ACADEMIC JOURNAL PERSPECTIVE: Education, Language, and Literature
https://jurnal.ugj.ac.id/index.php/Perspective/index
p-ISSN 2354-7340
e-ISSN 2621-6981

GRADUATE STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON GENERATIVE AI-INTEGRATED SELF-ASSESSMENT PRACTICE ACADEMIC WRITING: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY

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Received: November 3, 2025 Accepted: November 30, 2025 Published: November 30, 2025

Abstract

The study investigates graduate students' perceptions of Artificial Intelligence-integrated self- assessment in academic writing. Using narrative inquiry, the study investigated how students experience AI in their self-assessment and writing processes. The participants were three Indonesian EFL graduate students who enrolled in a scientific writing course. The data were collected using a questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and student artifacts. The data analysis technique employed was thematic analysis, which aimed to uncover the main themes in students' experiences. The findings indicate that AI tools supported students' understanding of writing conventions and increased confidence and motivation to learn more. The students exhibited a transition from relying on AI to a more independent process of selectively using AI feedback with human feedback. Despite the advantages of AI tools, the study also identified challenges using AI, specifically regarding the conceptual aspects of writing, including argumentation and knowledge of a specific discipline. The findings indicate that AI is a practical supplementary tool in academic writing, but human feedback remains essential. The research concludes with suggestions for further research, including the development of AI tools that provide more specific feedback when applying them. When using AI, students may need to establish a system of using human feedback and AI feedback in parallel to cultivate accuracy and critical analysis for academic writing.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence; Self-Assessment; Academic Writing

INTRODUCTION

Writing serves a fundamental role in the academic pursuits of university students, encompassing the processes of knowledge construction, student education, and the navigation of professional academic careers (Hyland, 2013). University students articulate their ideas through writing within their respective disciplines, enhance their understanding of their fields, and cultivate a sense of belonging within their academic communities. It also demands precision, critical thinking, and mastery of disciplinary conventions, making it both a challenging and essential skill for academic success (Lin & Morrison, 2021).

One major obstacle to successful academic writing is the absence of formative feedback in

conventional educational environments. The instructor has large classes and heavy workloads, making it impossible to provide personalized, detailed feedback. Students have to work with whatever limited feedback is available (Molin et al., 2022; Olsen & Hunnes, 2024). The lack of feedback prevents students from learning to identify and correct their mistakes; hence, learning has little chance of being enhanced through revision (Lim & Phua, 2019). Without some form of assessment, teachers may also find it difficult to judge the progress of students. In such a setting, therefore, learners must develop self-regulation, take responsibility for their learning, and demonstrate intrinsic motivation for research writing so that deep and meaningful educational experiences engage them.

Self-assessment necessitates critically considering one's work to highlight areas for improvement, leading to an enhanced understanding of writing standards and expectations (Hawe & Dixon, 2014). The use of AI tools adds another layer to the self-assessment process. AI tools have also been introduced as one possible solution to writing problems. They claim to give instant and automated feedback on writing quality concerning grammar, structure, and style (Cheong et al., 2023). Tools such as Grammarly and Quillbot offer opportunities for detailed corrections and recommendations; thus, they serve important interests in helping students enhance their writing. Though these instruments attend to adumbrated problems well, their feedback typically does not show the depth and kind of contextual understanding required to assist students in developing stronger arguments and clearer concepts (Koltovskaia, 2020).

In contrast, the use of AI in this process could foster too much dependence on AI-generated feedback and might discourage engagement with one's writing on an independent basis (Brown & Andrade, 2016). There could be interpretive issues concerning the applicability of AI feedback since it may not conform to their interpretation of academic practices (Zhang & Zhang, 2022). Whereas AI tools do well in identifying surface-level problems, more profound and conceptual issues with writing may go unaddressed by such tools (Cheong et al., 2023). This is another limitation that demands even more careful consideration of how to integrate AI into the teaching of academic writing so that it serves as an auxiliary, not a substitute for human judgment and engagement.

Graduate students navigating the complex process of academic writing often encounter both support and uncertainty when using AI. While existing theories on self-assessment and academic writing offer useful frameworks, they may overlook the emotional, reflective, and situational complexities experienced by students in real-time practice. Through their lived experiences, tensions between reliance and autonomy, clarity and confusion, and confidence and hesitation dynamics cannot be fully captured through surveys or theoretical models alone. Therefore, the research question of the study focus on 'How do graduate students perceive AI-integrated self-assessment practices in article writing?'

