# AI Tools as Facilitators or Threats to Vietnamese Students' Academic Integrity in Research Writing

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#### **Abstract**

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has captured the world's imagination and sparked endless debates among educators. Among the discussions is the ethical use of AI for academic purposes. The existing literature indicates that, while AI tools offer significant benefits, they also raise ethical concerns in higher education contexts. However, the impact of AI tools on the academic integrity of Vietnamese English majors' research paper writing remains relatively unexplored. This paper addresses this gap by investigating how final-year English majors in Vietnam perceived and used AI tools in their research paper writing. The study employed a quantitative approach, using a questionnaire as the primary tool to collect numerical data from 70 participants with experience in AI and research writing. Findings revealed that AI tools were generally perceived positively and were widely used in students' research paper writing process. Ethical issues were identified as a concern among the majority of the participants. However, the collected data also showed contradictions in participants' perceptions and use of AI. The research highlights the need to regulate the use of AI among students and to integrate these tools effectively into academic writing contexts. Urgent interventions are necessary to ensure that AI tools serve as facilitators rather than threats to academic integrity in Vietnamese students' research writing.

**Keywords:** Artificial Intelligence, AI, academic integrity, research integrity, research writing

### Introduction

In an era where written communication is indispensable, writing plays a fundamental role in language learning and academic success. The famous quote, "The pen is mightier than the sword," encapsulates the power of writing, which has been recognized as one of humankind's most influential tools (Hidi et al., 2006). Writing is a crucial means of self-expression, communication, and knowledge dissemination. It allows individuals to connect across distances and time, facilitating the exchange of ideas and the preservation of information with precision and accuracy. Given its significance, writing remains a central component of education, particularly in higher learning, where students must develop academic writing proficiency to succeed in their disciplines.

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Extensive research has examined the importance of academic writing and the challenges students face in mastering it. Grabe & Kaplan (2014) emphasize that writing should be valued and practiced to accurately represent language. Similarly, Wingate (2006) and Sultan (2013) highlight that academic essay and report writing are essential skills for higher education students. However, acquiring academic writing competence is a complex and time-intensive process. Wingate (2012, 2014) further stresses that students must exert significant effort to develop their writing abilities. Carless (2006) notes that many students in higher education struggle with academic writing due to its inherent challenges.

Despite recognition of these difficulties, the rapid advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) has introduced new tools that could aid students in their academic writing. AI-assisted language models have been increasingly utilized for educational purposes, including supporting research and writing processes. These tools offer various advantages, such as enhancing writing accuracy, generating ideas, and improving clarity. However, concerns remain regarding the accuracy, transparency, and ethical implications of using AI-generated content in academic writing (Semrl et al., 2023). While AI can serve as a valuable asset, its role in academic integrity and the extent to which it influences student learning and writing development warrant further exploration.

While prior studies have examined the role of AI in academic writing and explored the advantages and risks of AI in higher education, they lack empirical evidence on how Vietnamese students navigate ethical concerns while using these tools. This gap underscores the need for a localized investigation to understand students' perceptions, usage patterns, and the ethical dilemmas they encounter in their research paper writing.

This study aims to explore how final-year Vietnamese-English major students perceive and use AI tools in their academic writing. Specifically, it investigates the extent to which AI tools support their research process and the ethical considerations that arise. By employing a quantitative approach, the study seeks to provide insights into students' engagement with AI and to contribute to the development of policies that promote responsible AI integration in academic writing while ensuring academic integrity.

# **Literature Review**

# Artificial Intelligence Tools

Artificial intelligence (AI) has become ubiquitous in daily life thanks to its applications across industries such as innovative technologies, finance, e-commerce, marketing, manufacturing, and automotive (Pokrivcakova, 2019). First coined in 1956 by John McCarthy, Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a branch of computer science dedicated to creating intelligent agents to imitate human intelligence to perform tasks that traditionally require one, such as perception, speech comprehension, decision-making, language translation, etc. (Muayyad et al., 2024; Celik, 2023). It is undeniable that AI has become one of the most transformative technologies of the 21st century, reshaping economies and societies (Scherer et al., 2023). AI has become integral across different fields, revolutionizing decision-making, information sharing, and knowledge acquisition (Monika, 2023).

AI tools in education are applications that provide automated, adaptive, and individualized instruction. These systems are designed to enhance educational processes and outcomes by applying artificial intelligence technologies (Holmes & Tuomi, 2022). For example, AI-powered systems can analyze student performance data to tailor learning paths to individual

needs and paces. AI can also provide immediate feedback on student work, helping them improve faster. For learners, AI can identify skill gaps, recommend relevant learning resources, and deliver short, focused learning modules for busy adults. The education landscape has been significantly revamped since the emergence of AI applications. As technology becomes more prominent, most students agreed that responses generated by ChatGPT are the answers they are most likely to accept (Nguyen et al., 2025).

