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Transformation of Academic Writing Practices in the Era of Generative Artificial Intelligence: A Case Study of Students in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

Backround: While the use of GenAI in academic writing has become widespread, in-depth understanding of students' subjective experiences, usage strategies, and ethical negotiations remains limited, particularly within the Indonesian context. This research aims to identify GenAI usage patterns and strategies, explore students' perceptions regarding benefits and challenges, and understand the negotiation of AI literacy, academic integrity, and writer agency in student writing practices. **Method:** Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 12 students, participant observation, and document analysis within the Indonesian Language and Literature Education Study Program at Universitas Negeri Makassar. Result: Thematic analysis revealed three main themes. First, GenAI usage patterns fall into three levels—technical support, text development, and writing transformation—involving varying applications of metacognitive strategies. Second, students perceive benefits such as writing efficiency, improved language quality, idea exploration, and increased confidence, while also identifying challenges including over-reliance, questionable information reliability, threats to originality, and ethical ambiguity. Third, students engage in complex negotiations involving AI literacy, academic integrity, and writer agency, influenced by six factors: AI literacy levels, writing experience, lecturer expectations and institutional policies, task difficulty, academic pressure, and resource availability. **Conclusion:** The findings indicate that students with higher AI literacy tend to use GenAI more strategically and critically while maintaining writer agency, whereas those with low AI literacy are more susceptible to dependency and risks regarding originality.

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INTRODUCTION

Academic writing skills require mastery of research competencies, structured argument construction, and precise linguistic expression. The rise of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI), driven by large language models (LLMs) is transforming academic writing practices in higher education. Unlike earlier digital tools, GenAI offers constant interactivity and support across various dimensions of writing, including idea generation, initial drafting, sentence structure refinement, and automated feedback on student writing.

Discourse surrounding GenAI in academia encompasses pedagogical, ethical, and epistemological implications. A survey by Brown et al. (2025) indicates that 81% of respondents integrate GenAI into various stages of the research workflow. Other findings reveal that 75% of respondents at a university actively use LLMs in their academic activities (Klimova et al., 2025). These usage figures point to both widespread acceptance and an increasing reliance on GenAI tools among academics.

An AI literacy framework is highly relevant for understanding how students interact with GenAI in the context of academic writing. Xu et al. (2025) validated four dimensions of an AI literacy framework, understanding, use, evaluation, and ethics, specifically within the context of academic writing. Khuder (2025) introduced the concept of "Critical GAI Literacy," which integrates technical understanding, ethical awareness, and self-directed learning into a holistic approach for the responsible use of GenAI. Jiang and Verhulsdonck (2026) further noted that AI literacy includes the ability of students to critically assess GenAI outputs rather than merely accepting generated results passively.

A sociocultural approach complements the analysis of GenAI usage in academic writing. This approach investigates student engagement with GenAI by considering the social and cultural contexts shaping these interactions, including tool availability, institutional norms, and the expectations of lecturers and the academic environment. It acknowledges that academic writing is a social practice influenced by contextual factors beyond the individual student's capabilities.

Student perceptions regarding the benefits of GenAI in academic writing have also become a focus of recent research. Kim et al. (2025) identified three areas of perceived benefit: the writing process, writing performance, and the affective domain. A study by George-Reyes et al. (2025) found a positive correlation between ChatGPT usage and both academic performance and the development of advanced skills, such as academic writing and critical thinking. A survey conducted by Klimova et al. (2025) indicated that ChatGPT is used to understand complex concepts, generate ideas, and structure assignments, with the majority of respondents rating the tool as effective for enhancing academic efficiency.

The impact of GenAI on the writing process is the focus of other research. Wang (2025) explores GenAI-assisted writing from the perspectives of both native and non-native English-speaking students, revealing distinct engagement patterns as well as perceptions regarding emerging opportunities and challenges. Through a structured focus group study, Delina and Del Rosario Rondilla (2025) found that while students initially found GenAI helpful for generating ideas and checking grammar, they subsequently realized that the technology could not replace the in-depth, contextual feedback provided by experienced educators. Four key themes emerged: the evolving role of writing tools, the irreplaceable value of educator feedback, the benefits of peer collaboration, and the cognitive load associated with expectations to use digital tools without compromising the quality of the work.

A metacognitive dimension emerged in a qualitative study of graduate students (Sperber et al., 2025), which identified metacognitive strategies across five dimensions: planning, monitoring, evaluation, information management, and debugging. These findings extend the framework of metacognitive strategies to the context of GenAI-supported academic writing, highlighting debugging as a unique strategy in students' interactions with GenAI outputs. Chen, Wang, and Zhou (2025) confirmed that debugging defined as students' efforts to correct and refine AI-generated content, serves as a key differentiator between GenAI-assisted writing and conventional writing processes.

Students' levels of AI literacy significantly influence their interaction patterns with GenAI and their writing performance. A study by Xu et al. (2025) demonstrated that students with high AI literacy adopt a collaborative approach, actively accepting GenAI suggestions and incorporating the tool into metacognitive activities such as planning. Conversely, students with low AI literacy exhibit limited interaction, tending to handle ideation and evaluation independently. Statistical analysis reveals significant differences in writing task performance between the two groups across all evaluation rubrics, including content, structure/organization, and expression. Wang and Wang (2025) add that low AI literacy correlates with students' tendency to adopt a "copy-paste" approach to GenAI output without substantial adaptation or verification.