The theoretical foundation of this study is primarily rooted in the concept of Self-Assessment (SA), specifically utilizing the cyclical self-assessment process model proposed by Yan & Brown (2016). This model emphasizes the iterative, reflective, and non-linear nature of SA. The study selects four processes from their five-step model as most relevant to the writing context: determining performance criteria, self-directed feedback seeking, self-reflection, and calibration. This SA process is further contextualized within the four stages of academic writing as outlined by Hyland (2019): prewriting, drafting, responding to feedback, and revising. The recent incorporation of Generative AI tools into self-assessment practices significantly alters this process, as automated feedback can now be rendered concerning language accuracy, structure, and content quality (Ranalli et al., 2016).

Crucially, while these theoretical frameworks predate the widespread use of sophisticated Generative AI (like ChatGPT and Scispace), a critical gap exists: Current models have yet to fully capture how the instant, generative, and often persuasive nature of AI influences a student's real-time reflection, decision-making, and calibration within the established self-assessment cycle. Therefore, this study employs a narrative inquiry to explore the rich, contextualized lived experiences of students navigating this new theoretical-technological nexus.

METHOD

The study design employed narrative inquiry, which allows investigation of participants lived experiences as they engage with self-assessment and AI tools. This study was held in a scientific writing class in one of the universities in Yogyakarta from August 2024 to December 2024. Students enrolled in this class during the second semester. This course provides graduate students with important skills for preparing and publishing scientific articles.

The participants were male and female, with an average age of 24-43 years. The participants were three Indonesian EFL graduate students. This is deemed a sufficient within the narrative inquiry design, as the focus is on depth and richness of experience rather than statistical generalization. Participants were enrolled in a class on scientific writing with specific criteria. The participants were EFL graduate students who completed an AI-assisted self-assessment and writing process and received feedback from the AI during the process.

This study utilizes multiple data sources to make a broad contribution to understanding how students engage with self-assessment and AI in academic writing. Data was collected through questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and student artifacts. Through in-depth interviews and student artifacts, the researcher ensured that conceptual saturation of the lived experiences perspective was achieved, as no significant new themes or experiential dimensions emerged after the third participant's interview.

The questionnaire served as a screening tool to gather basic demographic data and participants' initial experiences with Generative AI (specifically Grammarly, ChatGPT, and Scispace) in academic writing. Beyond the structured option, the researchers added an "other" option to give them space to express their stories freely. Example questionnaire items included a Likert scale on the frequency of AI use and open-ended questions concerning the primary purposes for using AI in self-assessment.

A semi-structured interview was used to clarify and request more explanation or description. The interviews took place in an online meeting room that enabled interaction to elaborate on and clarify the participants' written reflections. Interview questions were structured around the study's core themes, such as, 'Please narrate in detail your experience from the moment you first decided to use AI to review a draft of your article, and how that changed your self-reflection process. Last, artifacts comprising drafts and revisions of written work were meant to triangulate data and ensure the credibility of the findings.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Barkhuizen et al. (2013) incorporate thematic analysis within the broader practice of narrative inquiry, examining how themes emerge from the setting and details of both personal and social stories. The analysis was conducted using a systematic approach, as follows: 1) familiarization with the data by reading through the data multiple times to understand the content and the repeated ideas; 2) thematically coded and extracted the data based on the relevance to the aims of the research; 3) collapsed the codes into larger themes that represented the participants' perceptions.

Furthermore, the 're-storying' process was implemented to analyze the data. In this process, the field texts (transcripts and notes) were reconstructed into coherent narratives for each participant, focusing on the temporal, social, and place dimensions of their experience. These re-storied narratives were subsequently provided to the participants for member checking to ensure that the researcher's interpretations accurately reflected the participants' intended experiences, thereby strengthening the study's methodological rigor.

To ensure rigor and credibility, all ethical considerations were strictly addressed. Participants provided informed consent, which detailed the study's purpose, data collection process, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. To maintain strict confidentiality and anonymity, participants' real names were replaced with pseudonyms (Larisa, Enid, and Zeed)."