Furthermore, Nguyen et al. (2025) highlighted the abundance of resources available for deep learning and the opportunity to hone and refine user language proficiency. Specifically, in language learning, Pham & Le (2024) have concluded that AI chatbots have the potential to revolutionize language education by providing personalized, flexible, and anxiety-reducing speaking practice, despite some challenges in effectiveness, such as feedback accuracy, emotional engagement, and technological barriers. He also found that Vietnamese students in Vietnam and the USA view ChatGPT as a useful tool for enhancing language learning. It supports knowledge acquisition, provides quick responses, and helps clarify concepts. Even more, this tool also boosts students' confidence by helping them prepare for group discussions.

#### Academic integrity

Academic integrity has long been recognized as a formal honor code policy that values respect, fairness, honesty, and responsibility for student conduct at an institution of higher education (Poitras & Gladue, 2022). Harp and Taietz (1965) highlight academic integrity as a combination of ethical and moral values. Therefore, academic integrity violations usually involve cheating, fraud, and plagiarism, which are considered the theft of ideas and other forms of intellectual property (Jones, 2011). Likewise, academic misconduct leads to severe consequences for students, and they have to deal with them in their career paths. Bower (1964) links personal integrity with academic one by considering "cheating" as "dishonesty" and a lack of "self-respect". While McCabe, Trevino, and Butterfield (1999) have a shorter explanation of "cheating behavior" in their research.

According to Jamieson and Howard (2019), academic integrity lacks a mutually agreed-upon definition, but some studies use the term 'plagiarism'. Howard (1993) defines plagiarism as taking creative works from other sources and submitting them without their consent. Also, Shelley (2000) asserts that plagiarism is somehow an instance of "academic literacy". While academic integrity covers multiple dimensions, the focus may specifically concentrate on plagiarism, especially with the use of AI-generated tools. Hoang (2023) found that integrating generative AI into higher education has led to increased challenges in maintaining academic integrity, such as plagiarism and cheating, and 50% of surveyed students admitted to using ChatGPT to complete assignments. It is looked into more deeply in her later research (Hoang, 2024) that AI tools like ChatGPT provide easy access to information, making plagiarism, fabrication, and unauthorized assistance easier. Bùi (2024) also identified the negative influences of AI on academic integrity, as AI introduces ethical dilemmas in distinguishing between human-generated and AI-generated work and undermines the authenticity of student contributions, raising concerns about fair academic evaluation. Academic online ghostwriting has become a serious issue; however, there has not been any large-scale comparison with the traditional one (Jamieson & Howard, 2019). Rodrigues et al. (2024) argue that AI tools increase the ease of plagiarism in academic settings, but they also help maintain and uphold academic integrity standards. Similarly, Dergaa et al. (2023) see potential hazards related to AI tools usage in education and research, yet with cautious procedure, academic reliability and validity might be ensured. Hence, educators and policymakers hesitate to propose improvements without raising controversies (Nguyen, 2023).

### AI Tools in Research Writing

Artificial intelligence has become an indispensable tool for academics and students navigating the complex landscape of research and writing. AI enhances the entire research process by automating routine tasks and providing intelligent support (Monika, 2023). From initial research to final manuscript, AI offers invaluable support. It aids in data analysis, identifies research gaps, and refines research methodologies. Moreover, AI tools enhance writing clarity, automate tedious tasks such as citation formatting, and enable researchers to focus on critical thinking. AI is a powerful research assistant, augmenting human capabilities and driving innovation.

There have been many findings on how researchers and writers have utilised AI tools to write academic research. Syahnaz (2023) found that students found Quillbot, an AI tool for paraphrasing text, beneficial across three writing areas: content generation, grammar correction, and language refinement. Tran (2024) found that AI-powered tools positively impact students' academic writing and that, with their help, students made significant progress in coherence, cohesion, and lexical resources. According to recent research by Phan (2023), AI tools offer high accessibility and convenience, aiding students in writing. Ibrahim (2023) found, through a systematic review of literature published since 2019 across databases such as PubMed, Embase, and Google Scholar, that AI significantly revolutionizes academic writing and research across six core domains: idea generation, content development, literature review, data management, editing/publishing, and communication/outreach.

