

The Role of AI Writing Assistance Tools in Supporting EFL Students' Research Proposal Writing

Vivi Aulia

Universitas PGRI Kalimantan

viviaulia@upk.ac.id

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Abstract

This study investigates how AI writing assistance tools support students during the research proposal writing process. Using a qualitative descriptive study design, this study involved 15 EFL undergraduate students at Universitas PGRI Kalimantan who composed their research proposals utilising these tools. The data were gathered through structured interviews and documentation, focusing on students' experiences, perceived benefits, drawbacks, and specific writing improvements. The findings revealed that during the research proposal writing, most students utilized these tools to generate ideas, create an outline, provide sample sentences, translate complex texts, and summarize the research articles. In addition, the findings also demonstrate that these tools help them improve their vocabulary, compose the background and literature review sections, and correct the accuracy of their sentences. Furthermore, this research has also reported drawbacks of these tools, including oversimplified explanations obtained from the tools and over-reliance on these tools. This study concludes that AI writing assistance tools should be wisely utilized as a supplementary tool rather than a replacement for critical thinking and academic writing skills.

Keywords: AI, EFL students, research proposal, writing assistance tools

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana perangkat bantu penulisan berbasis kecerdasan buatan (AI writing assistance tools) berperan dalam mendukung mahasiswa selama proses penulisan proposal penelitian. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif dengan melibatkan 15 mahasiswa program studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris (EFL) di Universitas PGRI Kalimantan yang menyusun proposal penelitian dengan memanfaatkan perangkat tersebut. Data penelitian diperoleh melalui wawancara terstruktur dan dokumentasi, dengan berfokus pada pengalaman mahasiswa, manfaat yang dirasakan, keterbatasan yang dihadapi, serta peningkatan keterampilan menulis yang dihasilkan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa dalam proses penulisan proposal penelitian, sebagian besar mahasiswa memanfaatkan perangkat tersebut untuk menghasilkan ide, menyusun kerangka tulisan, menyediakan contoh kalimat, menerjemahkan teks yang kompleks, serta merangkum artikel ilmiah. Lebih lanjut, temuan juga mengindikasikan bahwa penggunaan perangkat ini berkontribusi terhadap peningkatan penguasaan kosakata, penyusunan bagian latar belakang dan tinjauan pustaka, serta peningkatan akurasi struktur kalimat mahasiswa. Di samping berbagai manfaat tersebut, penelitian ini juga mengidentifikasi beberapa keterbatasan penggunaan perangkat AI, antara lain kecenderungan menghasilkan penjelasan yang terlalu sederhana serta potensi ketergantungan berlebihan dari pengguna. Dengan demikian, penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa perangkat bantu penulisan berbasis AI perlu dimanfaatkan secara bijaksana sebagai instrumen pendukung, bukan sebagai substitusi terhadap kemampuan berpikir kritis dan keterampilan menulis akademik mahasiswa.

Kata Kunci: AI, mahasiswa EFL, proposal penelitian, perangkat bantu penulisan



INTRODUCTION

Academic writing is one of the most important abilities students develop at a university. The formal characteristics of this writing style required them to master the writing conventions to meet the standards of university course writing assignments. They include academic research papers or articles, research proposals, journals, reflection papers, research reports, theses, and dissertations (Chauhan, 2022). A research proposal submitted before students working on an undergraduate thesis is one form of academic writing. This kind of writing is known as proposal skripsi in an Indonesian setting. This document, which includes the research strategy and design, is an essential component, and a vital phase of the entire process of defining the success of writing an undergraduate thesis (Hayati et al, 2024).

Academic writing has different characteristics from other formal writing activities. It is a key aspect of research and education, involving a structured method of expressing ideas. It is commonly used by researchers and educators in scholarly works to present data-driven arguments and logical reasoning. This form of writing helps readers to understand a topic thoroughly. It allows authors to deeply analyze concepts, leading to a well-explained theory or conclusion (Khalifa & Albadawy, 2024). For students learning English, having the ability in academic writing will allow them to know all the rules of their language and organize their ideas consistently with the language. When they practice writing, they are expanding their knowledge and learning the foreign language commands (Ginting & Barella, 2022).