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The results of the study were presented based on data from three participants' experiences. All of whom contributed invaluable perspectives on the use of AI to self-assess their academic writing. The participants are referred to by pseudonyms: Larisa, Enid, and Zeed. Each approach to AI tools is interesting and distinct, demonstrating the varied influence of AI on academic writing. The following sections summarize what was learned about their experience using data to understand better the influence of AI-assisted self-assessment knowledge on their academic writing.

Students perceive AI-assisted self-assessment positively, highlighting improved understanding of academic writing standards, increased confidence, and enhanced motivation. However, their experiences also underscored critical considerations, such as managing the balance between dependency and autonomy, and recognizing the limited scope of AI in addressing deeper, conceptual aspects of writing. Thus, while AI tools make great contributions to technical accuracy and turnaround feedback, students continue to acknowledge the indispensability of human mentorship and evaluative judgment for robust and distinctive self-assessment practices.

1. Larisa

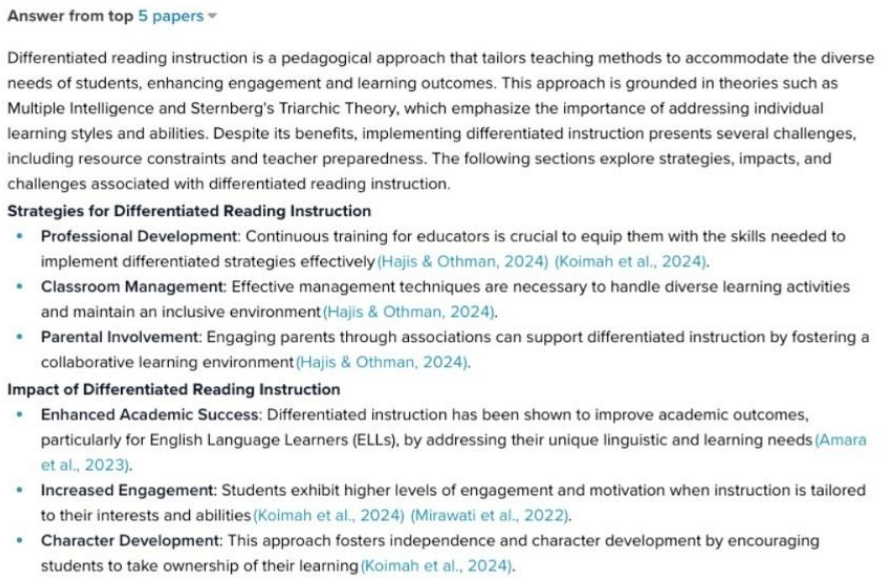
Enhanced Understanding of Academic Writing Standards

Referring to Larisa's journey into academic writing, she often felt like navigating a maze of expectations and invisible standards. She described how AI helped her make sense of the overwhelming expectations associated with academic writing, she explained:

I often compared journals with those from different publishers, which vary as well. This sometimes leads to confusion. Finally, I used Scispace. It provided specific, relevant ideas about what content I could include based on my theme, and then the results were exactly what I wanted, as it gave me ideas. **(P1/R1/UWS/AE/Interview)**

The AI tool offered concrete, tailored suggestions that aligned with her writing goals, helping her not only meet external standards but also internalise them. This experience marked a turning point where confusion gave way to clarity, and anxiety was gradually replaced by a growing sense of control over her academic voice. As shown in Figure 1, Scispace provided her with structured, relevant content aligned with her topic on differentiated reading instruction.

Figure 1: Scispace AI providing relevant ideas



Answer from top 5 papers

Differentiated reading instruction is a pedagogical approach that tailors teaching methods to accommodate the diverse needs of students, enhancing engagement and learning outcomes. This approach is grounded in theories such as Multiple Intelligence and Sternberg's Triarchic Theory, which emphasize the importance of addressing individual learning styles and abilities. Despite its benefits, implementing differentiated instruction presents several challenges, including resource constraints and teacher preparedness. The following sections explore strategies, impacts, and challenges associated with differentiated reading instruction.

Strategies for Differentiated Reading Instruction

- **Professional Development**: Continuous training for educators is crucial to equip them with the skills needed to implement differentiated strategies effectively (Hajis & Othman, 2024) (Koimah et al., 2024).
- **Classroom Management**: Effective management techniques are necessary to handle diverse learning activities and maintain an inclusive environment (Hajis & Othman, 2024).
- **Parental Involvement**: Engaging parents through associations can support differentiated instruction by fostering a collaborative learning environment (Hajis & Othman, 2024).

