



Exploring Senior University Students' Use of ChatGPT and its Perceived Impact on Academic Writing

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how senior university students use ChatGPT in academic writing processes and how they perceive its impact on the development of their academic writing skills. Adopting a qualitative approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted via Zoom with a sample of 10 male and female senior university students from 5 Palestinian universities located in the Gaza Strip. The qualitative thematic analysis which was applied with the support of NVivo software identified four key themes, namely: patterns of ChatGPT use, perceived benefits, perceived drawbacks and ethical implications. The data revealed that students mainly use ChatGPT for generating and organizing ideas, checking grammar, structuring arguments, paraphrasing and drafting content. Many students view ChatGPT as a valuable AI tool that enhances efficiency, clarity and coherence. However, a substantial number of the participants reported concerns about reduced creativity and critical thinking, increased overreliance, and, most notably, the weakening of writing autonomy. Other participants also voiced issues related to ethical implications, particularly plagiarism and academic integrity. The results suggest that while ChatGPT could be beneficial when utilized responsibly, it could also represent challenges which may hinder the development of academic writing skills. It was recommended that in order to promote balanced and informed engagement with ChatGPT, the higher educational institutions should establish clear guidelines and integrate digital literacy and ethical AI use into their academic programs.

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INTRODUCTION

The widespread adoption of AI-based instruments worldwide has brought about significant attention in education. ChatGPT is one of them which has been introduced into the academic environments in order to enable students accomplish their writing tasks (Marzuki et al., 2023). However, the increasing use of ChatGPT as an AI tool raises concerns about whether it contributes to the development of students' academic writing skills or offers a shortcut that hinders their ability to write academically. According to

Chanda et al. (2024) students struggling with their writing tasks and those who are unfamiliar with the structure of academic writing would find ChatGPT as the best solution. They elaborated that ChatGPT can help those students brainstorm ideas, organize content and revise drafts. In addition, Wang et al. (2025) found that students who used ChatGPT showed a significant improvement in various writing skills such as sentence structure, vocabulary, and overall coherence of their writings. Furthermore, Fowler (2023) insisted that ChatGPT would be beneficial for students learning academic conventions as it provides immediate feedback on their writing. Gayed et al. (2022)), similarly, believes that integrating ChatGPT would enhance more personalized approach to writing improvement as it adapts to students writing styles and provide tailored suggestions. It would also enable students to learn to apply language conventions more effectively. This personalized approach and feedback would assist students to refine their writing abilities independently of traditional writing instruction.

While ChatGPT provide students with enormous benefits at the level of writing effectively, its use to develop students' academic writing is still a controversial issue. Some scholars argue that ChatGPT may hinder students' academic writing development. This may be due to the fact that ChatGPT would foster dependency on AI-generated content. Although the use of AI in general has become more sophisticated, there is an increasing concern about students growing reliance on these tools to generate ideas, structure content, and even write the entire essays (Marzuki et al., 2023). Such overreliance would lead to a decline in students' creative writing skills as well as their creative thinking. Such decline could be attributed to the students' negligence of the process of drafting, revising and developing their thoughts independently (Jo, 2024). Most recently, Yeo (2023) revealed that the ease and speed of generating content using AI tools would reduce students' effort that they exert in their writing which would eventually lead to shallow and plagiarized work. Some other scholars such as Chen and Gong (2025) went even more to argue that the use of ChatGPT would lead to the lack of depth and coherence due to its inability to fully comprehend the nuances of academic discourse. They insisted that AI-generated content could provide surface-level analysis but fail to engage students critically with the academic sources or incorporate original thought (Chen and Gong, 2025). Such limitation highlights students' inability to keep a constant balance between the use of ChatGPT and their own writing skills.

Another important concern surrounding the use of ChatGPT is mainly related to its potential impact on academic integrity. Such concern arises due to the educators' inability to distinguish between students' written work and AI generated content (Park & Ahn 2024). This issue raises questions about plagiarism and the ethical implications of relying on ChatGPT for writing academic tasks. Furthermore, Hadi et al. (2025) indicted that the misuse of ChatGPT could undermine the value of independent academic work and challenge traditional assessments of students' achievement. Cotton

et al. (2023) pointed out that the dilemma of ChatGPT educational value would be presented when students complete their writing tasks without critically engaging with or understanding the material. Hence, considering the impact of ChatGPT can be determined through how students perceive its use as an effective AI tool for enhancing their academic writing. A study by Hadi et al. (2025) revealed that students who consider ChatGPT as a learning technique are more likely to apply it in order to enhance their writing whereas those who believe that it is merely a shortcut may fall into the trap of overreliance on the AI tools. Another research by Gayed et al. (2022) concluded that student's perception about use of ChatGPT is mainly based on their level of digital literacy. This study also indicated that students may view ChatGPT as a tool for improvement if they perceive it as a supplement to their learning. Meanwhile, the impact of ChatGPT on their writing would be detrimental if those students view ChatGPT as a crutch.

