Teaching in the Age of AI: Lecturer Perceptions of AI-Assisted Student Writing in a Private University in Perak, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

The rapid integration of artificial intelligence (AI) writing tools in higher education has generated growing debate about their influence on student learning, writing development, and academic integrity. This study explores lecturers' perceptions of AI-assisted student writing at a private university in Perak, Malaysia. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five lecturers to examine how AI tools such as ChatGPT are shaping students' writing practices, the extent to which students rely on these technologies, and the challenges and opportunities they pose. Findings indicate that AI tools have improved students' grammar, organization, and vocabulary, especially among those who previously struggled with language proficiency or structuring ideas. However, lecturers also observe increasing dependency on AI-generated content, insufficient understanding of the submitted work, and inconsistent citation practices. These concerns highlight broader questions about authentic learning, ethical use, and the future of academic writing instruction. The study offers insights into how universities can balance AI's benefits with the need to maintain academic integrity and foster independent thinking, and proposes ways to integrate AI responsibly into the learning environment.

INTRODUCTION

Academic writing remains a central component of higher education, serving as a foundation for critical thinking, research engagement, and scholarly communication. Academic writing courses aim to develop students' abilities in structuring arguments, synthesizing information, demonstrating originality, and adhering to academic integrity principles. They also prioritise skills such as critical analysis, logical organization, and accurate referencing (Teng & Wang, 2023; Cheong et al., 2023; Mendoza et al., 2022; Schillings et al., 2023). With the increasing presence of digital tools, the landscape of academic writing has experienced substantial transformation.

The emergence of AI-powered writing tools has intensified questions about their role in shaping students' writing abilities. Although tools such as Grammarly and Turnitin support proofreading and similarity detection, more advanced systems like ChatGPT can generate entire paragraphs, provide explanations, refine sentence structures, and offer stylistic suggestions. These capabilities raise concerns about the extent to which AI may influence students' creativity, critical thinking, and engagement in the writing process (Teng et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2023). Scholars also highlight that AI-generated writing often lacks depth, analytical coherence, and nuanced argumentation elements that require human reasoning and conceptual understanding (Schillings et al., 2023).

Educators increasingly express difficulty in distinguishing student-authored content from AI-generated text (Grimes et al., 2023). Although AI detection tools have been introduced, their accuracy remains questionable, as they often misidentify human writing as AI-generated or fail to detect substantial AI involvement (Warner, 2023; Elkhatat et al., 2023). Benarab (2024) emphasizes that no single detection method is reliable, calling for a combination of instructor judgment, process-based assessments, and technological literacy.

Beyond detection issues, there remains ongoing debate about the pedagogical implications of AI tools. While they can support language development and reduce writing anxiety, they may also compromise academic

integrity and hinder the development of metacognitive and independent writing skills (Perkins, 2023). This study aims to understand how lecturers perceive the influence of AI tools on student writing performance, learning behaviour, and ethical engagement.

The guiding research question is:

How do lecturers perceive the influence of AI writing tools on students' writing development and academic practices in a private university in Perak, Malaysia?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the Technology-Based Learning Model proposed by Hsu et al. (2012), which outlines how technology integration can be examined through three components: application domains, research methods, and research issues. This model has been widely applied in synthesising research on emerging technologies in education, including studies involving chatbots and AI-driven learning tools (Hwang & Chang, 2023; Liu & Hwang, 2023).

Hwang and Chang (2023) found that chatbots have been most widely used in language education, followed by disciplines such as engineering and computer science. Most studies employ quantitative methods, though qualitative and mixed-methods designs are increasingly used to explore learner perceptions and challenges in technology-enhanced environments. Key research gaps include limited understanding of effective learning designs and the lack of standardised frameworks for integrating AI tools into instruction.