Impact of Differentiated Reading Instruction

- **Enhanced Academic Success**: Differentiated instruction has been shown to improve academic outcomes, particularly for English Language Learners (ELLs), by addressing their unique linguistic and learning needs (Amara et al., 2023).
- **Increased Engagement**: Students exhibit higher levels of engagement and motivation when instruction is tailored to their interests and abilities (Koimah et al., 2024) (Mirawati et al., 2022).
- **Character Development**: This approach fosters independence and character development by encouraging students to take ownership of their learning (Koimah et al., 2024).

This finding showed that AI tools greatly improved students' understanding of the standards of academic writing. Larisa noted that Scispace provided clear, prompt feedback relevant to the context, which helped them understand and engage better with academic conventions (Cheong et al., 2023; Koltovskaia, 2020). This is also in line with Hyland (2013) claim that good academic writing needs not only mastery of the conventions in a discipline but also understanding what the audience expects.

The Nexus of Autonomy and Dependency

In the early stages of her writing process, Larisa leaned heavily on AI tools, especially when managing the extensive demands of a literature review. She reflected:

Impossible to read all journals individually; Scispace provides immediate insights and sampling, which greatly simplifies the process. **(P1/R13/NAD/OV/Interview)**.

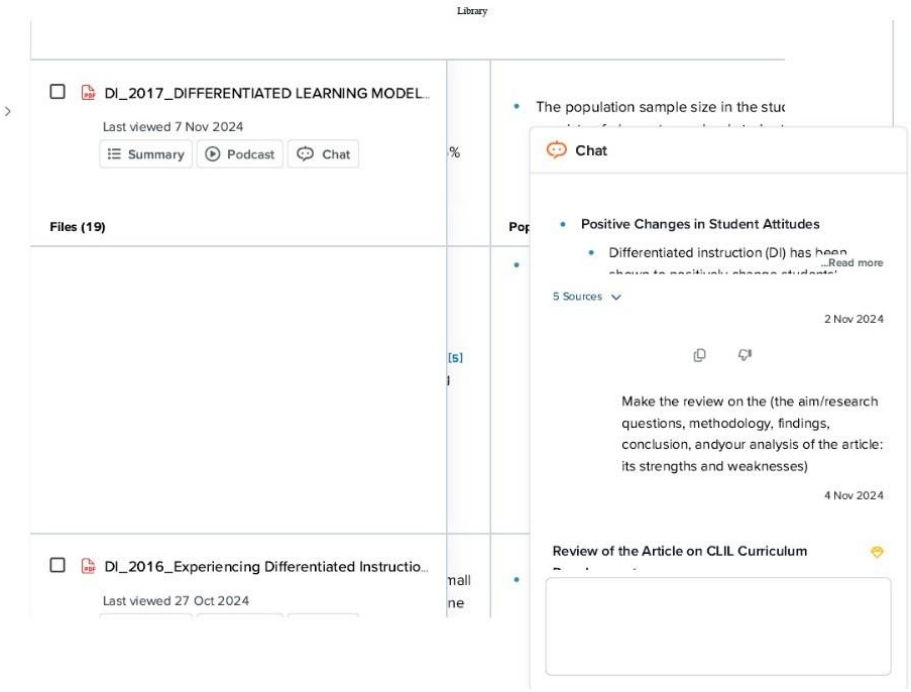
Faced with an overwhelming number of journal articles to sift through, she turned to Scispace as a way to streamline the task and make sense of the research landscape.

Larisa shared her perspective on the impact of AI, particularly in managing her workload and overcoming time limitations. She explained:

… AI impact is undeniably remarkable, particularly in education and employment, and specifically for me. It has been immensely helpful in easing my workload, especially considering the rapid developments in various fields. As someone with a busy schedule and at my stage in life, I often lack the time to read extensively. AI has significantly aided me by overcoming these limitations. (**P1/R14/NAD/OV/Interview)**

AI has proven to be a crucial tool in helping Larisa manage her workload more effectively. As seen in Figure 2, she used Scispace to manage her reading load while conducting a systematic literature review.