Obviously, integrating ChatGPT into academic writing would represent both opportunities and challenges. One perspective persists in the idea that ChatGPT may enhance students' writing skills as it provides instant feedback, offers content suggestions, and helps to refine academic writing skills. The other perspective, highlights the potentiality of overreliance on AI tools which could constrain the development not only independent writing abilities but also the creative and critical thinking. Ultimately, the ChatGPT's impact on academic writing is mainly based on how students apply and perceive its role in their learning process. The growing body of research about the influence of ChatGPT on students' academic writing, reflects the significance of understanding its benefits and drawbacks. Palestine is no exception, however, there is a common understanding that there is a notable gap in the research about how Palestinian senior university students perceive and interact with this technology. Hence, this study would give an in-depth insight into whether ChatGPT contributes to the development of their academic writing skills or poses an obstacle to their genuine learning and meaningful engagement.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed semi-structured interviews as a qualitative research method to explore how senior university students use ChatGPT in their academic writing and how they perceive its impact on the development of their academic writing skills. According to Creswell and Poth (2018) qualitative method seems to be appropriate due to the exploratory nature of qualitative studies. Such method would enable the researcher to capture an in-depth insight which would be difficult to obtain through quantitative method. Braun and Clarke (2021) also pointed out that semi-structured interviews would align with the qualitative studies' objectives for facilitating open discussion as well as providing enough structure to maintain the conversation focused

on the research key themes. The current study mainly aims at investigating the ways students use ChatGPT in their academic writing and how they perceive the impact of its use on the development of their academic writing skills. With this in mind the following research questions were formulated:

1. How do senior university students use ChatGPT in their academic writing processes?
2. How do senior University students perceive the impact of ChatGPT 's use on the development of their academic writing skills?

To fulfill the objectives of this study, a purposive sampling method was utilized to select 10 senior university students majoring in English language at five universities in the Gaza Strip. The sample size has been chosen based on the acceptable range for qualitative research studies, especially those employing semi-structured interviews (Allsop et al., 2022). The selection of these universities represents a diverse student body and ensures broad coverage of higher education institutions in the Gaza Strip. The student-participants- 5 males and 5 females were recruited based on their academic level and likelihood of having engaged with ChatGPT.

The semi-structured interview was developed based on the existing literature and the best procedures of qualitative research instrument design. The questions of the interview were formulated to address four thematic areas derived from the two major research questions of the study. Following Kallio et al. (2016) framework, the themes were refined into conceptually distinct five areas namely; patterns of ChatGPT, perceived benefits for academic writing, drawbacks for academic writing, and ethical implications. Establishing the thematic framework, the open-ended questions of the interview were drafted under each theme in order to elicit rich and descriptive data. For instance, when exploring students' views about the benefits of using ChatGPT, they were asked to point out how they typically used it and whether they found it helpful and improving their academic writing skills. As for drawbacks perception, they were asked to reflect on whether their academic independence was affected and to what extent they felt confident without using ChatGPT.

In order to ensure trustworthiness of the research tool by improving clarity, flow and relevance of the interview questions, the interview guide was piloted with two senior university students. Those students met the study's criteria but were not included in the final sample of the study. Having obtained the feedback from the student participants, several probes were refined and the sequencing of the questions was adjusted to enhance in-depth responses and create more natural conversational rhythm. In addition, the guide was reviewed by two academic colleagues who have extensive experience in qualitative method and digital education in order to enhance content validity. Their feedback contributed to further informed the final version of the

guide ensuring that it actually addresses the research questions appropriately and comprehensively.

