



THE HUMAN-AI INTERACTION IN ACADEMIC WRITING: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF WRITERS' EXPERIENCES WITH CHATGPT

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Abstract

The rapid development of technology, especially in artificial intelligence (AI), has led to the integration of AI tools such as ChatGPT into education. People have largely used ChatGPT as writing assistance, including for academic writing. While prior studies have examined ChatGPT in academic writing, few have explored writers' real experiences and views from a phenomenological perspective. This study aims to investigate undergraduate and postgraduate students' personal experiences and perspectives on the use of ChatGPT in academic writing. Using qualitative research employing a phenomenological design, this study involved four students from the English Language Education Program at one university in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and analyzed using Collaizi's method to capture the essence of their experiences. The findings indicate that participants experienced ChatGPT as both a productive partner in academic writing and a potential source of ethical, cognitive, and creative risks. However, ChatGPT raised concerns regarding excessive dependence, a decline in critical thinking, and factual accuracy. These emphasize that ChatGPT should function as a tool that assists rather than replaces writers' intellectual contributions. This study provides insight into how academic writers experience the writing process with the help of AI, which can serve as a reference for educators and institutions that want to integrate AI into writing instruction.

Keywords: AI, ChatGPT, Academic writing, Experiences

Introduction

In this modern era, technology has developed rapidly, especially in Artificial Intelligence (AI). AI now plays a crucial role in many sectors, such as education, where it is massively integrated into teaching and learning processes, particularly in academic writing. AI encompasses many technologies intended to replace human intelligence in machines, including common applications such as chatbots, voice assistants, and other technologies (Jarrah et al., 2023). Among various AI



applications, the Chat Generative Pre-Trained Transformer (ChatGPT), launched by OpenAI in November 2022, is a conversational AI chatbot that uses a large language model to generate human-like text responses. This technology has fundamentally transformed conventional learning and writing (Dempere et al., 2023; Imran & Almusharraf, 2023; Phuong et al., 2025; Sullivan et al., 2023). ChatGPT is the most well-known and widespread AI chatbots among users (Fletcher and Nielsen, 2024; On et al., 2025). Given its widespread use among students, ChatGPT has emerged as a prominent tool in academic writing, an activity that plays a crucial role in higher education.

In an academic field, writing activities are inseparable from learning activities, particularly in higher education experience. When a student is already at a higher level of education, they are not required to sharpen their skills in foundational writing duties. Still, they are encouraged to develop their academic writing. Academic writing is a complex process that combines research, clear argumentation, and structured methods to contribute to scholarly discourse (Malik et al., 2023; Khalifa & Albadawy, 2024). Thus, academic writing is a crucial part of the scholarly sector; however, it poses various challenges for writers. According to 90% of participants in a study conducted by Gupta et al. (2022), the most common difficulties in academic writing are the writing process itself, developing content or ideas, using appropriate grammar, selecting vocabulary, and arranging sentences or paragraphs. Malik et al. (2023) noted that gaining proficiency in using formal tone and specific vocabulary can be challenging, particularly for beginners.

AI tools are used to assist users in various areas. ChatGPT has become popular and widely recognized for its ability to produce clear, natural responses across various subjects (Lund & Wang, 2023). The emergence of the AI chatbot ChatGPT has significantly influenced academic writing practices in both beneficial and challenging ways. ChatGPT aids writers by saving time, synthesizing and citing, generating ideas, summarizing, and providing information resources on particular topics (Kasneci et al., 2023; Mondal & Mondal, 2023; Siripipatthanakul et al., 2024). In addition, ChatGPT provides vocabulary suggestions and checks grammar and coherence, which help writers with academic writing. The advantages of integrating ChatGPT show that it can be a helpful tool in academic writing. Besides its positive effects, ChatGPT also presents several negative effects in academic writing. ChatGPT possibly generates grammatically correct sentences, but the content may be meaningless, biased, and lacking originality (Hua et al., 2024). Kasneci et al. (2023) stated that using this AI chatbot could also lead to overreliance and restrict writers' critical thinking. Blind use of ChatGPT could also cause more harm than good.

Among numerous articles on the use of ChatGPT in education, this study aims to explore the personal experiences and views of undergraduate and postgraduate students regarding the integration of ChatGPT into academic writing activities. While plenty of studies have addressed the benefits and negative effects of ChatGPT in academic writing, few studies have explored writers' experiences and



views on using ChatGPT in academic writing from a phenomenological perspective, representing a distinct empirical gap that this study aims to address. A phenomenological design was applied in this study because it prioritizes deep exploration of the lived experiences of a small group of participants, yielding a rich, detailed understanding of how students interact with ChatGPT during the process of writing academic content. Therefore, consistent with this research design, this research was guided by several research questions:

1. What are academic writers' experiences when interacting with ChatGPT in their writing process?
2. How do writers perceive the role of ChatGPT in shaping their academic writing process, productivity, and creativity?