Figure 2: Scispace AI helping in reading the journal for SLR



Although Larisa initially leaned heavily on AI tools, she gradually began to shift her approach. Over time, she moved toward a more thoughtful and selective use of technology, engaging in a deeper form of self-assessment. She shared:

Ultimately, I started balancing AI suggestions with my own writing objectives. My personal writing goals and class knowledge served as benchmarks to determine the suitability of AI feedback. **(P1/R16/NAD/ID/Interview)**

This awareness marked a key turning point in her writing process. AI remained a helpful resource, but no longer the only voice she listened to.

Larisa's narrative exemplifies the shift from heavy reliance to strategic use within the self-assessment cycle. Initially, her dependence on Scispace and ChatGPT during the 'determining performance criteria' stage reflected a lack of internal standards for academic writing conventions. However, as she navigated the drafting and revising stages, her experiences mirrored the 'feedback-seeking' behavior described by Yan and Brown (2016), where AI provided the necessary immediate cues to reduce cognitive load. This initial dependency acted as a temporary scaffold that eventually facilitated better calibration of her own writing; as her confidence grew, she began to treat AI suggestions as options rather than mandates, illustrating a developmental progression toward self-regulated learning in the digital age (Molin et al., 2022).

Increased Confidence and Motivation

For Larisa, one of the most immediate effects of using AI tools was an increase in confidence. The instant feedback she received acted as a form of academic validation, reassuring her that she was on the right track with her writing. She expressed:

Using AI tools during drafting makes me feel more confident about meeting academic standards. **(P1/Questionnaire)**

This sense of affirmation motivated her and reinforced her belief in her academic abilities.

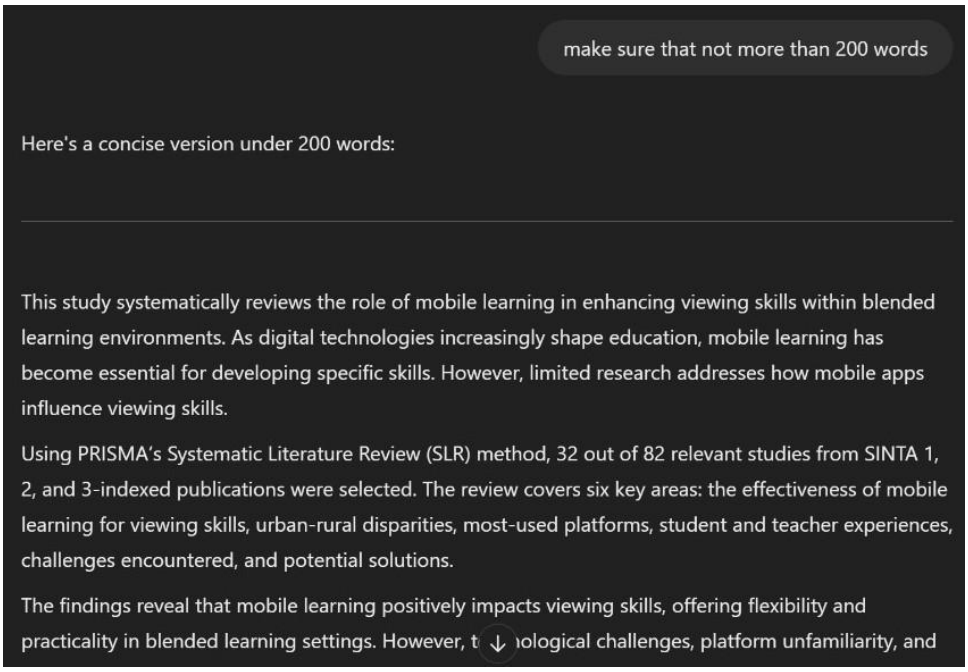
Participants often noted the feedback as being motivational and confidence building. Immediacy, clarity, and objectivity in feedback proved quite helpful in emotional reassurance; it reduced anxiety and built confidence in them. This finding corresponds to Brown & Andrade (2016) observation that clear feedback wherein explicit success criteria are provided boosts learners' self-confidence.

2. Enid

Understanding of Writing Standards

Enid's approach to AI feedback was measured and reflective. She did not depend solely on automated suggestions but situated AI as one voice within a broader community of feedback that included peers and instructors. In discussing her use of AI feedback, Enid noted that AI tools such as Grammarly and ChatGPT *"provide valuable suggestions,"* though she emphasized that she *"always compare[s] them with feedback from peers and instructors to ensure academic quality"* **(P2/Questionnaire),** highlighting her deliberate balance between technological assistance and human input. Figure 3 illustrates the moment Enid used AI tools to assist in writing the abstract for her research, ensuring it aligned with external academic criteria.