In the context of writing activity at the higher education level in Indonesia, academic writing requires the competence of the students to produce a research proposal that consists of three main sections: introduction, literature review, and methodology. As writing a research proposal is one of the compulsory subjects for EFL students at the university level in Indonesia, it becomes a hard challenge for them to compose a good research proposal. Further, this research proposal becomes a fundamental aspect of the academic writing process, where most EFL students have significant difficulties and challenges. These difficulties cover language proficiency, like grammar, syntax, vocabulary use, cohesion, and coherence aspects (Suyadi et al, 2020), academic writing conventions, critical thinking, and developing argumentation (Tahira & Haider, 2019; Walkova & Bradford, 2022). Besides the linguistic factors, the difficulties of writing the research proposal are also on how students compose the research proposal sections like the introduction, literature review, and research design sections (Mali, 2023). Consequently, they utilize the writing assistance tools as one of the alternative ways to help them cope with these difficulties since various online artificial intelligence (AI) accessible tools offer these services.

Recently, AI-based writing tools have become an important part of the academic writing process. The emergence of technology development is utilized by learners around the world to facilitate them in the writing process, including in academic writing. Some of the AI writing assistance tools offer various benefits, such as helping to speed up the drafting process, improving grammar, and providing advice on a more appropriate and professional writing style (Khalifa & Albadawy, 2024., Ozfidan et al, 2024; Thangthong et al, 2024). In addition, these tools can also guide in organizing ideas, suggesting relevant references, and providing useful feedback in improving the quality of writing. In the educational context, AI acts as a companion that assists students in improving their writing skills, as well as enhancing their understanding of writing formats that conform to academic standards.

Despite the growing popularity of AI tools, there is debate about their effectiveness in supporting more complicated academic writing, such as research proposals composed by undergraduate students. One of the main concerns is AI's ability to understand the deep context and nuances required in academic writing. Research proposals often require in-depth analyses of relevant literature, as well as well-structured arguments, which AI cannot always fully understand. While AI can produce text that is structured and follows a predefined pattern, success in writing a research proposal depends not only on language fluency, but also on depth of understanding and the ability to critically structure ideas. Another important consideration is that academic writing, particularly research proposals, often reflects a researcher's unique perspective and insights into a specific field. Humans think and draw on personal ideas to connect to what they want to generate. This is something AI cannot do since it is limited by the data that may not capture the specific nuance for academic writing needs.

While recent studies have heavily explored how AI writing tools affect general assignments like essays or short creative tasks (Chan et al., 2024; El-Garawany, 2024; Eragamreddy, 2024; Jen & Salam, 2024; Solovey, 2024), the researcher does not assume that these tools work the same way for research proposals. Writing a proposal is completely different from writing a standard essay. It requires complex structural organization and strong argumentation. For EFL students, this challenge is doubled. They are not just trying to figure out the methodology or research gaps. They are also trying to translate their complex idea into a foreign language, which often makes them rely heavily on AI. Because of this gap, this study aims to explore the actual experiences of EFL students using AI tools as they face challenges of drafting a research proposal. Based on this analysis, this research tried to investigate the role of AI writing assistance tools in supporting EFL students during the research proposal writing process. Specifically, they are formulated as follows:

1. How do EFL students use AI writing assistance tools during the research proposal writing process?
2. What are the benefits and limitations that EFL students perceive from using AI assistance tools in research proposal writing?

This research is expected to have significant implications for EFL students and also for the teachers. Understanding how students use AI writing assistance tools in research proposal writing can help teachers develop more effective guidelines for integrating AI into academic writing activities. Teachers need to create structured guidelines to help students use AI ethically and productively in their academic writing activities.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employed a case study design and a qualitative approach to investigate how EFL students used AI writing assistance tools to help them compose research proposals. Fifteen EFL undergraduate students from Universitas PGRI Kalimantan who were drafting or had finished their research proposals participated in this research. In addition, these selected participants were those who had previously utilized AI writing assistance tools, such as *Grammarly*, *QuillBot*, *ChatGPT*, and other similar tools. The data were gathered by using structured interviews focusing on students' experiences utilizing AI writing assistance tools when preparing research proposals, as well as the benefits and perceived drawbacks of these tools. Table 1 below presents the interview questions given to students on the use of AI writing assistance tools when composing research proposals.