Digital literacy serving as the foundation for AI literacy and a core competency in the use of information technology is closely linked to students' academic writing abilities. In their study, Haliq and Hamsa (2021) found that students generally possess a very high level of digital literacy and utilize credible, trustworthy sources for their academic essays. These findings indicate that students possess robust digital literacy skills and leverage them during the online academic essay writing process through various technological devices and applications. Further research by Haliq et al. (2025) examined the influence of critical thinking skills and digital literacy on students' academic essay writing abilities. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis revealed that critical thinking skills exert a dominant and significant influence on academic essay writing ability, while digital literacy makes a smaller yet still significant contribution. These findings underscore that integrating critical thinking skills and digital literacy into the educational curriculum is a necessary strategy for enhancing the quality of students' academic writing. Haliq et al. (2023) added that self-access to digital resources, along with the ability to evaluate information quality and source reliability, are key components of academic essay writing in the digital era. Hamsa et al. (2026) confirmed that digital literacy has a positive and significant impact on academic writing ability. Collectively, these findings position digital literacy as a fundamental variable that must be considered in any analysis regarding technology use in academic writing, including the use of Generative AI (GenAI).

Nevertheless, research has also revealed challenges and concerns regarding the use of GenAI. In a phenomenological study, Pratiwi et al. (2025) found that while students acknowledge AI's advantages in terms of speed and efficiency, they also express concerns regarding ethical implications and potential impacts on critical thinking skills. Key ethical issues include maintaining academic integrity, manually verifying AI-generated content, and avoiding over-reliance on the technology. Dogru Dastan and Mare (2025) identify convenience as a primary driver for students choosing GenAI; however, the threat of plagiarism and a lack of proficiency in managing these tools pose significant obstacles.

Academic integrity is a central concern in the discourse surrounding GenAI usage. A study by Brown et al. (2025) reveals that students' ethical beliefs, rather than institutional policies are the strongest predictors of perceived misconduct and actual AI usage in writing. Awareness of institutional policies has no significant influence on students' ethical judgments or behavior. These findings indicate that students do not view the use of AI in learning activities as an extension of conventional cheating, but rather as a distinct category of academic behavior. Hadinejad, Sperling, and McGrath (2025) emphasize the need for clearer academic policies and ethical frameworks to support students in making responsible decisions regarding the use of GenAI.

Another challenge involves the dilemma between efficiency and authenticity in academic writing. Research on pre-service teacher students in Indonesia conducted by Pratiwi et al. (2025) found that while AI tools significantly improved the clarity, coherence, and academic quality of manuscripts, participants also faced challenges such as over-reliance on AI, concerns regarding academic integrity, and ethical ambiguities surrounding authorship and plagiarism. Dogru Dastan and Mare (2025), in a study of EFL students in Turkey, reported moderate levels of AI literacy among participants, alongside significant reliance on AI tools for translation and grammar correction, as well as concerns regarding subject-specific AI reliability and its impact on creativity.

Existing research remains dominated by quantitative and survey-based approaches; consequently, there is limited in-depth understanding of students' subjective experiences, decision-making processes, and the negotiation of identity and authorial agency during interactions with GenAI. There has been little qualitative research within the Indonesian context that deeply explores the dynamics of GenAI usage in academic writing, particularly studies highlighting how students simultaneously navigate opportunities and challenges in their daily writing practices.

To address this gap, this study explores the transformation of students' academic writing practices in the era of generative AI through a qualitative case study approach. The research objectives include: (1) identifying patterns and strategies of GenAI usage by students during the academic writing process; (2) exploring student perceptions regarding the benefits and challenges of using GenAI in academic writing; and (3) understanding the negotiation of issues concerning AI literacy, academic integrity, and authorial agency within students' writing practices.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative approach using a single holistic case study design (Yin, 2018). This design was selected to explore in depth the phenomenon of the transformation of students' academic writing practices in the era of generative artificial intelligence, viewed as a "bounded system" within its natural context (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The unit of analysis consists of students from the Indonesian Language and Literature Education Study Program, Faculty of Language and Literature, Universitas Negeri Makassar, who have experienced and interpreted GenAI-assisted academic writing practices.

Research Location, Timing, and Participants

The research will be conducted within the Indonesian Language and Literature Education Study Program at Universitas Negeri Makassar during the even semester of the 2025/2026 academic year. The location was chosen based on prior findings indicating that students in this program possess high levels of digital literacy and make optimal use of digital reference sources when writing academic essays (Haliq & Hamsa, 2021; Haliq et al., 2025).

Participants will be selected using purposive and snowball sampling techniques (Patton, 2015) based on the following criteria: (1) active students in the Indonesian Language and Literature Education Study Program; (2) students who have completed or are currently taking a writing course; (3) students with experience using GenAI (ChatGPT, Gemini, or Claude) for academic writing; and (4) willingness to participate voluntarily. The target sample size is 10–15 students, with the final number determined by the principle of data saturation (Guest et al., 2020).