However, it is also broadly agreed that AI tools must be used with care and moderation in research writing. While Salvango (2023) argued that ChatGPT could be a valuable tool for assisting researchers in writing scientific papers, it is crucial to emphasize that ChatGPT is not a replacement for human researchers. Its output should always be critically evaluated and verified by human experts. Barret (2023) surveyed students and teachers across universities in the USA, and while both students and teachers agree that using GenAI for brainstorming and outlining is acceptable, both sides find it unacceptable to use AI to complete writing without disclosure and have concerns about its impact on education. Khalifa (2024) recommended ethics and transparency in the use of AI in academic research, encouraged adequate training for researchers in the tools, and maintained a balance between AI utility and human insight. According to Bok and Cho (2023), ChatGPT brings many benefits to its users; nevertheless, inappropriate and misleading information is also found. In addition, Jarrah et al. (2023) noted that writing ideas and suggestions generated by ChatGPT are highly likely to be plagiarized. Zuheir (2023) noted that fabricated references are a major concern in the use of AI in research, as he found that only 8% of the references generated were available on Google Scholar or Mendeley. Additionally, the lack of in-text citations raises concerns about plagiarism and misinformation. Similarly, Tang (2023) recognizes the transformative role of Generative AI (e.g., Bard or ChatGPT) in academic research, including assisting authors in drafting content, enhancing ideas, and suggesting improvements to text quality. However, concerns arise in authorship and attribution, as well as ethical issues such as plagiarism, conflicts of interest, and the replication of ideas or data.

# Perception of AI Tools in Research Writing

Findings in the study by Delcker et al. (2024) reveal that AI tools are favored in students' writing process. So far, participants have shown a strong interest in those AI tools because they are more practical and accessible than the advanced ones. Moreover, students have appeared to be curious about the potential of new technologies. Lee et al. (2024) reported that students prefer AI tools for their user-friendliness and usefulness in formal writing. However, students

are reluctant to involve those applications in research writing since some generated texts are inaccurate and unnatural.

Likewise, Utami et al. (2023) express that AI tools are primarily beneficial during the planning stages of the writing process, such as developing ideas and drafting topics. Nevertheless, participants perceive that AI tools still need further optimization and, as a result, cannot rely on them fully. Ozcelik and Eksi (2024) believe that AI tools like ChatGPT are still a long way from enabling students to depend on them in the future. Shofia (2024) found that lecturers welcomed AI as a research aid but feared overdependence could hinder students' critical thinking. Similarly, Mudawy (2024) reported that teachers at Majimaah University viewed AI positively for improving research writing but stressed the need for proper training.

Santiago (2023) noted that faculty researchers in the Philippines valued AI for enhancing clarity and efficiency but worried about overreliance. Kim (2023) found that U.S. STEM teachers saw AI as useful for scientific writing but raised concerns about its impact on teachers' roles and transparency. Overall, research highlights AI's benefits in academic writing while emphasizing responsible integration, training, and transparency.

# Research Questions

To fulfil the purpose of the study, the study tries to answer the following research questions:

- 1. How have the students perceived the AI tools to assist with the research paper writing task?
- 2. How have the students used the AI tools to assist with the research paper writing task?

#### **Methods**

## Pedagogical Setting & Participants

It is assumed that participants in this study are aware of AI tools' presence and intend to use them in the research writing process. The study investigates how students used AI tools to assist with the research paper writing task and their perceptions of using these tools.

The study was conducted in the Faculty of Foreign Languages at a public university in Vietnam. Specifically, the participants were final-year students who took a five-credit graduation thesis course. They work in groups of three to four to complete the graduation thesis. This course is a partial requirement for completing the study program. Writing a thesis is therefore an essential part that participants must fulfil.

The selected subjects are students who meet two criteria: English majors in a public university in Vietnam, and who are writing a research paper for a final graduation thesis. The participants answered the questionnaire in a Google Form survey link. Regarding the study participants' background information, 70 individuals were involved. All participants had prior experience with thesis writing, as reflected by the 100% reported experience rate.

# Design of the Study

This study used a questionnaire as its primary tool for collecting quantitative data. Data collected with statistics and numerical analysis provide a meaningful understanding that supports the research and can help identify relationships between variables (Daniel, 2007; Paul, 2007).

#### Data collection & analysis

Questionnaires are designed in English and translated into Vietnamese because the participants are Vietnamese. The questionnaire items were transformed into a Google form to send to convenience samples. The structure of the questionnaire consists of 4 main parts: (1) Participants' consent, (2) General information of participants, (3) Participants' experience with the use of AI in research writing, and (4) Participants' perception of the use of AI in research writing.