Building on this model, the present study examines lecturers' perceptions of AI writing tools, focusing on how these tools affect students' writing practices, cognitive engagement, and academic behaviour. Empirical studies such as those by Bin-Hady et al. (2023), Mizumoto and Eguchi (2023), Mohamed (2024), Yan (2024), and Young and Shishido (2023) provide insights into how AI tools influence language learning, writing support, and learner autonomy. These works suggest that while AI provides scaffolding, its impact largely depends on students' digital literacy, motivation, and ethical awareness.

METHODS

This research adopts a qualitative design to explore lecturers' perceptions of AI writing tools within the higher education context. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five lecturers from a private university in Ipoh, selected through purposive sampling due to their experience supervising and assessing assignments in which AI tools were used.

Each interview lasted 30 to 45 minutes and was conducted either in person. The interview protocol focused on key areas: changes observed in student writing quality, the extent of student reliance on AI-generated content, the benefits and challenges of AI-assisted writing, and concerns regarding academic integrity. All interviews were audio-recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim.

Thematic analysis was applied to identify recurring patterns and divergent viewpoints across the interviews. This approach provided an in-depth understanding of how AI tools are viewed by educators and how these perceptions inform teaching practices and assessment decisions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The interview data revealed a complex mixture of appreciation and concern among the five lecturers regarding the role of AI in students' academic writing. All lecturers agreed that AI tools have contributed positively to the linguistic and structural aspects of students' work. Students who previously struggled with grammar, vocabulary, and idea organisation demonstrated noticeable improvement after incorporating AI assistance. This was especially evident among weaker writers, who became more capable of producing organised and coherent assignments. One lecturer shared that even students with strong language proficiency benefitted from AI, particularly when refining the logical flow of their arguments and structuring their ideas more effectively.

Lecturer 1 highlighted that students' writing had improved markedly, especially in terms of grammar, structure, and vocabulary. The lecturer perceived ChatGPT as a supportive tool that could enhance students' critical thinking by offering ideas and helping them expand their perspectives. Lecturer 4 reinforced this observation by noting that assignments were being submitted with fewer grammatical errors and in a more timely manner. Lecturer 5 similarly pointed out that students who had previously been considered problematic were now able to produce more organised work, suggesting that AI offers meaningful scaffolding for those who need additional support. These positive perceptions align with recent literature indicating that AI can enhance students' linguistic accuracy and cognitive engagement when used as a learning partner rather than a shortcut.

Despite these benefits, the lecturers expressed strong concern about students' increasing reliance on AI without genuine engagement in the learning process. Lecturer 2 observed that many students submitted assignments generated almost entirely by ChatGPT, often without understanding the content. This became clear when students were asked to explain their work or reproduce similar content independently. Lecturer 3 echoed this concern, noting that some students contributed very little of their own thinking and depended heavily on AI to construct their arguments. Such behaviours mirror findings from current research that highlights the risk of superficial learning when students outsource cognitive tasks to generative tools.

Ethical issues also emerged as a major theme across the interviews. Lecturers reported that students frequently copied AI-generated content directly without acknowledging the source. The absence of proper citation practices was noted by Lecturer 3, while Lecturer 2 described cases where entire responses were lifted from AI without modification. Although Lecturer 1 believed plagiarism could be controlled through clear citation requirements, other lecturers felt that students did not fully adhere to these expectations. These concerns resonate with wider academic discussions about the challenges of maintaining academic integrity in an AI-mediated learning environment, particularly given the limitations of AI detection tools and inconsistencies in students' digital literacy.

Another issue highlighted by the lecturers was the diminishing involvement of students in the writing process. Several lecturers observed that students often treated AI as a replacement for personal effort rather than as an academic resource meant to support learning. Lecturer 2 emphasised that students appeared less stressed because the AI completed much of the cognitive work for them, yet this lack of active participation undermined the experiential nature of writing. Lecturer 3 similarly expressed concern that student dependency on AI weakened their ability to develop critical thinking, independent argumentation, and sustained writing practices. This is consistent with existing scholarship warning that while AI can scaffold learning, it may also inadvertently reduce students' metacognitive engagement if used uncritically.