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection will be carried out using three simultaneous techniques to achieve triangulation (Denzin, 1978).

1. Semi-structured interviews were conducted using a guide developed based on the theoretical frameworks of AI literacy (Xu et al., 2025), metacognitive strategies (Sperber et al., 2025; Chen, Wang, & Zhou, 2025), and issues regarding ethics and academic integrity (Brown et al., 2025; Pratiwi et al., 2025). Each participant was interviewed one to two times for a duration of 60–90 minutes.
2. Participant observation was conducted in campus settings (classrooms, libraries, laboratories), with the researcher adopting the role of "observer as participant" (Gold, 1958). Observations focused on the academic writing process, how students accessed and utilized GenAI, and the social interactions shaping these practices. Field notes were systematically recorded.
3. Document analysis involved collecting secondary data, including students' academic writing assignments, course syllabi, institutional policies on AI usage, and screenshots of student interactions with GenAI (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Research Procedure
The research was conducted in four stages, as recommended for qualitative case studies (Yin, 2018; Rashid et al., 2019). The planning stage encompassed problem formulation, objective setting, literature review, determination of the research design and unit of analysis, and the development of the research protocol. The field preparation stage involved obtaining permits, developing and validating instruments through expert judgment, and recruiting participants, including the signing of informed consent forms. Data collection was carried out iteratively, using interviews, observations, and document analysis, until data saturation was reached. The analysis and reporting stage included data processing, thematic analysis, interpretation, and report writing.

Data Analysis Technique
Data were analyzed using a six-stage thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2022): (1) familiarization with the data through repeated reading of transcripts and field notes; (2) inductive generation of initial codes using NVivo software; (3) searching for themes by grouping codes into meaningful patterns; (4) reviewing themes to ensure internal coherence and data representation; (5) defining and naming themes descriptively; and (6) writing the report, integrating empirical findings with the theoretical framework.

Data Validity Assessment
Data validity was assessed based on four criteria (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was pursued through source and method triangulation, member checking (confirming findings with participants), peer debriefing (discussions with expert colleagues), and prolonged engagement in the field. Transferability was achieved by providing rich, detailed descriptions ("thick description") of the context and findings. Dependability was ensured through an audit trail that transparently documented the entire research process. Confirmability was met by maintaining raw data and a verifiable analysis trail, as well as by explicitly acknowledging the researcher's positionality and biases.

RESULTS

This study explores the transformation of academic writing practices among students in the Indonesian Language and Literature Education Study Program at Universitas Negeri Makassar during the era of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI). Based on a thematic analysis of in-depth interview data with 12 participants, participant observations, and document studies conducted between February and June 2025, three main themes emerged representing the students' experiences and interpretations regarding their interaction with GenAI. These themes are: (1) patterns and strategies of GenAI usage; (2) perceptions of GenAI's benefits and challenges; and (3) the negotiation of AI literacy, academic integrity, and writer agency.

Patterns and Strategies of GenAI Usage
Data from interviews and observations reveal that students utilize GenAI at various stages of the academic writing process, with varying levels of depth and intensity. Student usage patterns can be classified into three categories based on the observed level of engagement and interaction complexity.

1. Usage for Technical Support
All twelve participants utilized GenAI for basic writing functions, primarily grammar checking, spelling correction, and diction refinement. Participant P03 stated:

> *"I usually use ChatGPT to check the writing structure and find more academic word choices. Sometimes I write a rough draft first, then input it into ChatGPT and ask it to refine the language to make it more academic and formal."*

In this pattern, students treat GenAI as an extension of conventional spell-check functions. Field observations indicate that students following this pattern tend to access GenAI during the final stages of writing, after having independently composed the initial draft. Students in this category generally engage with GenAI only once or twice and do not alter the substantive arguments of their writing.

2. Usage for Text Development
At an intermediate level, students use GenAI to develop the writing structure, search for references, and expand upon arguments. Participant P07 stated:

> *"I ask ChatGPT to create an outline before I start writing. Then, I compare my own outline with the one from ChatGPT and combine the best elements of both. Sometimes, I also ask for recommendations on journals or books relevant to my topic."*

Students in this category do not merely accept GenAI output passively. Observational data indicates that they engage in a process of comparing and selecting the information provided. Participant P11 added:

> *"I use AI to look for alternative perspectives. Sometimes, when I hit a wall, I ask ChatGPT, 'What arguments can I develop from this topic?' Then, I select the ones that fit and develop them further myself."*

At this level, students typically engage in three to five rounds of interaction with GenAI and demonstrate the ability to evaluate the relevance of the AI's output to their writing needs.

3. Usage for Writing Transformation

Some participants, particularly final-year students and those with more extensive writing experience—use GenAI at a transformative level. At this level, GenAI serves as a dialogic partner that fosters critical reflection and the development of ideas. Participant P09 explained:

> *"I never use ChatGPT's output directly. I engage in a back-and-forth; I debate with ChatGPT and ask it to provide counter-arguments to my own. That helps me spot weaknesses in my writing. Sometimes I ask it to act as a reviewer and offer criticism, then I revise my work based on that feedback."*

Participant P05 added:

> *"I often ask ChatGPT to critique my writing and point out sections that are weak or illogical. Afterward, I make the corrections myself. I don't ask it to rewrite the text; I ask it to highlight my weaknesses."*

Users at this level engage in more than five iterations of interaction and demonstrate the ability to critically question and modify GenAI's output.