Theoretical Framework

Sociocultural Theory of Writing and Mediation

This study is guided by a theoretical framework based on Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which mentions the use of tools, in this case, such as language and AI, specifically for academic writing. Those tools can be viewed as mediators of cognitive and creative processes when college students use AI in their writing. In line with cognitive processes, Vygotsky (as cited in Malik et al., 2025) argued that cognitive development and language, as the second tool, cannot be separated, as both develop simultaneously. Thus, language functions not only as a means of communication but also as a tool for thinking and understanding the world. Additionally, Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) concept differentiates between what students can do on their own and what they can reach with assistance (Munir et al., 2025). As ChatGPT is considered an assistant in academic writing, human-AI interaction is closely related to and may influence the ZPD. It is strengthened by Munir et al. (2025), who stated that AI and ChatGPT aim to ensure that individual learning occurs with optimal results by analyzing students' prior knowledge and adjusting the material's difficulty and the level of assistance.

ChatGPT can be an example of a mediational tool, as emphasized by Erol (2025) in the study's findings: despite the need to combine it with pedagogical support for effective use, it remains a powerful mediation tool. As a form of writing assistance, ChatGPT was found by Afzal et al. (2023) to be a well-known tool used for producing structured academic texts and brainstorming. Furthermore, Xue (2024) revealed that ChatGPT can enhance writing proficiency by providing suitable discourse models, useful information to enrich written content, and real-time feedback for evaluation, thereby improving writing logic. However, it should be noted that ChatGPT primarily requires explicit commands and cannot provide independent guidance, which can be considered a limitation in the writing process (Erol, 2025; Herda et al., 2024). Thus, as a mediational tool, ChatGPT can also influence the way writers develop ideas, negotiate meaning, and engage in academic writing. Through these mediated interactions, both the writers' skills and their textual outputs are fundamentally refined. Therefore, this framework helps



explain how writers experience and interpret their interactions with ChatGPT during the academic writing process.

Human-Computer Interaction (HCI)

This study is grounded in Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) theory, which explores how humans and computers interact, particularly through AI-powered tools such as ChatGPT. According to Novitaningrum et al. (2025), HCI is the study of interaction between humans and computers, both direct and indirect. Another study stated that HCI is a multidisciplinary field that aims to design technologies that are used effectively for the users (Issroff & Scanlon, 2002). In the academic writing context, writers typically go through stages that mirror Norman's (2013) Human Action Cycle: goal formation, specifying intention, sequencing actions, execution, perception, interpretation, and evaluation. These stages are closely related to HCI because they illustrate the cognitive processes involved in interaction and collaboration between writers and AI-powered tools. Writers' control in HCI refers to more than just operating the tool; it also encompasses the ability to evaluate the answers and suggestions from AI-powered tools, aligning with Norman's (2013) Human Action Cycle's execution.

To further explain the cognitive processes underlying human-AI interaction, this study draws on Distributed Cognition, a sub-theory of HCI that was made to understand the interaction between humans and technology. This theory extends beyond cognitive processes, providing a broader concept that appears from social interaction between people, tools, and the environment (Hollan et al., 2000). In the context of AI-assisted academic writing, Distributed Cognition Theory provides insight into shared interaction between people, in this context, is the writer and the tool, ChatGPT.

Besides structural and cognitive theory, the sense of agency plays a pivotal role in human-AI interaction, particularly in academic writing contexts. It is not unusual for writers to navigate the tension between accepting AI suggestions and maintaining their original authorial intent. According to Bandura (2001, as cited in Code, 2020), human agency theory is "the power to originate action". Another study defines agency as the ability to choose and to act on the choices in ways that change their lives (Martin, 2004). AI-powered tools act as symbiotic writing partners that enhance human agency and do not replace it (Han, 2025; Herda et al., 2024). In Integrating AI into academic writing, the agency includes writers' ability to evaluate, modify, or accept the suggestions from the AI-powered tool such as ChatGPT, which is aligned with Norman's (2013) Human Action Cycle and distributed cognition theory.