Table 1. List of interview questions related to research problems

No	List of Questions
1	Would you describe your experience using AI writing assistance tools during the research proposal writing process?
2	What specific AI tools did you use, and for which parts of the proposal writing process?
3	How did these tools impact your workflow or efficiency while drafting your research proposal?
4	Did AI writing assistance tools help you save time, improve your writing, or offer additional insights? Could you provide examples?
5	Were there any surprising or unexpected benefits of using AI writing assistance tools in this process? If so, how?
6	What were the main drawbacks you faced when using AI writing assistance tools during your research proposal writing?
7	Did you encounter issues with the accuracy/relevance of the suggestions provided by AI writing assistance tools?
8	How did you address situations where the AI writing assistance tools did not fully meet your expectations?
9	Overall, how do you use AI writing assistance tools during the research proposal writing process?

Adapted from: Haleem et al (2022), Al-Sofi (2024)

Along with the interviews, the researchers asked the students to present their research proposal documents using AI tools to identify areas for improvement, such as grammatical errors, sentence-structure corrections, and improved idea development. Each of them was required to present an initial research proposal draft and a follow-up document demonstrating the improvements made using these AI tools. These documents were analyzed manually without using any qualitative data analysis software to provide additional perspectives and strengthen the interview findings. The data were then analyzed using a thematic approach.

There are some steps of conducting a thematic approach for analyzing the data. First of all, the researcher did some initial coding by re-reading the interview transcript and document notes to get a deep identification for the data. Then, the researcher categorized the codes. Second, the researcher grouped the codes into different categories. After that, the researcher developed the final themes by looking at the categories that directly answered the research questions about the benefits, drawbacks, and writing improvements. Finally, the researcher triangulated the data by comparing the results of interviews and documents to ensure consistency of findings. These processes ended with the interpretation of the findings in the context of relevant theories to answer the research questions and provide meaningful insights.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The results of this research are presented in order of the research question. The initial names of the students used as samples were included with each of the findings

AI for Idea Generation and Language Improvement

Students' experiences using AI writing assistance tools during the research proposal writing process

Based on the results of this interview section, the students have various experiences using AI writing assistance tools during the research proposal writing. Seven students reported they had positive experiences with AI writing assistance tools that significantly improved their work. In contrast, the other eight report having had neutral experiences with AI tools, which occasionally support them with certain aspects of writing. However, in some cases, these tools fall short of their expectations. Samples of their responses are as follows:

I found AI tools very helpful. I used ChatGPT to get ideas and to make my writing clearer, especially when I needed to explain complex topics. It didn't always give the perfect answer, but it gave me a good starting point. It also helped me rewrite things so my research made sense to people outside my field (Student A)

Using AI tools like Grammarly and ChatGPT really helped me. When I did not know how to start a sentence or needed new ideas, they gave me quick suggestions. They also caught grammar mistakes and improved how my sentences sounded (Student B)

My experience with AI tools was both good and bad. They were great for fixing grammar mistakes and making my writing sound smoother, but they did not help much with proper citations. I often had to spend extra time manually checking if their suggestions were correct (Student C)

AI tools did not always understand my topic. Writing a research proposal needs careful thinking, and the AI's suggestions were too simple. It made me realize that AI is good for grammar or small edits, but not for a complex research proposal. However, for translating the text, DeepL was powerful and helpful for me. (Student D)

According to students' statements in interviews on this topic, they used five main AI writing assistance tools, namely *ChatGPT*, *Perplexity AI*, *QuillBot*, *Grammarly*, and *DeepL* while preparing their research proposals. Additionally, all of them (100%) stated that the introduction and literature review sections of research proposals were mostly composed using these AI technologies.