# Findings and discussion

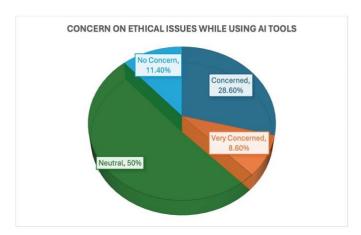
# **Findings**

Participants' perception of the AI tools being used to assist the research paper writing task

Regarding participants' concerns about ethical issues in research writing, they were open to sharing their views on the use of AI tools in graduation thesis activities. The results indicated that around 9% and 29% expressed concerns about using AI tools in their research writing. Half the participants chose to be 'neutral', and the last portion (around 11.5%) ticked the 'no concern' option.

Figure 1

The participants' concerns about ethical issues in research writing



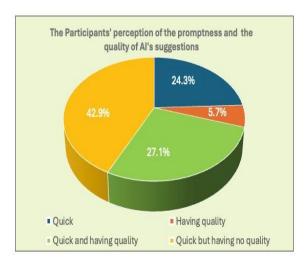
Regarding the usefulness of ChatGPT, opinions were evenly divided: 50% of participants viewed it as beneficial and time-saving. In comparison, the other 50% responded with 'perhaps,' indicating uncertainty or conditional agreement.

In terms of the participants' viewpoints on the usefulness of ChatGPT at different stages of writing a research paper, over 70% of the participants ticked the category 'only useful in some ways', whilst 14.3% consider that ChatGPT is somehow 'useful at all stages of the topic'. Around 10% found such AI tools as ChatGPT 'very little useful'.

Regarding the participants' perception of the rapidity and the quality of the AI's generated answers, the following chart provides results about how the participants evaluated the two aspects.

Figure 2

The participants' perception of the promptness and the quality of the AI's suggestions

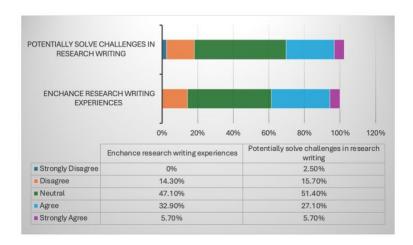


Overall, participants agreed with ChatGPT's haste, but opinions remain mixed regarding the quality of its generated answers.

Regarding how AI tools enhance participants' writing experiences and potentially solve their research writing problems, responses were mixed between 'agree' and 'neutral'. However, more students agreed that AI tools enhanced their research writing experience rather than helped solve the challenges they encountered in the research process. The chart below indicates the participants' answers in detail:

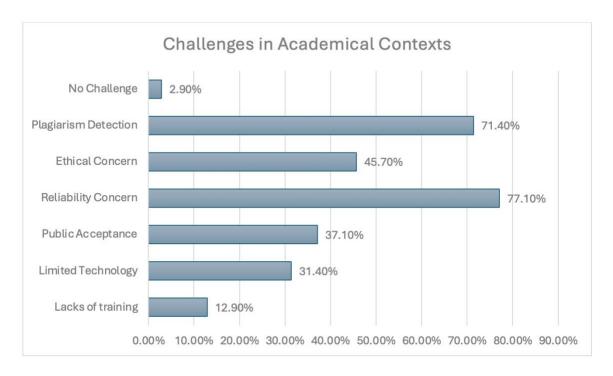
Figure 3

The participants' perspectives on how AI tools enhance their research writing experience and solve problems in research writing



The figure below highlights several key challenges in academic contexts related to AI usage. The most significant concern is reliability, with 77.10% of participants identifying it as a major issue. Plagiarism detection is another critical challenge, as noted by 71.40% of respondents. Additionally, ethical concerns (45.70%) and public acceptance (37.10%) remain notable issues, reflecting ongoing debates about academic integrity and societal perceptions of AI. It's worth mentioning that only 2.90% of participants reported facing no challenges, indicating that the majority experience difficulties when incorporating AI into academic work.

Figure 4
Challenges encountered while using AI tools in academic contexts



## How the participants used the AI tools to assist with the research paper writing task

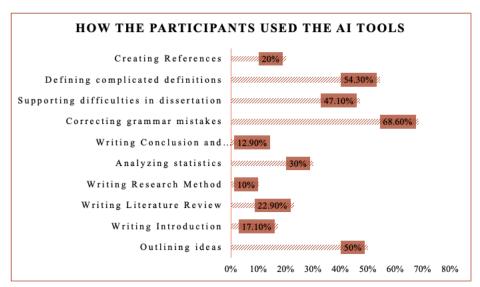
The study's primary concern is how frequently the participants use AI in their research writing. Findings indicated that most participants (52.9%) reported using AI tools occasionally, while 28.6% reported using them regularly. A smaller portion (16.2%) reported never using AI; notably, none of the participants reported using AI tools all the time.