4. Metacognitive Strategies in GenAI Usage

Participants employ various metacognitive strategies when interacting with GenAI, including planning, monitoring, evaluation, information management, and debugging. Planning strategies are evident when students determine the purpose of using GenAI before initiating the interaction. Participant P02 stated:

> *"Before I open ChatGPT, I already know what I want to use it for. If I'm looking for ideas, I use a different prompt. If I need language correction, I use yet another type of prompt."*

Monitoring strategies are observed when students actively oversee the process and quality of their interactions with GenAI. Participant P05 revealed:

> *"I check whether ChatGPT's answers align with what I requested. If they don't, I adjust the prompt. Sometimes I repeat the process several times until I get the answer I'm looking for."*

Evaluation strategies emerge when students assess the quality and reliability of GenAI's output. Participant P10 explained:

> *"I always check information from ChatGPT first. I compare it with other sources, such as journals or books, because ChatGPT sometimes provides incorrect or inaccurate information."*

Information management strategies are evident when students filter and organize information from various sources, including GenAI. Participant P04 stated:

> *"I take ideas from ChatGPT, but I first verify them in journals to see if they are correct. I never use them directly without verification."*

Debugging strategies are apparent when students correct and refine both prompts and GenAI outputs. Participant P08 revealed:

> *"If ChatGPT's answer isn't quite right, I try changing the wording of my question. Sometimes I ask it to explain again in a different way. I also often ask it to correct its own answer if I feel it is inaccurate."*

Participant P01 added:

> *"Sometimes I intentionally provide an ambiguous prompt to see if ChatGPT can grasp my intent. If it doesn't, I keep refining the prompt until I get a satisfactory answer."*

Participants with higher levels of AI literacy employ more diverse and in-depth metacognitive strategies, whereas those with lower AI literacy tend to use GenAI more passively, relying on only one or two types of strategies.

Student Perceptions of the Benefits and Challenges of GenAI
Participants identified various benefits and challenges associated with using GenAI for academic writing.

1. Benefits of GenAI
a. Writing Efficiency and Speed
The benefit most frequently cited by participants was increased efficiency and speed in the writing process. Participant P01 stated:

> *"In the past, when I wanted to write an essay, I could spend days just searching for references and drafting an outline. Now, with ChatGPT, that process is faster. I can immediately get a big-picture overview of the topic I am writing about."*

Participant P12 added:

> *"The process of searching for journals, which used to take hours, can now be shortened. I simply ask for recommendations and then select the relevant ones myself."*

Field observations indicate that students who use GenAI for initial reference searches complete writing assignments in a shorter timeframe compared to those who do not, although the quality of the final output still depends on the depth of the verification process undertaken.

b. Improved Language Quality and Writing Structure
Participants consistently reported that GenAI helped them improve the language quality and structure of their academic writing. Participant P06 revealed:

> *"My English isn't very good. With ChatGPT, I can learn how to write better sentences and use appropriate academic terminology. My writing has become more structured and readable."*

Participant P03 stated:

> *"I have gained a better understanding of good paragraph structure. ChatGPT often corrects my disjointed paragraphs and makes them more coherent."*

Analysis of the participants' written work shows that students who use GenAI for language editing produce writing with better coherence and cohesion, more precise use of academic vocabulary, and more varied sentence structures.

c. Use for Idea and Topic Exploration
Several participants reported that GenAI assisted them in generating ideas and exploring writing topics. Participant P12 explained:

> *"Sometimes I'm unsure what to write. I ask ChatGPT about trending topics in my field or perspectives that haven't been widely discussed. It helps me come up with interesting ideas."*

Participant P07 added:

> *"I often ask ChatGPT for case studies or phenomena relevant to my topic. That helps me enrich my arguments."*

Participant P02 noted:

> *"When I get an idea from ChatGPT, I don't use it immediately. I develop it further using my own experience and knowledge."*

d. Increased Confidence
Several participants mentioned that using GenAI boosted their confidence in academic writing. Participant P03 stated:

> *"I used to worry that my writing might be grammatically incorrect or lack an academic tone. Now, I feel more confident because I know I can check and refine it with AI's help. I'm more willing to write."*

Participant P11 added:

> *"I'm no longer afraid to tackle difficult topics. I know AI is there to help me if I run into trouble."*

2. Challenges and Concerns
a. Excessive Dependence (Over-reliance)
The concern most frequently expressed by participants was the potential for over-reliance on GenAI. Participant P07 stated:

"I'm worried that if I use AI too often, my own writing skills will become dull. I'll be too lazy to think because I just have to ask AI. Sometimes I realize I've become too dependent on ChatGPT."

Participant P10 added:

"I once had a period where I couldn't write at all without the help of ChatGPT. It scared me. I had to work hard to reduce that dependency."

Participant P04 admitted:

"I realized that sometimes I use AI not because I really need it, but because I'm lazy. That's a bad habit that's hard to break."