The impact of using AI writing assistance tools on the workflow of students' research proposal writing process

According to the results of the interview in this section, nine out of fifteen students believed that the use of AI has a lot to do with grammar and spelling correction. The majority of them agreed that AI helps a lot with the mechanical aspect and idea formation of their research proposals. However, some of them reported that utilizing these tools was uncomfortable because they require clear prompts, which can occasionally waste time. Samples of their responses are as follows:



AI writing tools helped me write faster. They gave me suggestions for grammar and spelling, so I did not have to check everything by myself. This saved me a lot of time (Student C)

AI tools were very useful when I made mistakes. For example, if I used the wrong word, the AI suggested the correct one. It also helped me choose better words for academic writing (Student D)

I used them a little, but I still had to spend a lot of time thinking about my ideas. They were helpful for small corrections, but not for everything (Student E)

I'm not good with technology, so I did not know how to use it properly. It took too much time to learn. Instead of helping me save time, the tools made me spend more time trying to figure out how to give clear prompts. It seems that the AI tools only work if I give it the right instructions, but I did not know how to explain what I wanted. I spent more time thinking about the prompts than actually writing (Student F)

From the interview results of this section, some of the students stated that AI writing assistance tools enhanced particular parts of their research proposals while also saving time. Some of them, meanwhile, also believed that utilizing AI writing assistance tools wastes time instead. It seems that technology did not help them in certain cases of academic writing tasks.

The benefits of using AI writing assistance tools during the research proposal writing

According to interview results on this topic, all students (100%) agreed that AI writing assistance tools helped correct grammar, providing alternative word choices that fit the standards of research proposal writing, and correcting sentence appropriateness. Furthermore, the tool also helps in organizing ideas in accordance with the research topic. The samples of students' responses are shown as follows:

The AI tool helped me improve my vocabulary. It suggested academic words that I did not know before. This made my research proposal sound better. At least, with the help of AI, my research proposal is a little more feasible to consult with my supervisor (Student G)

The AI tool saved me time when I was stuck. I used it to brainstorm sentences or ideas, and it gave me something to start with. This was really helpful when I did not know how to continue, particularly in constructing the background and the literature review parts (Student H)

The Challenges of Using AI in Research Proposal Writing

The drawbacks of using AI writing assistance tools during the research proposal writing

According to the results of the interview on this section, the majority of students said that AI generates general recommendations that do not always align with their needs. The research proposal addressed the specific area based on students' expertise, which AI

seems to find challenging to investigate. Additionally, they appear to have relied heavily on these AI technologies when developing the research proposal. In addition to the drawbacks, students' responses regarding the accuracy and applicability of AI writing assistance tools, like over-simplified explanations, are also included. The following are samples of their responses:

Based on my experience, I found it hard to use AI tools because they needed very clear instructions. If I did not ask the right question, the answer was not useful. The AI also did not always understand my topic. Sometimes it gave me wrong or unrelated suggestions. Sometimes, the suggestions are too basic (Student J)

One problem was that the AI gave me too many suggestions, and I did not know which one to choose. It made the process more confusing. My topic was very specific, but AI gave me general answers. It did not fully understand complex terms or theories (Student K)

The students' ways to address the situation where AI writing assistance tools do not help them much

According to the results of the interview on this section, when AI writing assistance tools are not very helpful, all students (100%) rewrite and edit their research proposals manually. They mentioned that AI tools are just machines that merely rely on their users to maintain their function. Below are some samples of their responses.

I changed how I asked the AI for help, using clearer and more detailed instructions to get better answers (Student A)

AI's writing did not always match my style, so I rewrote parts to make it sound more natural and academic (Student F)

When AI gave me incorrect or outdated facts, I searched for reliable information manually using the internet, and if it did not fully help, I asked my advisors for feedback (Student N)

The students' research proposal writing aspect that needs the help of AI writing assistance tools

According to the results of the interview in this section, the students use AI writing assistance tools in a variety of ways. The majority of them stated that they use it to outline and generate ideas. A few of them also used it to give examples of sentences, translate complex texts, and summarize the research paper articles. The samples of students' responses are shown as follows:

I use AI to get ideas for my research question. AI helps me organize my thoughts by creating an outline for my proposal (Student G)