Having established trustworthiness and content validity of the interview guide, the interviews were conducted using Zoon. Utilizing Zoo was mainly based on methodological and practical considerations. Methodologically, Zoom would ensure high level of data integrity and consistency in documentation based on its capabilities of built-in recording and transcription (Howlett, 2022). Moreover, visual aspect of Zoom could enhance rapport-building and enable the researcher to observe the non-verbal cues as well as promote quality of interaction (Archibald et al., 2019; Shah, 2024). Furthermore, Zoom may provide flexible and accessible space leading to rich and reflective conversations. Hence, participants can join from familiar, private sittings which create comfortable and authentic engagement. From a practical perspective, Zoom would be necessary to overcome some contextual barriers particularly closure due to the ongoing emergency at the time of research. Fan et al. (2023) stated that launching interviews online can make participation safer and more accessible while allowing the research continue uninterrupted. Chen (2023) also believes that scheduling flexibility is a prominent advantage of using Zoom as it allows participants to choose the best interview time that suited their schedules.

Taking all the considerations mentioned earlier in the above paragraph into account, the interview process initially started by contacting the participants via WhatsApp and email to introduce the study, share information sheet and arrange suitable interview times. Once the interview's date and time were confirmed, the Zoom link was sent to each participant along with the consent form and a reminder message the day before the scheduled session. On the day of the interview, the researcher logged into the meeting room early to ensure technical readiness. Upon joining the meeting, the student-participants were welcomed and briefed on the study's background and the interview format. They were then reassured about confidentiality, anonymity of data use, and voluntary nature of their participation including their right to withdraw at any stage without any consequences. Moreover, to ensure that participants were fully informed, a verbal consent for audio recording was obtained before the interview began.

Following assurances of ethical considerations, the interviews started and each interview lasted between 30 and 40 minutes. They were also followed by semi-structured interviews which balanced consistency across participants with the flexibility to explore insightful or unexpected responses. Time management and conversation quality were fully observed through scheduling interviews across several days, typically with a few sessions conducted each day. Such approach would enable both the researcher and the participants to remain engaged and focused Chen (2023).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Thematic analysis approach was applied for data analysis. Such approach is widely used in qualitative studies as it allows for an in-depth exploration of participants' perceptions, attitudes or beliefs (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In the current study, therefore, the analysis was performed based on six stages following Braun and Clarke's (2021) guidelines namely: familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. The data from the semi-structured interviews was primarily transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were then systematically analyzed through identifying recurring patterns and significant observations.

For the purpose of organizing and coding the data, NVivo software was employed. However, the initial coding and theme identification were performed manually. This approach would enable the researcher to develop an in-depth understanding of the data by ensuring that the data analysis remained closely connected to what student- participants said or reported (Allsop, 2022). Five key themes were derived by thematic analysis which were the base for understanding students' perceptions and experiences with ChatGPT namely: patterns of ChatGPT Use, perceived benefits for academic writing, perceived drawbacks for academic writing, and ethical implications. The four themes were emerged from participants' answers. They obviously represent the core factors where students' perceptions converged. For effective data illustration, the following table was used to depict a summary of the five themes, the corresponding codes, and samples answers of the participants.

Table 1.
The Five Themes, the Corresponding Codes, and Samples
Answers of the Participants.

Theme	Code	Sample Quotes
Patterns of ChatGPT Use	Paraphrasing assistance, generating and organizing thoughts, grammar correctness, drafting	<i>"Every time I need help with writing, I use it. It can organize my thoughts. It is available most of the time and very easy to use"</i> (Student 3).
Perceived benefits for academic writing	Confidence feelings, clarity improvement, better vocabulary usage, faster writing process.	<i>"It enables me to write with confidence. When I am stuck, it helps me write faster and sound more academic."</i> (Student 6)
Perceived drawbacks for academic writing.	Artificial content, reduced critical thinking, lack of	<i>"Sometimes it gives broad content and doesn't suit what I exactly need."</i>

	creativity, lack of depth, over-simplification, increase dependency, loss of confidence.	(Student 9). <i>"Even when I know the correct answer, I still double check it with ChatGPT in advance."</i> (Student 7)
Ethical implications (Plagiarism & Academic Integrity Risks)	Fear of plagiarism penalty, Misuse of AI material, need for proper citation.	<i>"Sometimes I feel worried when I copy and paste parts from ChatGPT is like plagiarism."</i> (Student 10) <i>"I think using AI text without proper citation is dishonest."</i> (Student 2)

Theme 1: Patterns of ChatGPT Use

The participants reported different uses of ChatGPT in their academic writing namely; generating and organizing ideas, paraphrasing, drafting, and correcting grammar. Student 3 stated *"I use it when I need help with writing. It can organize my ideas. It is very easy to use and is available most of the time."* This reflects students' perception of using ChatGPT as a readily and available assistant. Student 5 added, *"when I don't know how to start, I use it to help structure my text's introduction. I also ask it to fix my grammar or rephrase paragraphs. "* The tool seems to be used as a supporter for developing thoughts and constructing the whole text. Furthermore, many of the participants expressed a tendency for using ChatGPT in the drafting process. Student 1 noted, *"It enables me to draft some hints into full paragraph when I only have bullet points."* These findings reveal that students perceive the utility of ChatGPT in two domains of academic writing: cognitive e.g. organizing thoughts and mechanical e.g. correcting grammar.