Observations show that students who use GenAI from the beginning of the writing process tend to have more difficulty letting go of dependence than students who use it only at the final stage.

b. Reliability and Accuracy of Information

Participants expressed concerns about the reliability of the information GenAI produces. Participant P10 explained:

"ChatGPT sometimes messes up, gives wrong or made-up information. I once got references that turned out to not exist in the real world. So I always have to double check."

Participant P08 added:

"I once got statistical data from ChatGPT which turned out to be wrong when I checked the original source. Since then I have never simply trusted information from AI."

Participant P06 stated:

"Sometimes ChatGPT gives a convincing answer but it turns out to be wrong. It takes special skills to distinguish what information is correct and what is not."

c. Threats to Originality and Authorial Voice

Some participants expressed concerns that the use of GenAI could threaten the originality of their writing and authorial voice. Participant P09 stated:

"I'm afraid that my writing will be too generic, like robot writing. Everyone uses ChatGPT, the results will be the same. Even though the lecturer wants to see my own thoughts, not AI's thoughts."

Participant P07 added:

"I feel like I lose my own writing style if I use AI too often. All sentences sound the same, formal but bland."

Participant P05 stated:

"I try to maintain my language style even though I use AI for correction. I don't want my writing to lose its identity."

d. Ethical Confusion and Academic Integrity

Participants acknowledged confusion regarding the ethical boundaries of using GenAI in academic writing. Participant P02 stated:

"I'm confused, is it actually permissible to use AI for assignments? Lecturers never explain it clearly. There are lecturers who forbid it, there are those who allow it as long as it's not copy-pasted. So I have to decide myself."

Participant P06 stated:

"I'm confused, how much AI assistance is allowed? If I ask AI to make an outline, is that cheating? If I ask AI to correct my paragraph, is that still allowed? There are no clear rules."

Participant P11 added:

"I feel bad every time I use AI for assignments, even if I don't copy-paste. I always wonder whether what I'm doing is ethical or not."

Negotiating AI Literacy, Academic Integrity, and Author Agency

The third theme that emerged from data analysis was the negotiation process that students carried out in balancing the demands of AI literacy, academic integrity, and author agency. Students did not passively accept or reject GenAI, but rather actively negotiated the role of technology in their writing practices.

1. Development of AI Literacy

Participants demonstrated varying levels of AI literacy. The pattern of AI literacy development identified in this research includes four trajectories: from uncritical to informed users; from AI-dominated users to AI masters; from passive recipients to strategic users; and from efficiency-oriented users to responsible writers. Participant P05, who falls into the category of users with high AI literacy, explained:

> *"I understand that ChatGPT is just a tool. He doesn't think, he just predicts words based on the data he has. So I never take ChatGPT results as the truth. I always check back."*

Participant P09 added:

> *"I study how AI works before I use it seriously. I want to know its weaknesses so I don't get caught out. AI is a powerful tool, but it can also be misleading."*

In contrast, participant P04, who had lower AI literacy, expressed:

> *"I usually just use what ChatGPT gives me. But sometimes I realize the answers are strange or don't connect. I get confused."*

Participant P08, who was at the transition stage, stated:

> *"I used to just believe in ChatGPT. Now I'm starting to realize that ChatGPT isn't always right. I'm still learning to be more careful about what ChatGPT provides."*

Field observations show that students with higher AI literacy tend to use GenAI more selectively and strategically. They not only check the accuracy of the information, but also evaluate the appropriateness of language style, depth of analysis, and relevance of the content to their academic context. Students with low AI literacy tend to rely on GenAI for most of the writing process and rarely perform cross-verification.

2. Academic Integrity Negotiations

Participants demonstrated awareness of academic integrity issues, although their interpretations of what constituted a violation varied widely. The majority of participants differentiated between the use of GenAI as a tool and the use of GenAI as a substitute for thought processes. Participant P11 stated:

> *"If I use AI to help me understand concepts, or to find ideas, or to improve language, I don't think that's a problem. But if I copy-paste the AI results and collect them as my own work, that's clearly cheating. I never do that."*

Participant P08 added:

> *"I always tell the lecturer when I use AI. I write it in the footnotes or in the methodology section. I think transparency is important so that the lecturer knows which is my work and which is AI assistance."*

Participant P03 stated:

> *"I consider AI like a tool. I still write, AI only helps. I don't feel it's cheating as long as I still do my own thinking process."*

Some participants acknowledged the existence of confusing gray areas. Participant P06 stated:

> *"I'm confused, how much AI assistance is allowed? If I ask AI to make an outline, is that cheating? If I ask AI to correct my paragraph, is that still allowed? There are no clear rules."*

Participant P02 added:

> *"There are no clear guidelines from the campus. Every lecturer has a different opinion. Some prohibit it completely, some allow it as long as it is not copy-pasted. This is confusing."*

Participant P10 stated:

> *"I sometimes feel guilty about using AI even though I don't copy-paste. But I also don't know the correct standards. I just follow my own intuition."*

3. Writer Agency

Most participants reported that they retained agency over their writing even when using GenAI. Participant P09 stated:

> *"I decide where I want my writing to go. AI just helps me get there faster. I still own my writing, I am responsible for what I write."*

Participant P12 added:

> *"I don't feel like AI is taking over my writing. On the contrary, AI is helping me express my ideas better. I'm still the writer, AI is just my tool."*