It gives my key points to include in my literature review and methodology section (Student C)



If I do not understand difficult English research papers to be cited in the literature review section, I use AI to summarize them (Student I)

Besides gathering the data through structured interviews, the researcher also gathered the data through the analysis of students' research proposal documents. Along with the interview process, each student had to provide an initial draft of their research proposal and a follow-up document detailing the progress they made with the use of AI writing assistance tools. After that, the researcher compared these drafts before and after using AI tools. Based on the analysis, this comparison is nearly identical to that of the interview, in which the students mostly use AI writing assistance tools to help generate ideas, outline, and provide sample sentences, as well as to translate complex texts and summarize research paper articles. In brief, the following are the findings from the two ways of data collection mentioned above that address the two research problems:

1. During the research proposal writing process, the majority of the students in this research used AI writing assistance tools to help them come up with ideas, create an outline, give example sentences, translate difficult texts, and summarize the research paper articles. While some students thought that using AI was beneficial, others thought it was a waste of their time.
2. Students' perceptions of the benefits and drawbacks of employing AI writing assistance tools during the research proposal writing process are based on their experiences. The benefits are as follows: (1) AI assisted students in improving their vocabulary to meet academic writing standards before consulting advisors on their research proposal; (2) AI assisted them in creating the background and literature review sections of their research proposal by allowing them to generate initial ideas for the proposal; and (3) AI assisted them in correcting their sentences. On the other hand, they felt that using AI writing assistance tools has drawbacks as well. These include: (1) AI writing assistance tools offer too many recommendations that appear to be oversimplified explanations, and (2) students' over-reliance on these tools while composing research proposals.

DISCUSSIONS

The findings of this research highlight the significant role of AI writing assistance tools in helping students write research proposals. Interviews and documentation were conducted with 15 EFL undergraduate students at Universitas PGRI Kalimantan who were composing their research proposals to learn more about their experiences with AI writing assistance tools. The research's first finding addresses the first research topic, which was that the majority of students used these tools for various purposes, such as generating ideas, creating an outline, offering sample sentences, translating difficult texts, and summarizing research articles. The convenience offered by AI was perceived as beneficial by many students, particularly in enhancing their vocabulary to meet academic writing standards, structuring the background and literature review sections, and correcting sentence structures before consulting their advisors.

According to the students' experiences during the interview section, the AI writing assistance tools they use, helping them come up with ideas, create an outline, provide sample sentences, translate difficult texts, and summarize research paper articles, are

consistent with some earlier research. A previous research which was conducted by Ozfidan et al. (2024) revealed that EFL Saudi undergraduates also utilize AI technologies for idea formulation and outline preparation when writing academically in English. The findings also demonstrated the widespread acceptance of AI tools like *Google Translate*, *Grammarly*, and *ChatGPT*. *ChatGPT*, *Perplexity AI*, *QuillBot*, *Grammarly*, and *DeepL* are the five main tools that students in this research used to write their research proposals, according to information they provided throughout the interview process. It indicates and reflects how adaptable and useful these tools are for handling many phases of the writing process, from idea generation to editing. The students valued the AI tools' ability to help them write better overall, especially when it came to grammar and vocabulary—two important aspects of academic writing.

Talayhan & Babayigit (2023) also discovered similar results to the students' experiences in this research. While most students used *QuillBot* or *Grammarly* primarily to improve their writing style and vocabulary, most also used AI writing assistance tools, such as *ChatGPT* to generate sample texts, *Perplexity AI* to summarize and paraphrase the texts, and *DeepL* to translate academic texts. Students are consistent with the findings of the document analysis when asked to show how their research proposal has improved both before and after using these tools. Based on these findings, the majority of students thought that employing AI writing assistance tools was beneficial for certain aspects of academic writing work.