Theme 2: Perceived Benefits for Academic Writing

The overwhelming majority of participants acknowledged the positive impact of using ChatGPT in their academic writing. Their answers revealed how ChatGPT increases clarity, writing speed and above all boosts confidence. It seems that the students are inclined to use ChatGPT as an instrument for bridging the gap in their academic writing and ultimately in their language proficiency. Student 6 observed, *"It helps me write with confidence, it enables me write faster and sound more academic when I am stuck."* Similarly, Student 8 stated that, *"It helps me to learn how to elaborate on my ideas especially when it suggests the exact vocabulary which I wouldn't have thought of. It really makes my vocabulary bank richer."* Such answers reflect students' recurring perception of viewing ChatGPT as a scaffolding writing technique as well as an implicit language instructor.

Theme 3: Perceived Drawbacks for Academic Writing

It is obvious that the vast majority of the participants acknowledged the extensive advantages of using ChatGPT in their academic writing. However, they reported some concerns about content quality and depth. Their responses indicated that ChatGPT's content lacks the critical specificity needed in academic writing. Student 9 shared, *"It sometimes provides broad content which doesn't really fit my needs."* Similarly, Student 2 commented that, *"It doesn't enable me to think deeper. I feel it gives me a general and repeated ideas."* Such perceptions suggest that despite students' confession of ChatGPT's assistance in their academic writing, they also believe that it restrains their capacity to create deep and original analytical content. Other students were also concerned about the decline in their critical thinking skills which demolishes their cognitive development. The participants expressed a strong convention that while ChatGPT is a helpful AI tool, it leads to a decline in their autonomy and confidence in writing. For example, Student 7 noted that, *"Although I know the right answer, I still check it with ChatGPT in advance."* Students also stated that they feel they lost their self-reliance and believe that ChatGPT reliance would bring about a long-term impact on their academic independence as a whole. This finding can be emphasized by Student 1 who confessed that, *"I can't even start writing a paragraph without consulting it first. I really feel that I trust it more than my own thoughts."*

Theme 4: Ethical Implications

Finally, the students voiced issues related to ethical implications particularly plagiarism and academic integrity. Many of the participants observed the ambiguity of citing ChatGPT and they also expressed their fear of disciplinary consequences from using such content without acknowledging the source. Some participants recounted how they feel anxious when they copy and paste ChatGPT-generated content without attribution. Student 10 stated that, *"Copying and pasting parts from ChatGPT makes me worried- it's really like plagiarism."* Likewise, Student 2 reported, *"I think using ChatGPT-generated content without acknowledging the original reference is dishonest."*

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal an insight into how students use ChatGPT in their academic writing and how they perceive its impact on the development of their academic writing skills. The findings do not only align with most of the recent global literature on the issue, but they also shed light on the local educational realities.

The findings related to the patterns of ChatGPT use indicate that the majority of the students are aware of various uses of ChatGPT in writing. They primary use it to help them generate and organize thoughts, structure arguments, paraphrase sentences and correct grammar mistakes. This finding echoes Nguyen et al. (2023), who noted that ChatGPT generated-content was increasingly embedded into students' academic writing in order to enhance efficiency and performance. This finding also depicts

ChatGPT's role as an assistant in drafting and structuring content. As in Chanda et al. (2024). findings, in which the participants reported how ChatGPT provide a structural support and organize their ideas when starting writing. Student 3's comment- *"I use it when I need help with my writing task."* suggests that ChatGPT is primarily used as a brainstorming instrument which allows participants to start writing with more organized and clearer framework. A similar perspective was revealed by Gayed et al. (2022) who found that ChatGPT could personalize students' writing process by adapting their writing styles.