Participant P05 stated:

> *"I use AI as a mirror. I see the reflection of my ideas through AI, then I decide what is good and what is not. The final decision is always in my hands."*

Some participants acknowledged that excessive use of GenAI could erode author agency. Participant P07 stated:

> *"Sometimes, I use AI too often often, I feel like my writing is not my writing. I'm too lazy to think, too lazy to find my own words."*

Participant P04 added:

> *"I once went through a phase where I couldn't write without opening ChatGPT first. It made me lose confidence in my own abilities."*

Participant P06 stated:

> *"I have to keep reminding myself that AI is a tool, not a replacement. Sometimes I deliberately don't use AI for some tasks so that my writing skills remain trained."*

Factors Affecting Negotiations

Data analysis identified several factors that influenced the negotiation process carried out by students:

1. AI literacy level: students with higher AI literacy tend to be more critical, selective, and strategic in using GenAI, and are better able to maintain their authorial agency. They have a better understanding of how AI works and its limitations.
2. Writing experience: students who have broader writing experience tend to use GenAI more purposefully and critically. They are better able to differentiate between helpful assistance and assistance that threatens academic integrity. Students with limited writing experience tend to rely more heavily on AI for all aspects of writing.
3. Faculty expectations and institutional policies: the lack of clarity in institutional policies and variations in faculty expectations create uncertainty that influences how students use GenAI. Participants whose lecturers explicitly permitted or prohibited the use of AI tended to have a clearer view of ethical boundaries. Participants who do not receive clear guidance tend to feel anxious and confused.
4. Assignment difficulty level: Students tend to use GenAI more for assignments that are considered difficult or beyond their abilities. On easier tasks, they tend to be more independent. Participant P10 stated:

   > *"If the assignment is easy, I write it myself. But if the assignment is difficult or I don't understand the topic, I immediately ask AI for help."*

5. Academic pressure: the pressure to complete assignments on time and get good grades drives students to use GenAI, even though they are aware of the potential risks. Participants P02 revealed:

   > *"Sometimes I use AI because deadlines are tight. I know this is not ideal, but I have to."*

6. Availability of resources: students who have access to an adequate library and intensive lecturer guidance tend to use GenAI less often than students who have limited access to conventional academic sources.

DISCUSSION

Patterns and Strategies of GenAI Use in Academic Writing

The research findings regarding the three levels of GenAI use technical support, text development, and writing transformation align with the theoretical framework developed by Kim et al. (2025). In their study of Chinese students using a ChatGPT-4-integrated writing system, Kim et al. (2025) identified that students perceived GenAI as beneficial in three areas: the writing process, writing performance, and the affective domain. The current study extends this understanding by demonstrating that levels of GenAI use reflect not only differences in the intensity of utilization but also differences in the quality of cognitive interaction between students and the tool. Students at

the transformative level do not merely use GenAI as an aid but as a dialogic partner that fosters critical reflection—a finding consistent with the concept of "critical chatting" proposed by Shen and Chen (2025) to distinguish it from "casual cheating."

The identification of metacognitive strategies in GenAI use encompassing planning, monitoring, evaluation, information management, and debugging, reinforces and expands upon the findings of Yao et al. (2025). In a qualitative study of postgraduate students in Hong Kong, Yao et al. (2025) identified that students employed metacognitive strategies across these five dimensions when using ChatGPT for English academic writing. Their research specifically highlighted the unique nature of debugging strategies within the context of GenAI-supported academic writing. The current study confirms the distinctiveness of these debugging strategies, observed as students iteratively corrected and refined both prompts and GenAI outputs to achieve desired responses. These findings also align with Teng's (2025) research on the metacognitive awareness of EFL student writers utilizing ChatGPT.

The observed differences in the application of metacognitive strategies between students with high and low AI literacy in this study confirm the findings of Xu et al. (2025). In developing and validating an AI literacy scale for L2 writing, Xu et al. (2025) proposed a four-dimensional framework of AI literacy comprising 'understanding', 'use', 'evaluation', and 'ethics'. The study's findings indicate that students with higher AI literacy employ more diverse and in-depth metacognitive strategies, whereas those with lower AI literacy tend to use GenAI more passively, a pattern suggesting that AI literacy serves as a prerequisite for the strategic utilization of GenAI.

Student Perceptions of the Benefits and Challenges of GenAI

Student perceptions regarding the benefits of GenAI, specifically in terms of efficiency, improved language quality, and support for idea generation, align with findings from previous research. Kim et al. (2025) found that students envision AI playing multiple roles, such as a multitasking writing assistant, a virtual tutor, and a digital partner that supports various stages of the writing process. The findings of the current study confirm these expectations; participants consistently reported that GenAI accelerates the writing process, aids in refining structure and grammar, and offers alternative perspectives for developing ideas. Similarly, in a systematic review of GenAI's impact on postgraduate research, Mabirizi (2025) identified increased productivity and efficiency, including improvements in academic writing, as key benefits.