Further, the second result of this research revealed that students who use AI writing assistance tools to write research proposals have three benefits. First, AI assisted students in improving their vocabulary to meet academic writing standards prior to presenting their research proposal to advisors. As mentioned by Tahira & Haider (2019), academic writing frequently necessitates a formal tone and style, which requires the exact diction that can sometimes be complicated for those who are developing their academic language skills. AI writing assistance tools offer help by suggesting more appropriate vocabulary that meets academic standards. This guidance supports them in helping their writing be credible before consulting the advisors. This benefit supports the findings of Maphoto et al.'s (2024) research, which found that certain students struggle greatly to choose diction that is appropriate for academic writing standards. AI is useful as a writing coach available whenever they need it, and writing assistance tools may help them solve these problems. As a result, they feel more confident in their writing before consulting with the advisors. This increase in confidence is further supported by Ngoc et al (2025) in their research, which states that AI helps students, leading to better preparation for the tasks. They are, therefore, more willing to share their work and receive feedback from the advisors.

The use of AI writing assistance tools also benefits the students by assisting them in composing the background and literature review sections of their research proposal. These sections require them to clearly specify the context of their research, highlight supporting previous studies, and mention the research gaps that can sometimes be challenging at the early stage of proposal development. With the help of AI writing assistance tools, they can brainstorm the topic more easily and develop their ideas. These AI technologies assist students in suggesting relevant keywords, topic areas, and exploring similar research to support the substance of the research proposal.



Meanwhile, in the literature review, AI supports the students' work by extracting, summarizing, and organizing the information logically. It is in line with the systematic review conducted by Khalifa & Albadawy (2024) that there are two domains of academic writing that AI can improve and offer possible help. The first domain is idea development and research design, where AI writing assistance tools have functions as idea generation (brainstorming, literature gap identification, hypothesis generation) and research planning (study design assistance). The second is literature review and synthesis, where these AI tools have functions such as extracting and analyzing information (text extraction, semantic analysis) and synthesizing literature (summary tables, comparative analysis, and automated literature synthesis). Moreover, Al-Sofi (2024) also mentioned that AI writing assistance tools help students extract up-to-date information from the latest relevant literature.

The last information about the benefit of using AI writing assistance tools for research proposal writing is that they greatly help to correct the sentences properly. The majority of students, through the interview process stated that they frequently struggle with grammar and clarity while drafting a research proposal. This helps them reduce the time spent on editing and revising, enabling them to focus more on the substance of their proposals. Vieriu & Petrea (2025) underlined that time-saving is one of the categories in which the students noted that AI tools reduce the time spent on some particular parts of their tasks, like processing information and performing complex idea exploration, allowing them to focus more on critical thinking and understanding. Sentence construction can be a challenging aspect of academic writing for undergraduate students who are still learning about research.

An addition to grammar correction, AI writing assistance tools also help guide more formal and academic word choice as well as rephrasing inappropriate sentences as required by academic writing standards. These improvements are especially useful in research proposal writing, where clarity is essential. By offering real-time feedback, these AI tools act as a writing tutor, guiding students to support better research proposal writing. Other research conducted by Kramar et al (2024) found that Grammarly and QuillBot are two examples of AI writing assistance tools that are easier to use and more suitable for grammar checks. They found out that these kinds of tools helped students achieve improvements primarily in such aspects as the use of articles, punctuation, use of prepositions, and elimination of redundancy.

Apart from the results of the research on the use of AI writing assistance tools in research proposal writing, which indicated that students perceived benefits in utilizing the tool, the research also discovered that students perceived drawbacks in utilizing the tool. According to the students' experiences during the research proposal writing process, AI writing assistance tools provide too many suggestions that seem to be over-simplified explanations. Many students state that the number of feedback produced by these AI tools was more distracting. This made it challenging for students to determine which suggestions were actually fit and relevant to their research topic and which could be eliminated. Take for example, in the methodology section, a sentence that is created by students like *The study will employ a qualitative approach, combining observation and semi-structured interviews to gather the data*, might be reduced by the AI to *This study will use observation and interviews to get different kinds of data*. This kind of revision

eliminates important methodological terminology like qualitative and semi-structured interviews, which accurately describe research designs. Consequently, the simplified version lacks the clarity and professionalism needed in academic proposals. These indicate that AI writing assistance tools are merely machines that cannot replace the role of humans to produce research proposals in accordance with the proper academic context and nuances.