Method

Research Design

This qualitative study applied a phenomenological design to investigate students' lived experiences engaging with ChatGPT in academic writing. Phenomenology



provided comprehensive insights into students' perceptions and interpretations of their interactions with AI as a writing instrument, especially within educational contexts. The emphasis was on revealing the core of these encounters from the individuals' viewpoints. Phenomenology was used as the research design for this study due to its efficacy in examining and comprehending persons' actual experiences (Fraenkel et al., 2022). This research highlighted how student writers perceive and interpret their interactions with ChatGPT during academic writing processes. Instead of measuring or quantifying behavior, phenomenology enables the researcher to explore the subjective sensations, feelings, and significance that participants associate with using AI in writing. This aligns with the study's objective of encapsulating the core of human-AI interaction from participants' viewpoints, offering profound, nuanced insights that alternative research methodologies may not adequately capture.

Participants

The participants consisted of four students (N=4) enrolled in the English Language Education Program at a university in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Two participants (P3 and P4) were undergraduate students enrolled in an Academic Writing course and had prior experience with ChatGPT. The other two (P1-P2) were master's students writing their thesis proposals. All participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their familiarity with ChatGPT and active involvement in academic writing tasks. This sample size aligns with phenomenological research, emphasizing depth over breadth in exploring lived experiences.

It was intentional to include two participant groups to document a more comprehensive range of experiences with ChatGPT across various phases of academic writing. Undergraduate students were chosen to represent users participating in course-based academic writing activities, whereas master's students represented individuals engaged in more advanced, independent scholarly writing, specifically in thesis proposal development. This heterogeneity enabled the research to investigate both common and context-dependent experiences in utilizing ChatGPT for academic writing. The goal of this phenomenological study was to gain a thorough understanding of participants' actual experiences rather than achieve a statistical generalization.

Before data collection, participants were provided with an informed consent letter outlining the study's purpose, procedures, and ethical considerations. The letter emphasized that participation was entirely voluntary and that participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured by informing participants that their identities would be protected through pseudonyms and that all data would be used solely for research purposes.

Data Collection Technique

Data were collected through in-depth interviews to allow flexibility in exploring participants' individual experiences while maintaining consistency across



interviews. Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and was conducted in English or Indonesian, depending on the participant’s preference. Interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim for analysis. However, open-ended questions encouraged participants to share detailed narratives about their experiences using ChatGPT for academic writing purposes.

Data Analysis Technique

The data were analyzed using Colaizzi’s method of phenomenological analysis (1978), strengthened by Wirihana et al. (2018) which includes the following steps: first, reading and rereading the transcripts to become thoroughly familiar with the data; second, extracting significant statements that directly relate to the phenomenon; third, formulating meanings from these significant statements; fourth, aggregating the formulated meanings into clusters of themes and broader thematic categories; fifth, developing an exhaustive description of the phenomenon’s essential structure or essence; sixth, generating a description of the fundamental structure of the phenomenon; and seventh, validating the findings through participant feedback to ensure accuracy and credibility of the interpretations.

Findings and Discussion

Academic Writers' Experiences When Interacting with ChatGPT in Their Writing Process

To address the first research question, the experiences of four participants (P1-P4) were analyzed, revealing positive experiences and their concerns about ChatGPT’s use in academic writing. On the positive side, participants described ChatGPT as a valuable partner for idea generation, content organization, and overcoming writer’s block. On the other hand, they expressed concerns about ethical implications, overreliance, and factual accuracy. The following sections present these experiences in detail.

Table 1. Positive Experience of ChatGPT Use Among Participants

No	Participant	Phenomenon Highlight
1	P1	ChatGPT positively influenced her academic writing by enabling a more systematic approach to idea development, enhancing coherence, acting as a discussion partner, and saving time for deeper analysis and refinement.
2	P2	ChatGPT offers a positive experience, helping him create clear outlines, serving as a brainstorming partner, and acting as a dynamic collaborator, which shaped his thought process.
3	P3	ChatGPT is a valuable source of ideas and outlines. It aids content planning without diminishing its personal writing style and improves time efficiency, especially under tight deadlines.



4	P4	ChatGPT is effective for developing ideas, identifying key points, and improving writing style through feedback and modelled phrasing.
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Table 1 presents participants' positive experiences with ChatGPT in academic writing, highlighting its contributions to systematic idea development, coherent structure, collaborative support, time efficiency, and style enhancement. Participants reported generally positive experiences with ChatGPT in their academic writing process.

Participant 1 (P1) described it as having a “positive influence” on their writing. Similarly, P2 characterized the experience as “generally positive throughout the writing journey”.