Figure 3: AI helping in writing abstracts aligning external criteria



By incorporating AI feedback, she ensured that her abstract met the criteria of clarity, precision, and relevance, which are vital for making a strong first impression in academic submissions. AI feedback also gave concrete examples; students internalized the grammatical and stylistic norms and realized how well their writing met academic standards. Integrating generative AI into writing instruction has been found to create a conversational learning environment where students collaborate closely with AI-assisted tools to deepen their understanding of writing rules. Maphoto et al. (2024) point out that using generative AI tools can result in better writing abilities among learners in online education settings, stressing that learners adjust more smoothly to scholarly writing needs via tech-aided learning encounters.

She elaborated further on this point by emphasizing the primacy of human feedback in

maintaining academic standards:

… AI tends to be more general, offering an overall assessment. However, professors are more critical and their approach is more human-centered… . **(P2/R1/UWS/AE/Interview)**

By foregrounding this distinction, Enid reveals a critical awareness of AI's strengths and limitations. Her position underscores that while AI offers accessible and immediate feedback, it lacks the distinction and context-specific insight experienced educators provide. Amirjalili et al. (2024) also mentioned that no matter how well-trained text-generating systems are made to simulate human authorship principles, they fall short and often produce outputs that do not have the depth and conceptual richness required for high-level academic writing. Whereas AI greatly helps in improving technical adequacy, deeper critical interaction remains an indispensable domain for instructor feedback.

Thus, the present study validates that, along with conventional mentoring methods, powerful AI tools should be added to make academic writing training complete. Effective pedagogy should incorporate AI-supported feedback within structured human interaction, enabling students to learn not only linguistic accuracy but also discipline-specific argumentation skills.

The Nexus of Autonomy and Dependency

Enid emphasized that while she considers feedback that aligns with her ideas and is reasonable, she always relies on her own analysis to guide her decisions. As she mentioned:

I will consider feedback that is reasonable and aligns with my ideas. However, I still rely on my own analysis. I do not simply adopt someone else's ideas without thinking it through, just because it seems correct. I maintain a clear focus on the article I am working on … . **(P2/R5/NAD/ID/Interview)**

This reflects her commitment to maintaining the integrity of her original ideas while being open to revisions that enhance the overall quality. This approach illustrates Enid's careful and reflective process of using feedback, where personal judgment plays a central role in deciding what to adopt.

Enid's experience highlights a more sophisticated engagement with the self-reflection and calibration phases of the self-assessment model. Unlike a passive recipient of automated feedback, Enid utilized AI tools like Grammarly and ChatGPT as conversational partners to test her ideas, yet she consistently prioritized human feedback from instructors and peers to validate conceptual depth. This behavior demonstrates a high level of evaluative expertise, a key element in Hyland's (2019) writing process and Yan and Brown's (2016) cycle. By cross-referencing AI-generated suggestions with pedagogical advice, Enid successfully navigated the autonomy-dependency nexus, showing that AI-integrated self-assessment is most effective when it is utilized to provoke deeper reflection rather than to bypass the critical thinking required in academic discourse (Cheong et al., 2023).

Increased Confidence and Motivation

Enid shared that she feels more enthusiastic and motivated when their feedback offers valuable insights that can improve the quality of her article. As she mentioned:

When the external feedback comes directly from professors, experts, practitioners, or even classmates who read my article or draft, I feel more enthusiastic and positive. Because their feedback often contains valuable insights that can improve the quality of my article… **(P2/R17/CME/ER/Interview)**

This reflects her openness to external feedback while also maintaining her autonomy in deciding which suggestions to integrate. In situations where conventional mechanisms have induced anxiety, the non-judgmental and encouraging feedback of AI could create a more welcoming environment for learners so that they can express their ideas freely, and therefore their motivation will be enhanced (Kaharuddin et al., 2024).

3. Zeed

The Limited Role of AI in Self-Assessment

Zeed acknowledged that while AI plays an important role in enhancing grammar and clarity, he emphasized that it does not replace the need for feedback from peers or instructors. He stated that:

While AI helps with grammar and clarity, it doesn't fully replace the need for feedback from peers or instructors who can evaluate the substance of my ideas. **(P3/Questionnaire)**

Human feedback is crucial for evaluating the substance of his ideas and ensuring that his arguments are robust and academically sound.