The students' responses concerning the benefits of ChatGPT's use suggest that they largely perceive it as a beneficial AI tool that eventually enhances their writing skills. They insisted on the idea that ChatGPT could help them in terms of vocabulary usage, clarity and confidence. The majority of the participants confessed that ChatGPT enables them to write more confidently and quickly particularly when they feel lack of idea or stuck at a point. For example, Student 6 reported that *"It helps me sound more academic and write faster."* These findings resonate with Wang's et al. (2025) who claimed that ChatGPT could improve overall coherence and clarity by giving instant feedback, fostering the sense of control and confidence and facilitating smooth writing processes. The participants also stated that interaction with ChatGPT brought about an improvement in their vocabulary usage. This is obviously consistent with Fowler's (2023) findings which revealed that ChatGPT enhances students' writing style through its capacity of offering new vocabulary and expressions. Most importantly, the findings highlighted how ChatGPT brought about a positive effect on the mechanical aspects of students' academic writing especially when students feel lack of confidence or struggle with cohesion or language proficiency.

As for the drawbacks of ChatGPT's use, the participants reported several hindrances which constrain the development of their academic writing. For instance, many students confessed that the use of ChatGPT would reduce creativity and critical thinking. Such finding reflects how ChatGPT fosters a shallow comprehension of the content and lack of depth. Yeo (2023), similarly, found that the majority of the students failed to provide an in-depth understanding when they were critically asked to reflect on their AI-generated content. In addition, some students recounted as Student 9 that, *"It sometimes offers a broad content which doesn't fit to what I exactly want."* This reveals students hold the belief that while ChatGPT could help generate and organize ideas, it could provide general responses which eventually fail to engage with the subject matter. Furthermore, a lot of participants admitted that when they were to undertake a writing task, they double-checked their work with ChatGPT, even if they already knew the answer. This is clear evidence of another drawback which reflect students' dependency and overreliance on ChatGPT. The issue of overreliance is always emerged

as a significant challenge as in Jo (2024) who emphasized that overreliance could stifle creativity and critical engagement with academic text.

The issue of academic integrity and plagiarism was strongly voiced by the majority of the participants. This indicates that the students are fully aware of the issue as a disciplinary matter that would lead to serious consequences. However, many of the participants confessed to copying and pasting parts of ChatGPT-generated content. Student 10 confessed that, *"Sometimes I feel anxious when I copy and paste chunks from ChatGPT's content, it feels like plagiarism."* Other students also admitted of using the whole ChatGPT's content without putting the proper citation or even acknowledging the original reference. Student 2, similarly, stated that, *"I think that using AI-generated content with ignoring right citation is really dishonest."* From the previous quotes, it could be inferred that the mis-use of ChatGPT-generated content reflects the ethical dilemma that students encounter when utilizing ChatGPT without understanding or even adhering to the proper academic writing values. These findings highlight the significance of fostering students' mentality with a strong sense of academic honesty when using AI tools such as ChatGPT. Such assertion was emphasized by Hadi et al. (2025) who believes that students should be learned about the appropriacy of integrating ChatGPT-generated content into their writing tasks without violating the ethical norms. Apprehension regarding plagiarism underscores the importance of establishing clear academic guidelines about the use of AI tools by higher educational institutions. These guidelines would contribute to developing students' digital literacy skills and allowing them navigate the ethical complexities of AI-assisted writing tools.

To sum up, the findings indicate that students use ChatGPT in a variety of ways in their academic writing. The most prominent uses emerged from their responses are namely; generating and organizing initial ideas and outlines, checking grammar, paraphrasing and drafting. However, their perceptions of its impact vary significantly based on the purpose and the extent of its use. While many participants stated that ChatGPT enhances their confidence, efficiency, and language proficiency, a considerable number of the participants expressed concerns regarding ethical implications and the menace of diminishing creativity, critical thinking, and independent writing skills. Ultimately, the findings reflect the dual-edged nature of ChatGPT 'use in academic writing. While many students perceive it as facilitator, others see it as a potential crutch which constrains the development and the autonomy of their academic writing.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it can be inferred that ChatGPT's educational value is not inherent to the tool itself, but rather formed by the students' perceptions, digital literacy and intentions. Those who use ChatGPT as a supplementary assistant appeared to develop a

greater autonomy and confidence in their academic writing, while those who see it as a shortcut are susceptible to plagiarism risks and overreliance. Such dual-edged nature of ChatGPT revealed by the students, highlights the crucial need for a balanced approach to AI tools in higher educational institutions. Those institutions should take measures to guide students in ethical and appropriate use of AI tools. These measures would provide a safeguard for students' writing development and empower them to harness the benefits of these AI tools (Gayed et al., 2022; Chen, & Gong, 2025). Finally, the most significant takeaway from this study is that the future of academic writing's development relies not only on technological innovation but also on students' agency and pedagogical responsibilities.

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