“My experience of using ChatGPT in academic writing is quite influential ... it's quite influential in finding and discovering ideas” (P1)

These accounts align with findings by Wardat et al. (2023), who reported that users' positive feedback on ChatGPT highlights its potential to innovate educational practices by making the learning process more accessible and personalized. Supporting this view, Kafabih et al. (2026) reported that AI features such as real-time feedback, adaptive content, voice recognition, and gamified tasks meaningfully contributed to improvements in EFL learners' writing, reading, speaking, and listening skills, confirming that AI-mediated tools can serve as effective cognitive scaffolds when engaged with judiciously. Similarly, Mahapatra's (2024) study of ESL students in India indicated that learners hold an overall positive attitude toward ChatGPT's impact. ChatGPT's perceived usefulness significantly affects satisfaction with using the tool; positive perceptions of ChatGPT's usefulness may motivate users to use the tool more frequently and develop higher levels of satisfaction with it (Yu et al., 2024). Taken together, these studies and participant accounts suggest that ChatGPT can serve as an effective and supportive tool in the academic writing process.

Several participants emphasized ChatGPT's role in refining and elaborating their initial ideas. P1 shared that ChatGPT helped her to develop the ideas, while P3 described using it to “create an outline” before beginning to write. Similarly, P2 valued the tool's pre-writing support, particularly in organizing key points, identifying relevant content, and shaping both the introduction and conclusion.

“ChatGPT helps me develop ideas that are more structured. So, when I have prompts or writing ideas, I discuss them with ChatGPT, and I get a lot of insights that are more structured academically.” (P1)

“Using ChatGPT for academic writing is like giving me time to construct the outline of the writing I'm going to do. For example, determining the content, generating the starting point, and creating the concluding paragraph.” (P2)



“I have experience in using ChatGPT for academic writing for example, if I want to create an article. I use ChatGPT to create an outline.” (P3)

“In academic writing ChatGPT supports me in developing ideas” (P4)

When participants encountered difficulties in expanding or innovating their ideas, ChatGPT provided alternative perspectives and suggestions that helped them overcome these challenges. This observation aligns with Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory, which highlights the role of mediational tools in enabling learners to function within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). By facilitating idea development and structuring the writing framework, ChatGPT effectively bridged the gap between participants’ current performance and their potential. This finding aligns with a study conducted by Malik et al. (2024), demonstrating that ChatGPT was helping the study’s participants in exploring new ideas and concepts. This shows that ChatGPT can serve as a tool to help writers refine and expand their ideas (Marzuki et al., 2023). These insights suggest that ChatGPT can serve as both an organizational aid and a collaborative partner, allowing writers to preserve and enhance their work while maintaining their voice and originality.

Participants further described ChatGPT as a valuable partner for brainstorming and idea generation. P2 referred to it as a “dynamic collaborative partner” that shaped his thought process and helped him overcome writer’s block. At the same time, P4 highlighted the “key points” it provided that supported the development of her brainstorming process.

“During the writing process, sometimes we need input to develop certain ideas further. ChatGPT can provide me suggestions to complete sentences or check my overall content in the final stage” (P2)

“ChatGPT has a big impact because it helps me to brainstorm” (P4)

These experiences illustrate ChatGPT’s ability to foster creative thinking by providing relevant information and stimulating new directions for exploration. From the perspective of *Distributed Cognition theory*, this process can be understood as shared cognitive work, where the task of generating and organizing ideas is distributed between humans and AI. In this capacity, ChatGPT functions not merely as a passive source of information but also as an active co-contributor in the creative process. Afzal et al. (2025), similarly, discovered that ChatGPT facilitates structured text production and supports the brainstorming process. Participants had a relatively good insight into the proportion of text they had contributed to texts and the proportion of text that ChatGPT had generated (Luther et al., 2024).

In addition to positive experiences, several participants expressed their concerns about excessive use of ChatGPT. As provided in Table 2.



Table 2. Participants’ Concerns in the Use of ChatGPT for Academic Writing

No	Participant	Phenomenon Highlight
1	P1	Excessive reliance on ChatGPT could diminish personal voice and style, weaken critical thinking skills, and increase the risk of inaccuracies in the generated content. She further argued that such dependence, particularly in scientific publications, undermines the ideal of novice writers developing their skills independently.
2	P2	ChatGPT should function only as an assistant rather than a creator, underscoring the need for careful use in academic writing.
3	P3	Emphasized concerns about becoming dependent on ChatGPT, viewing reliance as the biggest risk. He also expressed caution regarding potential inaccuracies and the possibility of plagiarism
4	P4	ChatGPT’s responses are drawn from a large database without proper citations, which could lead to unintentional plagiarism.