The over-simplified explanations which are generated by AI writing assistance tools are also evident in the results of research conducted by Barrot (2024) and Azib et al (2024). AI-generated content may not be accurate or relevant. It needs students to critically evaluate the content produced by them. Moreover, Gururaj & Dsouza (2024) suggested that students should always cross-check information with reliable sources and seek clarification from instructors when necessary. They can help refine our writing, but the core ideas and arguments should always be the students' own. This cross-checking information with credible sources to ensure accuracy is compulsory to evaluate the credibility of the AI writing assistance tools' suggestions. They should be responsible for carefully reviewing and editing the output to avoid incorrect, incomplete, or biased content (Cooperman & Brandao, 2024).

The next result of this research related to students' experiences with the limitations of AI writing assistance tools is the over-reliance on these tools during the research proposal writing process. At first, the students might use these tools just to get help with grammar, idea development, or content organization. Over time, these tools are utilized to do most of the writing of entire sections which makes it harder for them to build their own thinking and writing skills. Instead of learning how to research and explain ideas clearly, they might just accept whatever the AI gives them for some sections in their research proposal writing process. Their writing might look good on the surface, but if they have not done the real thinking behind it, the proposal may be weak. The advisors often notice problems like unclear research questions or ideas that do not make sense together. These are signs that the student does not fully work through the topic themselves. These conditions are supported by some similar research findings that AI may potentially make the students too dependent on them because of the ease offered by these tools. Guo & Lee (2023), Octaberlina et al (2024), and Vieriu & Petrea (2025) revealed that overdependence on AI tools might undermine students' critical thinking, potentially causing passive information consumption instead. This led them to pursue a quick solution, potentially eliminating their understanding and logical reasoning skills.

Additionally, the over-reliance on AI writing assistance tools highlights the important finding of this research, which is that some students perceive that using these tools is a waste of time. Instead of thinking about the topic on their own, students may spend too much time trying to produce the correct prompt for the AI. They focus on telling the AI what to do, instead of thinking deeply or coming up with their own ideas. Students might have to attempt a lot of prompts before getting something useful. This can be quite time-consuming and can become frustrating. Spending that time considering the task and coming up with their own solutions would be more beneficial.

Lastly, even if AI writing tools offer a chance to improve and customize writing training, they cannot take the place of conventional academic writing courses. The future, on the other hand, rests in an appropriate strategy that makes use of both AI writing



assistance tools' benefits and traditional academic writing courses to give students a more efficient and interesting learning environment, particularly undergraduates who must write research proposals as one of the requirements to obtain their final academic degree.

This research has several limitations. First, this research focuses only on the research proposal writing stage, so the results may not be generalizable to other forms of academic writing. Next, this research does not evaluate the actual quality of the proposals produced using AI, focusing instead on perceptions and usage patterns. Lastly, differences in students' familiarity and proficiency with AI tools may have influenced their experiences. Hence, the future research is expected to include a broader range of academic writing tasks and use mixed methods, such as analyzing writing samples or advisor feedback, to assess the impact of AI tools objectively. Investigating how students acquire a critical understanding of when and how to employ AI effectively in their academic work would also be beneficial.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this research concluded that the majority of students at the English Department of Universitas PGRI Kalimantan used AI writing assistance tools to support them during the research proposal writing process. They used AI to generate ideas, create outlines, provide sample sentences, translate difficult texts, and summarize research articles. Many students found these tools helpful in improving their writing, especially in academic contexts. However, not all experiences were positive. Some students felt that using AI took too much time or was not always helpful.

Moreover, the students recognized both benefits and drawbacks in using AI writing assistance tools. The benefits included better vocabulary choices, easier development of background and literature review sections, and improved sentence correction. On the other hand, the drawbacks involved receiving too many suggestions that were sometimes too simple or general. Another issue was that some students became too dependent on AI tools instead of developing their own writing skills. Based on these findings, it is recommended that students use AI tools wisely and not rely on them completely. Teachers and advisors can help guide students on how to use AI tools effectively, so they can support the writing process without replacing the student's own thinking and creativity. Students should still try to write and think independently, using AI only as a support tool.

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