Zeed admitted to having some bias regarding AI, particularly concerning the level of trust he places in its feedback. He further described:

I acknowledge that I have some bias regarding the use of AI, particularly concerning my trust in it. I tend not to trust AI feedback, especially when it pertains to larger aspects such as the topic or content of my writing. However, if the feedback relates to smaller issues, such as grammar checks, I find it acceptable. **(P3/R1/LRAI/SK/Interview)**

He tends to distrust AI feedback on more substantial aspects, such as the topic or content of his writing.

However, he finds AI feedback acceptable when it pertains to smaller issues, such as grammar checks. Zeed found AI useful for synthesizing words and providing explanations, but less effective for generating new ideas. He explained:

I consider AI useful for helping synthesize words. However, I feel that the ideas generated by AI are not particularly relevant. During the composition process, I mainly use AI for providing additional explanations, rather than for generating new ideas. **(P3/R3/LRAI/SL/Interview)**

A crucial finding was students' recognition of AI's small ability to handle deeper aspects of academic writing. While able to competently deal with technical aspects, the AI tools were consistently described as lacking in their capacity to provide distinctive feedback on argumentation, conceptual clarity, and discipline-specific contexts (Cheong et al., 2023; Koltovskaia, 2020). Participants consistently highlighted these limitations, reinforcing Hawe & Dixon (2014) argument that meaningful self-assessment demands reflective engagement beyond technical corrections. Participants explicitly identified the indispensable role of human feedback, reflecting Sadler (1989) argument that quality self-assessment fundamentally relies on expert human judgment and interpretative insights.

This study adds to the current discussion on AI use in higher education by stating that AI tools should mainly take on supplemental roles and not completely supplant human judgment material (Almaraz-López et al., 2023). The learners' experiences vividly highlight how critical human guidance is to develop complete academic competence. Consequently, the study strongly suggests pedagogical strategies emphasizing integrated AI-human assessment models, recognizing both the efficiency of automated feedback and the necessity of human

interpretative guidance for sophisticated academic writing.

Understanding of Writing Standards

Zeed recognized that AI is useful for identifying errors, but emphasized that understanding and adhering to academic writing standards go beyond what AI can provide. He noted that:

AI helps me identify errors, but understanding academic writing standards requires a deeper grasp of content, structure, and theoretical alignment. **(P3/Questionnaire)**

This reflects the participant's acknowledgment of the limitations of AI in capturing the complexity and depth of academic writing, highlighting the importance of human expertise in ensuring that writing meets scholarly expectations. Zeed saw the limits of AI in dealing with more profound theoretical and conceptual issues in writing, thus supporting Brown & Lee (2015) on micro and macro skills. Though it does well in spotting surface-level problems, participants noted that learning formal argumentation still needs a lot of human mentoring (Lim & Phua, 2019).

CONCLUSION

This research examined graduate students' perceptions of self-assessment in academic writing with AI integration. The results indicate that AI tools can significantly develop students' technical skills while also supporting increased confidence and motivation; yet, students also articulated that AI has limitations in facilitating deeper, conceptual engagement with writing, especially in complex areas such as argumentation and critical thinking. These results indicate the need to temper AI feedback with human support, as an individual cannot engage in reflection or high-order skills in academic writing without the opportunity to think about it.

AI enhances writing in a helpful way as a technical tool, but cannot diminish the importance of human mentoring to process, reflect, and support higher-order cognitive thinking skills in developing an academic-quality writing sample. These findings are important, yet rest on very few students and only a short timeframe of data collection. The experiences of three students cannot account for a full response of student population across various contexts and disciplines. Future studies might increase the number of student responses or include students from different programs, disciplines, or fields to assess whether AI has an overall effect on all students or is discipline-specific.

This study contributes to the field of academic writing by extending the Yan and Brown (2016) cyclical self-assessment model to include automated feedback as a vital developmental scaffold, illustrating how AI-human interaction facilitates a transition toward informed autonomy. Furthermore, it offers a unique qualitative lens on the psychological and reflective complexities of the writing process, providing empirical evidence that AI-integrated practices enhance students' evaluative expertise and mastery of academic conventions. Furthermore, writing instruction should explicitly model the transition from using AI as a temporary linguistic scaffold for grammar and structure to maintaining human agency in high-stakes conceptual argumentation.

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