Table 2 presents participants’ primary concerns about ChatGPT use in academic writing, including risks of overreliance, which can weaken critical thinking, inaccurate information, and potential plagiarism. P1 warned that overreliance might erode their “voice” in academic writing and questioned the ethical implications. P1 further argued that such dependence in scientific publications contradicts the values of novice writers striving to develop their skills independently. P3 identified dependency as his “greatest concern” when using the tool.

“If the author uses AI too much in their writing, it feels a bit unethical to me.” (P1)

“I’m afraid of relying on ChatGPT, and that is my biggest concern.” (P3)

Such concern aligns with findings from previous studies that academics and students fear AI-generated text could blur authorship boundaries and undermine original thought (Dwivedi et al., 2023; Lund & Naheem, 2024). The reflections from P1 and P3 indicate that novice writers are keenly aware of the trade-off between working efficiently and preserving their own authentic voice. This underscores the need for clearer and more practical guidelines on the ethical and responsible use of AI in academic writing.

Another key concern raised by participants was the potential weakening of critical thinking. P1 cautioned that students and novice writers might bypass important cognitive processes. Similarly, P2 emphasized that ChatGPT should be treated strictly as an assistant rather than as a substitute for original thinking.

“If we depend on ChatGPT, our critical thinking won’t be as sharp when we rely more on our own thoughts.” (P1)



This finding aligns with the previous study by Koos and Wachsmann (2023), which found that overreliance on AI can negatively impact critical and analytical thinking abilities. The answers generated by AI may discourage writers from conducting in-depth research and critically evaluating sources, which are essential for developing strong cognitive skills. Similar findings were highlighted in a study by Ismail (2023), which emphasized that overreliance on AI negatively affects analytical thinking abilities. This underscores the importance of fostering intentional and reflective use of AI, ensuring that such tools complement rather than replace the cognitive processes fundamental to academic writing.

Participants also recognized ChatGPT's limitations regarding factual accuracy. P1 noted that ChatGPT's responses "may be correct, but they may also be inaccurate" and stressed the need for verification. P3 similarly expressed caution when using ChatGPT. This underscores the necessity of fact-checking AI outputs and supplementing them with verifiable sources.

"There's often a bias from ChatGPT when it mentions the theory and the year it was published. Sometimes I need to double-check that it's accurate... so we need to check because I've come across it a few times." (P1)

"I am also concerned about inaccurate information from ChatGPT, so I searched again on Google. I also do not believe what ChatGPT provides in articles because sometimes they are fake." (P3)

These findings emphasize the importance of equipping writers with the skills to critically evaluate AI-generated information. ChatGPT's contents may not always make sense, may be unauthentic and unreliable, and may require cross-checking (Bibi & Atta, 2024). This echoes Kim (2023), who suggests that ChatGPT can produce inaccurate information, highlighting the need for human authors to thoroughly review and verify AI-generated content before incorporating it into their work. Since AI-generated content is influenced by its training data, relying on AI without thorough verification can lead to the dissemination of outdated or biased knowledge that affects how writers construct their arguments. The tendency of AI to perpetuate algorithmic bias (Tejani et al., 2023; O'Connor & Liu, 2023) suggests that uncritical use in academic writing may compromise factual reliability and inadvertently shape perspectives through skew. Writers need to be aware of potential biases and verify the accuracy as well as the reliability of AI's information. These findings emphasize the importance of checking sources more thoroughly to maintain the integrity of academic discourse.

Participants also expressed concern about potential plagiarism from ChatGPT. P1 noted that, as an academic writer, she minimizes its use when possible, observing that overreliance can reduce writing quality and raise plagiarism and AI-detection scores, which should remain low for publication purposes. P3 also expressed concern about plagiarism; thus, he made a point of reworking ChatGPT's output in his own words to reduce the risk. P4 added that ChatGPT's lack of citations in some



responses could lead to unintentional plagiarism, as the database it draws from does not always provide references.

“If I have plenty of time, I’ll minimize my use of ChatGPT because I’ve personally experienced that when I become too dependent on it, my writing quality suffers. Then I checked the AI usage percentage, and sometimes the percentage is higher when using AI, whereas if we want to publish something, it’s better to keep the percentage low or minimal.” (P1)

“I’m also afraid of plagiarism, but if we only ask for the outline, then develop the writing independently and by our style, it should be safe from plagiarism.” (P3)

“Of course, there are some concerns regarding plagiarism from ChatGPT, because ChatGPT generates the data from a massive database that sometimes doesn’t include the source and the author” (P4)

These perspectives showed that overusing AI, in this case ChatGPT, may risk ethical standards, particularly when proper attribution is lacking or when it compromises originality. Generative AI tools such as ChatGPT have the very real potential to facilitate scientific fraud (Kovari, 2025). Inaccuracies, missing citations, and potential plagiarism can damage the credibility of a writer's work and erode trust in academic research.