Despite the risks of over-reliance, the lecturers acknowledged that AI has reduced writing anxiety, especially for students who lack confidence in their linguistic abilities. Several lecturers reported that assignments were being submitted more consistently, possibly because AI helped students overcome challenges related to idea generation and initial drafting. This observation is supported by emerging research suggesting that AI, when used effectively, can act as a confidence-building tool that enables students to complete tasks they might otherwise avoid.

Collectively, the lecturers' perspectives illustrate the dual nature of AI-assisted writing. On one hand, AI improves accuracy, coherence, and organisation, benefitting both strong and weak writers. On the other hand, misuse of AI leads to superficial learning, ethical breaches, and reduced student engagement. These findings suggest that while AI holds significant pedagogical potential, it must be integrated within a structured framework that promotes critical use, ethical awareness, and sustained student participation. Such balance aligns with scholarly recommendations advocating for AI literacy, explicit guidelines, and thoughtful curriculum design to ensure that technology enhances rather than replaces meaningful learning.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. AI technologies evolve rapidly, and the capabilities of writing tools and detection systems may change significantly over time. Current literature and lecturer perceptions may therefore become outdated quickly. The study is based on a small sample from a single private university, which limits

the generalisability of the findings to broader educational contexts. Experiences in multilingual, public, or international institutions may differ, particularly where writing conventions or levels of digital literacy vary. Moreover, the study relies on self-reported experiences through interviews, which may not fully capture the complexities of students' actual writing behaviour or the extent of AI usage. Longitudinal research would provide deeper insight into how sustained AI use influences writing development, academic identity, and metacognitive strategies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, several recommendations are proposed to improve the integration of AI tools in academic writing instruction while safeguarding academic integrity:

1. Develop clear institutional guidelines

Universities should create transparent policies that clarify acceptable and unacceptable uses of AI writing tools. Instead of blanket bans, guidelines should emphasise ethical use, attribution, and critical engagement.

2. Integrate AI literacy into writing instruction

Educators should explicitly teach students how to use AI tools such as paraphrasers, editors, and feedback systems responsibly and effectively. This includes training on prompt creation, revision strategies, and evaluating AI-generated content.

3. Shift assessment design toward higher-order skills

Because AI can generate basic essays easily, assessments should prioritise critical thinking, reflection, personalised analysis, and process-based tasks (drafts, logs, peer reviews) that reduce dependence on automated outputs.

4. Use detection tools cautiously

Given documented detection inaccuracies (Elkhatat et al., 2023; Warner, 2023), AI-detectors should never be used as the sole evidence for academic misconduct. Instead, they should serve only as preliminary indicators supported by human judgment.

5. Support students' writing self-efficacy

Instructors should incorporate metacognitive strategy instruction (Ishak et al., 2025) and confidence-building tasks to ensure that students continue to develop genuine writing competence rather than relying solely on automation.

6. Provide professional development for educators

Lecturers need ongoing training to understand AI capabilities, limitations, and pedagogical applications so they can guide students more effectively.

CONCLUSION

AI-assisted writing tools have introduced new dynamics into academic writing practices in higher education. While they offer substantial benefits by improving language accuracy, enhancing clarity, and supporting students who struggle with writing, they also pose challenges related to ethical use, dependency, and authentic learning. Lecturer experiences in this study reveal that AI can be a valuable tool for scaffolding student learning, but its effectiveness depends on students' willingness to critically engage with the writing process and understand the content they produce.

The findings reinforce the need for clear institutional guidelines, AI literacy instruction, and assessment designs that promote higher-order thinking and originality. Universities must strike a balance between

embracing technological innovation and preserving the integrity of academic writing. AI should serve as a supplementary aid rather than a substitute for students' reasoning, creativity, and intellectual growth. With proper guidance and ethical frameworks, AI tools can enrich the learning experience while maintaining the core values of academic scholarship.

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