Conversely, the concerns raised by participants regarding over-reliance, information reliability, and threats to originality mirror findings by Pratiwi et al. (2025). In a phenomenological study involving Indonesian doctoral students, Pratiwi et al. (2025) found that while students acknowledged AI's advantages in boosting speed and efficiency, they also expressed concerns about ethical implications and potential impacts on critical thinking skills. Ethical issues identified in that study included maintaining academic integrity, manually verifying AI-generated content, and avoiding over-reliance. The findings of the current study reinforce the argument made by Pratiwi et al. (2025) that, while AI facilitates idea generation and technical tasks, it also carries the potential to undermine critical thinking and analytical skills.

The concerns expressed by participants regarding threats to originality and the authorial voice reflect broader apprehensions within the literature concerning GenAI's impact on authorial identity. Research on multilingual writers using GenAI independently reveals a spectrum of approaches, ranging from prescriptive to dialogic uses (Wang, Xu, & Tan, 2025). Case studies of three (post) doctoral writers in that research show that participants positioned AI either as a tool or as an interactive participant in their meaning-making processes, reflecting differing views of AI as a mechanical system, a social construct, or an instance of distributed agency (Wang et al., 2025). Meanwhile, a study on multilingual doctoral students engaged in AI-mediated academic writing found that students did not merely adopt AI suggestions passively; instead, they negotiated textual authority by critically examining AI outputs, aligning them with disciplinary norms, and maintaining ownership over their writing style, tone, and genre (Ou, Tai, & Wang, 2026). Ou et al. (2026) demonstrate that doctoral students developed their identities as autonomous, multilingual academic writers through translanguaging practices involving a dynamic negotiation between their personal linguistic repertoires and AI mediation; this process entailed a negotiation of power between human and AI as students questioned, revised, or rejected AI outputs to uphold their authorial and disciplinary stances. These findings indicate that participants with higher levels of AI literacy were more likely to engage in such negotiations, whereas those with lower AI literacy were more susceptible to threats regarding originality.

Navigating AI Literacy, Academic Integrity, and Authorial Agency

Findings regarding the varying development of AI literacy among participants demonstrate strong relevance to the AI literacy framework developed by Xu et al. (2025). Their proposed four-dimensional framework comprising understanding, use, evaluation, and ethics, provides a basis for understanding why some students are able to use GenAI critically and strategically, while others tend to use it passively. The study's findings indicate that participants with high AI literacy not only understand the technical workings of GenAI but also evaluate the reliability of its outputs and consider the ethical implications of its use. Conversely, participants with low AI

literacy tend to master only the "use" dimension, lacking adequate critical understanding, evaluative skills, or ethical awareness.

The concept of "Critical GAI Literacy" introduced by Khuder (2025), which integrates technical understanding, ethical awareness, and self-directed learning also aligns with the findings of this study. Participants who evolved from passive to strategic users demonstrated increased ethical awareness and a capacity for independent learning through their interactions with GenAI. This progression also mirrors the findings of Pratiwi et al. (2025) in their study on the development of critical AI literacy among doctoral students, which identified four developmental trajectories: from uncritical consumer to informed user; from AI-dominated user to AI master; from passive recipient to strategic user; and from efficiency-oriented user to responsible scholar.

The way participants navigated academic integrity reflects the tension between technological utilization and adherence to academic norms a tension previously identified in the literature. Pratiwi et al. (2025) found that Indonesian students expressed concerns regarding the ethical implications of AI use, emphasizing the need for manual verification of AI-generated content and the avoidance of over-reliance on the technology. The findings of this study indicate that participants developed their own informal codes of ethics, distinguishing between using GenAI as an aid and using it as a substitute for the thinking process. However, the confusion regarding ethical boundaries expressed by participants, stemming primarily from a lack of clear institutional guidelines highlights a policy gap that needs to be addressed.

The findings regarding writer agency constitute a key contribution of this study. Most participants reported maintaining control over their writing despite using GenAI; this aligns with research by Ou, Tai, and Wang (2025) on multilingual writers using GenAI independently. That study revealed that students did not lose their agency as writers; instead, they utilized GenAI as a resource to construct meaning and assert authority in their writing.

Nevertheless, some participants in the current study acknowledged that excessive use of GenAI could erode their writing agency. This concern is echoed in other research findings. Park (2025), in a systematic literature review on GenAI literacy in schools, noted that studies highlight concerns that over-reliance can diminish ownership of ideas and weaken authorship. Jiang, Vetter, and Lucia (2024), in their exploration of AI literacy in the post-digital era, emphasized that uncritical use of ChatGPT can threaten agency and authorship, necessitating an AI literacy approach that moves beyond technical understanding toward a critical awareness of the power dynamics between humans and AI.

Research by Bhat, Aubin Le Quéré, Naaman, and Jakesch (2026) on "Reactive Writing" found that inline AI suggestions transform writing from an active process of memory retrieval into an evaluation-oriented, suggestion-led practice, wherein users prioritize evaluating AI-generated text over generating their own ideas. Bhat et al. (2026) shows that in reactive writing, writers often do not complete their own ideation process before engaging with AI suggestions; consequently, the ideas and opinions suggested by the AI steer the direction the writing takes, while the writers themselves remain unaware of this AI influence and feel they retain full control over their work. The findings of this study indicate that students are aware of this risk and actively seek to maintain their agency, although such efforts are not always successful. As noted by Park (2025), preserving agency requires encouraging students to articulate their own ideas before engaging with GenAI and to integrate AI-generated output only after critical reflection.