Overall, the findings indicate that academic writers' experiences with ChatGPT are characterized by a dynamic balance between its potential benefits and inherent risks. Participants described ChatGPT as a productive partner that assists in academic writing. On the other hand, participants expressed concerns about over-reliance, ethical integrity, diminished critical thinking, and factual accuracy. The dual nature of AI as both a cognitive enhancer and a potential crutch has been widely noted (Jose & Jose, 2024; Suman et al., 2025). This experience suggests that while ChatGPT can be an effective partner in the writing process, its integration must be accompanied by strong critical evaluation skills, adherence to ethical guidelines, and a sustained emphasis on the writer's intellectual contributions. As AI and chatbots continue to evolve, it is important to carefully consider the implications of their use and take steps to prevent their misuse (King, 2023).

The Perceived Role of ChatGPT in Shaping the Academic Writing Process, Productivity, and Creativity

To address the second research question, this phenomenological study investigated the lived experiences of four academic writers (P1–P4) as they engaged with ChatGPT across three core dimensions: the academic writing process, creativity, and productivity. To address this, the experiences shared by the four participants (P1–P4) were examined across three dimensions, each revealing distinct patterns in how they understood and used the tool in their academic writing practice. The following discussion presents the findings for each dimension in turn, drawing on



the participants' accounts to explore both the benefits they identified and the concerns they raised about integrating ChatGPT into their writing.

The participants' academic writing processes are further depicted in Table 3.

Table 3. Perceptions of ChatGPT's Role in The Writing Process

No	Participant	Phenomenon Highlight
1	P1	Viewed ChatGPT as a collaborative partner that facilitated idea organization and structural clarity, yet expressed concern that intensive use reduced personal engagement and sense of ownership.
2	P2	Engaged in a dialogic exchange with ChatGPT to enhance textual cohesion, while emphasizing the necessity of maintaining full authorial control during revision.
3	P3	Used ChatGPT primarily for generating outlines in the prewriting stage, wrote the content independently, and consistently verified sources to ensure accuracy.
4	P4	Highlighted the importance of clear prompts and supplementary materials to improve output relevance, but noted concerns about a lack of transparent sourcing and potential plagiarism.

A salient theme emerging from the data was the reconfiguration of the writing process through interaction with ChatGPT. Participant 1 (P1) described the tool as a collaborative partner that facilitated idea organization and clarity, stating,

“ChatGPT helped me structure my ideas more clearly.” (P1)

This echoes Hammoumi et al. (2024), who suggest that AI tools can function as cognitive scaffolds, enabling writers to externalize and refine their thoughts in more structured ways. However, P1 also expressed reservations about voice and ownership, observing that overreliance led to reduced personal engagement:

“When I used ChatGPT intensively and submitted writing with minimal revision, the originality score was higher, and I felt less ownership.” (P1)

This ambivalence resonates with concerns about the erosion of authorial identity in AI-mediated writing, as discussed by Keyes et al. (2021).

P2 characterized their use of ChatGPT as a dialogic process, treating the AI as a thinking partner. They stated,

“I often copy a sentence and ask if there is any idea that fits to complete it,” (P2)

Indicating a back-and-forth exchange aimed at enhancing textual cohesion. This finding aligns with emerging views of AI as a co-constructive agent in digital



writing environments (Lin, 2025). Yet, P2 remained critical of the tool's limitations, asserting,

"It helps with fluidity, but I must review everything; it should assist, not replace."
(P2)

P1 and P2 showed a similar pattern in their work with ChatGPT. They used it in an interactive, step-by-step manner during the drafting process. Instead of asking for full answers back-and-forth conversation will develop and improve writers' ideas (Lin, 2025). However, P1 also mentioned a concern. Using ChatGPT too much in this way could reduce their sense of ownership, so they might feel less that the ideas are truly theirs. The balance between seeking help and maintaining control suggests that writers need to retain authority over their writing (Recchio, 1991). This suggests that while this method can be helpful, it should be used carefully to avoid losing one's personal voice

P3 primarily used ChatGPT during the prewriting phase, particularly to generate outlines.