The findings showed that 52.9% used AI sometimes in their graduation thesis writing process, while more than one-fourth of the total usually used it. That implies that nearly 80% of participants have at least some experience with AI, and that they use it more than once. Interestingly, a small number of participants (15.7%) claim to acknowledge using AI tools but have never used them in their research writing.

As the findings show, genitive AI – ChatGPT was the most commonly used tool by the participants. The participants claimed they used this tool to write specific sections of the research paper, from the introduction and literature review to the research methods. "Grammarly" and QuillBot were two other tools the students used to support their thesis-writing process. Around 53% of students used Turnitin, a plagiarism—detection tool, before submitting their papers.

Feedback on how participants used AI tools to support their research writing process was also collected. The following figure presents the main ideas of how the participants used the AI tools in their research process.

Figure 5
How the participants used the AI tools in their research writing process

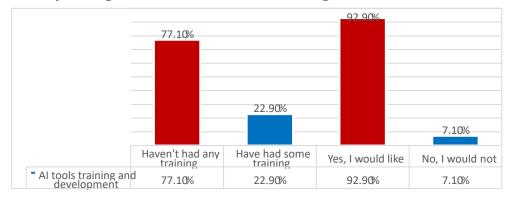


As depicted in the figure, there are several compelling implications that justify how AI tools can benefit final-year students. The four most preferred approaches were correcting grammar mistakes, defining complex terms, outlining ideas, and supporting complex parts in the graduation thesis paper—nearly two-thirds of the participants used AI to detect their writing errors. Around 50% adopted AI tools for various tasks, mainly to aid their writing. Participants asked AI to outline ideas for their paper. In general, participants used AI tools to personalize their research writing. The activities ranged from asking AI to solve difficulties, correct grammar mistakes, writing an introduction, literature review, writing research methods, writing conclusions, and analysing data.

Despite participants' positive perceptions of AI in research writing and its practical use, most expressed a need for training in using AI tools for research writing. The following figure summarizes the participants' ideas.

Figure 6

Needs of training on how to use AI in research writing



#### **Discussion**

This study examines how English-major students in Vietnam perceive and utilize AI tools in their research writing process. A survey of 70 final-year students found that while AI is highly regarded for its usefulness, concerns about ethics and academic integrity persist. The study highlights contradictions between students' perceptions and actual use of AI, emphasizing the need for training and standardization in integrating AI into academic writing.

These findings align with those of Delcker et al. (2024) and Lee et al. (2024), who also found AI to be favored for its convenience and ease of use in academic writing. However, the study challenges previous research by Utami et al. (2023), which suggested that AI is primarily beneficial in the idea-generation stage rather than throughout the writing process. Furthermore, prior studies by Mudawy (2024) and Khalifa (2024) emphasize the need for training and standardization to ensure the responsible use of AI, a concern echoed in this study.

However, the findings of this study contrast with those of Lee et al. (2024), who found that students were reluctant to use AI applications in research writing due to concerns about inaccuracy and unnatural language. In this study, AI was generally perceived positively and widely used by participants, despite various concerns. Although AI tools are not yet fully integrated into students' academic routines, those who used tools like ChatGPT in thesis writing were more concerned about plagiarism detection than broader ethical implications. This discrepancy may stem from a lack of understanding of ethical AI usage and research practices. While AI offers benefits such as grammar correction and structural support, insufficient guidance can lead students to unintentionally violate academic integrity policies.

# Limitations of the study

This study provides empirical data on perceptions and AI use in academic writing among 70 English-major final-year Vietnamese students at a public university. It also has a narrow sample scope, as it only includes students from one university, which may not fully capture the diversity of AI perceptions and usage behaviors. Thus, generalization must consider academic regulations specific to different universities in different countries.

# **Conclusion and recommendations**

This study aimed to provide an overview of how students writing research papers for graduation perceive and use AI tools in their thesis writing process. The findings revealed contradictions between students' perspectives and their actual use of AI in research writing. While many participants expressed concerns about ethical issues, they still used AI tools throughout various stages of their research, from outlining to drafting conclusions.

From the students' perspective, AI tools serve as facilitators, helping them overcome challenges in research writing. However, from an ethical standpoint, their perceptions and usage patterns pose potential threats to academic and research integrity.

To ensure responsible AI use in academic and research writing, training and support for its integration are urgently needed. Students must recognize both the benefits and risks of AI tools, emphasizing the importance of clear policies and guidelines. While AI is a valuable resource, responsible use is essential to uphold academic integrity.

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