Factors Influencing Negotiation

Based on the results of this study, six factors influencing the negotiation process were identified: AI literacy levels, writing experience, lecturer expectations and institutional policies, task difficulty, academic pressure, and resource availability. These factors provide a more nuanced understanding of the variations in GenAI usage among students. These findings align with research by Yusof et al. (2025) on cognitive load and ethical perceptions regarding written assessments in higher education; that study found that when tasks are conceptually demanding, students tend to rely on AI to bridge gaps in understanding and articulate unfamiliar concepts. The study by Yusof et al. (2025) examined "parroting" behavior, defined as the use of AI-generated text with minimal cognitive engagement among students. Drawing on Cognitive Load Theory and Dual-System Theory, the research conceptualized parroting across three dimensions: intrinsic load, extraneous load, and ethical rationalization. The results indicated that external pressures, such as unclear instructions and heavy workloads, were the strongest drivers of parroting behavior (Yusof et al., 2025).

The findings regarding the role of lecturer expectations and institutional policies in shaping student behavior have significant implications for policy development. Research by Edam-Agbor, Orim, Ovat, and colleagues (2026) on student perceptions of ChatGPT usage found that institutional policies did not mediate the relationship between predictors and student acceptance of ChatGPT. This indicates that students adopt ChatGPT independently of formal institutional structures, reflecting the decentralized nature of AI usage in higher education. Nevertheless, institutional policies remain relevant, as they are shaped by these predictors and subsequently influenced by awareness and perceptions (Edam-Agbor et al., 2026). The findings of this study indicate that policy ambiguity creates uncertainty affecting how students use GenAI; participants whose lecturers explicitly permitted or prohibited AI usage tended to have a clearer understanding of ethical boundaries. Yusof et al. (2025) also found

that ethical rationalization was the least supported approach and occurred primarily when institutional guidelines were ambiguous, underscoring the importance of clear and transparent policies.

CONCLUSION

This study explores the transformation of students' academic writing practices in the era of generative AI through a qualitative case study approach within the Indonesian Language and Literature Education Study Program at Universitas Negeri Makassar. Based on a thematic analysis of interview, observation, and documentation data, the study yields three key findings that address the research objectives.

First, students utilize GenAI at three levels reflecting varying qualities of cognitive interaction: technical support (grammar checking and spelling correction), text development (structuring and reference searching), and writing transformation (critical dialogue and reflection). The application of metacognitive strategies, such as planning, monitoring, evaluation, information management, and error detection (debugging), varies among participants, with students possessing high AI literacy employing more diverse and in-depth strategies. These findings broaden the understanding of GenAI usage, positioning it not merely as a technical aid but as a dialogic partner with the potential to foster students' critical thinking.

Second, students perceive GenAI benefits across four areas: writing efficiency, improved language quality and structure, exploration of ideas and topics, and increased self-confidence. However, the study also identifies four major challenges: over-reliance that threatens independent writing skills, the need for manual verification of GenAI-generated information, threats to originality and authorial voice, and ethical confusion stemming from a lack of clear institutional guidelines. These findings indicate that the benefits and challenges of GenAI are simultaneous and interconnected, requiring students to develop the capacity to navigate both in a balanced manner.

Third, students engage in a complex negotiation between the demands of AI literacy, academic integrity, and authorial agency. This negotiation process is influenced by six factors: AI literacy levels, writing experience, lecturer expectations and institutional policies, task difficulty, academic pressure, and resource availability. Students with high AI literacy demonstrate the ability to use GenAI selectively and strategically, critically evaluate AI outputs, and maintain authorial agency by retaining control over the ideas, style, and substance of their writing. Conversely, students with low AI literacy tend to use GenAI passively and are more susceptible to dependency and threats to originality. These findings confirm that AI literacy serves as a prerequisite for the responsible and effective use of GenAI in academic writing.

Theoretically, this study enriches the AI literacy framework by demonstrating the empirical manifestations of its four dimensions understanding, use, evaluation, and ethics, within the context of academic writing in Indonesia. It identifies debugging as a unique metacognitive strategy in students' interactions with GenAI and reveals the contextual factors influencing ethical negotiation and student writer agency. Practically, the findings have implications for developing clear and transparent institutional policies regarding GenAI use in academic assignments, integrating AI literacy into writing curricula, and training lecturers to guide students in using GenAI critically and ethically.

This study has acknowledged limitations. It involved only 12 participants from a single study program at one university; thus, the findings cannot be generalized to broader contexts. The study focused solely on student experiences, without exploring the perspectives of lecturers or policymakers. Furthermore, it did not longitudinally measure the development of students' AI literacy over time. Therefore, future research should expand the participant scope across study programs and universities, incorporate the perspectives of lecturers and institutional administrators, and employ a longitudinal design to track the evolution of students' AI literacy. Quantitative research is also needed to examine the relationships between the variables identified in this study, such as the impact of AI literacy on writing quality and the level of dependency on GenAI. Further research into the development of pedagogical models that integrate AI literacy into academic writing instruction is also an urgent agenda in the era of digital transformation in higher education.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

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