"I ask ChatGPT for an outline, but I choose the words and write the content myself," (P3)

"Sometimes the articles it gives me are fake, so I double-check on Google Scholar."
(P3)

This caution mirrors findings from Sanchez-Ramos et al. (2023), who argue that while ChatGPT can be a valuable resource, its content must be critically verified due to its propensity to fabricate sources.

P4 offered nuanced reflections on the importance of prompt engineering in effective AI use.

"The clearer the prompt, the better the result" (P4)

"It doesn't always give sources, and I need to verify everything to avoid plagiarism." (P4)

The theme of checking and verifying information was seen in both P3 and P4. They described clear, regular ways to check the content generated by ChatGPT. This similar behavior may indicate that they are more aware of the risks of plagiarism or misinformation, especially since they use ChatGPT more often to create content. This idea is in line with Annapureddy et al. (2025), who highlighted that AI literacy and using AI tools responsibly are important for writers.

Building on these insights into the academic writing process, participants' perceptions of ChatGPT's role in writing productivity are further depicted in Table 4.



Table 4. Perceptions of ChatGPT’s Role in Academic Writing Productivity

No	Participant	Phenomenon Highlight
1	P1	Reported that ChatGPT supported rapid idea organization under time pressure, but asserted that optimal productivity depended on balancing AI assistance with personal judgement.
2	P2	Acknowledged ChatGPT’s value in generating a range of up-to-date ideas, yet stressed the importance of developing these ideas through critical engagement.
3	P3	Adopted ChatGPT to overcome writer’s block and expedite early drafting, while reserving substantive intellectual work for personal effort
4	P4	Experienced increased writing frequency with ChatGPT’s support, but cautioned that overreliance could lead to diminished cognitive effort.

Regarding productivity, all participants acknowledged that ChatGPT enhanced writing efficiency, particularly in the initial stages. P1 observed that the tool helped her get started when under pressure.

“When I don’t have much time, it really helps me organize and get started.” (P1)

While P3 described a strategic use of ChatGPT, primarily for overcoming writer’s block and accelerating early drafts:

“It helps me get started faster with outlines, but I still do the real thinking.” (P3)

Overcoming writer’s block and facilitating writing initiation was shared by P1 and P3, both of whom described ChatGPT as most valuable under time pressure or creative stagnation. These reflections are consistent with Sweller's (1988) cognitive load theory, suggesting that while AI may reduce extraneous cognitive demands, it should not replace essential cognitive processing.

“The real productivity comes from balancing ChatGPT's help with my own judgment.” (P2)

“It gives many up-to-date ideas, and I can choose based on my interests.” (P2)

However, P2 also stressed the importance of critical engagement with AI-generated content, observing,

“It provides topics, but we must develop them critically.” (P2)

This suggests a nuanced view of productivity as a human-machine collaboration. P4, meanwhile, observed an increase in writing output:



“It increased my writing frequency,” yet she warned of cognitive complacency: “Because it gives so much, it makes me use less of my brainpower.” (P4)

P2’s insight captures the paradox of AI-mediated productivity: It can simultaneously stimulate and dull cognitive effort. Idea supply and increased writing frequency were the productivity benefits highlighted by P2 and P4, who emphasized the volume of ideas and the pace of output. A notable divergence emerged in how participants conceptualized productive quality. P1, P2, and P3 all argued, though in different ways, that the best productivity comes from keeping human intellectual control while using AI assistance, defining productivity not simply as producing more output, but as producing output that is genuinely meaningful. P4, on the other hand, raised a concern that the others did not mention: that because AI makes content generation so easy, users may gradually become less mentally engaged in the process. This concern is reflected in Kafabih’s (2025) study of secondary school EFL learners who used mobile devices to learn English, which found that although students rated their enjoyment and interest in mobile-assisted learning very highly, their satisfaction scores were noticeably lower. This gap suggests that feeling positive about AI-based learning tools does not necessarily mean learners feel confident they are making real, meaningful progress.

Siddiqui et al. (2025) have highlighted such trade-offs, arguing for the integration of AI into pedagogical frameworks that preserve critical and reflective thinking. Turning to creativity, participants’ perceptions of ChatGPT are presented in Table 5 below.

Table 5 Perceptions of ChatGPT’s Role in Academic Writing Creativity

No	Participant	Phenomenon Highlight
1	P1	Used ChatGPT-generated title options as exploratory material, combining elements to create original titles.
2	P2	Appreciated ChatGPT’s alternative perspectives, yet criticized its tendency toward templated responses; argued that creativity should originate from the writer.
3	P3	Gained new ideas from ChatGPT but carefully selected and refined them; incorporated personal arguments and sought additional information to strengthen critical thinking.
4	P4	Felt ChatGPT’s instant provision of ideas could limit independent thinking, yet acknowledged its role in enhancing formal and academic tone through paraphrasing and revision.

