

## Is Generative AI a Game-changer or a Disruptor of University English Writing Education?: A Critical Analysis of the Student Perception

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### Research Domains

Digital University and new learning technologies (DU)

### Abstract

This study discusses the future of college English writing, focusing on the impact of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI), e.g., ChatGPT, on the second language English writing education based on the findings from the questionnaire at an online English-medium university in the US. The findings suggest many students perceive that writing with an AI is equally unfavorable as plagiarism, students' AI misuse should be detected appropriately by instructors, and repeated AI use may lead them to its customary use and study failure. While the AI misuse issue is often discussed from academic ethics, many students were more concerned that regularly using AI would prevent them from acquiring knowledge, improving their writing skills, and achieving the results of their efforts. This case study provides some hints on solving AI's disadvantageous aspects, not only from a technical but also a cognitive viewpoint.

### Full paper

#### Introduction

College English writing education has constantly been confronted with issues of plagiarism and academic ethics, and the problem has become even more severe and complex with the advent of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI), e.g., ChatGPT. Courses offered online are the most vulnerable to the impact of these technologies, but in-person education should also be prepared for the same concern. This study discusses the future of college English writing instruction, focusing on the impact of GenAI on second-language English writing instruction, based on the questionnaire results at an online English-medium university in the USA.

#### GenAI in Higher Education

AI has increasingly become pervasive in higher education; for example, AI grades student essays (Folz et al., 2023), gives feedback for student writing (Fleckenstein et al., 2023), and helps students access and search for necessary information (Trust et al., 2023). Research indicates students' awareness and familiarity with GenAI tools and their continuous use of AI for information gathering and text paraphrasing (Yusuf et al., 2024). GenAI is expected to transform writing education, as it is an excellent time-saver, as it immediately retrieves information and generates sentences quickly using pre-trained

knowledge data (Kacena et al., 2024). However, AI's inaccuracy of information, ethical issues, and support for academic misconduct are also warned against (Lim et al., 2024).

## **Methods and Study Context**

The study conducted a questionnaire on the perception of using GenAI in an online university's academic English writing course in 2023. The questionnaire has multiple and single-choice questions and free comment sections. Participants were twelve students, including three females and nine males, from ten countries worldwide. The students are relatively highly qualified and motivated. The assessment consists of writing assignments and an online Oxford English Proficiency Test given as a final exam, with a passing grade of at least 75% of the total required. Writing assignments in eight weeks include weekly discussion posts (250-300 words each) on the short novels and articles, reply posts to peer students, weekly learning journals (250-300 words each), and a short 500-1000 word essay with preparatory writings and three drafts. Students use Grammarly to revise their language mistakes before submission, and the learning platform has a plagiarism detector preinstalled.

## **Findings**

According to the results, about half of the participants answered that they should not use GenAI in writing assignments, but the rest answered that they could use it when necessary. About 75 percent responded that submitting an AI-generated text is equally undesirable as plagiarism and that the teacher should detect the students' wrong use of GenAIs. In the free comment, many were concerned that constant use of ChatGPT may lead them to habitual dependence and failure in the study. Interestingly, while teachers often view the students' AI misuse as an issue of academic integrity, many students were more concerned that over-reliance on such AI tools would prevent them from acquiring knowledge, improving their writing skills, and achieving the proper results of their efforts.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

AI detection tools, which initially claimed a detection rate of 60-75%, have improved in accuracy, with some claiming 99%, but none of them are perfect in identifying the author of the text. Since this problem makes it difficult to provide concrete evidence of the AI used, teachers must be cautious, as their misinterpretation and blame words could demotivate students and spoil valuable learning opportunities. However, this does not mean that teachers can turn a blind eye to AI-generated writing. Teachers themselves need to be able to distinguish between AI and human texts, communicate with students individually, and persist in their teaching, remembering that students are in class to develop their thinking and writing skills.

Teachers will need to recognize how AI has intruded into students' learning, particularly in writing. If there are no problems at all with AI use in the writing classroom, the teacher is likely unaware of it or not giving students enough writing activities. Writing is one of the skills that universities are responsible for teaching. A writing class that does not teach academic essay writing and literature citation can be irrelevant to plagiarism and AI problems, but the teaching content may need to improve.

Although generalizing the results is difficult due to the small number of subjects, this case study provides valuable hints on addressing the disadvantageous aspects of AI in L2 writing, not only from a technical but also from a cognitive perspective.

## References

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