Creativity emerged as a more contested dimension of the human-AI writing experience. Unlike the themes of productivity and process, where participants’ views were fairly similar, creativity elicited more varied responses, reflecting that participants had different views on originality, inspiration, and the level of effort involved in creative work.

“I combined options based on my preferences and keywords,” (P1)



“Sometimes it gives ideas I wouldn’t think of.” (P3)

However, P3 maintained critical authorship:

“I never copy the answers directly. I always check and expand on them.” (P3)

Alternative perspectives and creative expansions were themes shared by P1 and P3, both of whom described ChatGPT as a useful source of ideas they would not have come up with on their own. Importantly, both participants also showed what can be called critical appropriation, meaning that instead of simply accepting whatever the AI produced, they actively chose, evaluated, and built upon the generated content. This approach aligns with Vuong and Napier's (2014) argument that creativity works best when outside input is critically engaged with rather than passively received. Meanwhile, P2 commented on the model’s repetitiveness.

“The alternatives are so template; it makes everything uniform.” (P2)

These reflections resonate with Zimmermann and Lee-Stronach (2022), who caution that algorithmic outputs may reinforce conventional patterns, limiting originality. In contrast, P4 expressed ambivalence. While she appreciated the AI’s contribution to academic phrasing, she warned that it risked undermining deeper cognitive involvement:

“It limits my mental effort because it offers everything too easily.” (P4)

P4’s concern highlights the careful balance between seeking help and losing creativity when using AI in writing. These examples highlight an important issue that while ChatGPT can help generate more creative ideas, it may also reduce how deeply someone thinks during the creative process. This is consistent with Mei et al. (2025), who found that generative AI tends to improve performance outcomes but weakens the personal and subjective experience of engaging in creative work.

Taken together, the findings of this study suggest that ChatGPT serves as a double-edged instrument in academic writing (Chukwuere, 2024). On the other hand, it supports idea generation, organization, and productivity; on the other hand, it raises ethical, cognitive, and creative concerns (Mei et al., 2025). All participants demonstrated critical awareness, indicating a shared belief that AI should function as a supplement rather than a substitute for human judgment, voice, and integrity (Abdullah et al., 2025).

These lived experiences contribute to ongoing discussions on the evolving nature of authorship, creativity, and cognition in the age of generative AI. They show that human-AI interaction in academic writing is not a matter of simple assistance or substitution but entails a nuanced process of negotiation, reflection, and ethical positioning. As such, the academic writing landscape is not being eclipsed by AI; rather, it is being reshaped through collaborative human-AI engagements marked by discernment and strategic agency (Lin, 2025; Naqvi et al., 2024).



Conclusion

This phenomenological study indicates that academic authors perceive ChatGPT as both a beneficial collaborator and a cause of apprehension during the writing process. Participants deemed the tool beneficial in augmenting idea development, promoting organization, boosting productivity, and providing creative impulses, especially during initial drafting phases. Simultaneously, they articulated concerns about overreliance, diminished critical thinking, ethical ambiguity, and factual errors. These dualities emphasize the necessity of perceiving ChatGPT not as a substitute for human intelligence, but as an auxiliary instrument whose effectiveness relies on conscientious, analytical, and ethically sound application. This study emphasizes the necessity for explicit rules, AI literacy, and pedagogical frameworks in academic writing, as human-AI interaction becomes more prevalent, to maintain authorial voice, cognitive engagement, and academic integrity. The incorporation of AI in academic settings must be driven by judgment and intent, enhancing rather than eclipsing the writer's intellectual efforts. This study offers valuable insights into the experiences of academic authors using ChatGPT; however, its small sample size of 4 participants limits the generalizability of the results. The uniformity of the participants' academic backgrounds and circumstances may limit the diversity of opinions expressed. Furthermore, as a phenomenological study, the research prioritizes subjective experiences over quantitative assessments of changes in productivity, originality, or writing quality. Subsequent research ought to encompass a broader array of fields, educational strata, and cultural contexts. Longitudinal or mixed-methods studies may provide profound insights into the long-term impact of continuous use of ChatGPT on writing habits, skill development, and academic integrity. Subsequently, future research should investigate the formulation of ethical frameworks and AI literacy initiatives to assist academic authors in utilizing generative technologies such as ChatGPT responsibly and efficiently.

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