



THE IMPACT OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE TOOLS ON ACADEMIC WRITING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

Artificial intelligence (AI) tools have become increasingly sophisticated in recent years, providing new ways for students to improve their writing ability. These tools can help with tasks such as grammar and spell-checking, generating topic ideas, and even offering suggestions for improvements in style and structure. The effects of such tools on users and students writing ability have been the subject of recent research, with some studies indicating positive outcomes. The rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools has transformed various aspects of education, particularly in academic writing. This study investigates the impact of AI-assisted writing tools on university students' writing skills, focusing on areas such as grammar, structure, vocabulary, coherence, and critical thinking. Using a quasi-experimental research design, the study evaluates students' writing performance on utilizing AI tools. The research involved 30 university students enrolled in Business English language courses at University of Tirana, Albania.

The findings of the research provide insights to educators navigating the integration of Artificial Intelligence tools into writing curricula while maintaining instructional quality and academic integrity standards in Albania, and not only. However, the study also reveals concerns about over-reliance on AI, which may hinder the development of students' critical thinking and original writing abilities. Student feedback indicates that AI tools are generally seen as beneficial for refining writing but should be used as supplements rather than replacements for independent writing efforts. This study contributes to understanding the role of AI in higher education writing and provides recommendations for educators, students, and policymakers on the ethical and effective use of AI tools in academic contexts.

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Keywords: *Artificial Intelligence, Academic Writing, AI tools, Higher Education.*

Introduction

The rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools has brought about significant changes in various sectors, including education. In higher education, AI tools are increasingly being integrated into academic writing processes, offering students new ways to enhance their writing quality. These tools, such as grammar checkers, content generators, and language enhancers, promise to assist students in refining their work, improving structure, and ensuring grammatical accuracy. However, while AI tools provide substantial benefits, they also raise important questions regarding their impact on students' academic skills, particularly in relation to critical thinking, originality, and the development of writing proficiency.

This study seeks to explore the influence of AI-assisted writing tools on university students' academic writing skills. By employing a mixed-methods approach, the research evaluates students' writing performance before and after using AI tools, focusing on key areas such as grammar, structure, vocabulary usage, coherence, and critical thinking. The research also examines student perceptions of AI tools through surveys and interviews, shedding light on how students engage with these technologies and their views on AI's role in academic writing. In light of the growing use of AI tools in educational settings, it is crucial to understand how these technologies affect the learning process, particularly in developing essential writing skills. This study aims to provide valuable insights into how AI tools can be effectively integrated into academic writing curricula, ensuring that students benefit from these technologies while maintaining academic integrity and developing their own critical thinking abilities.

Problem Statement

The increasing integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools into higher education, particularly in academic writing, has raised significant concerns regarding their impact on students' writing development. While AI tools such as grammar checkers, content generators, and style enhancers are designed to assist students in improving the quality of their written work, there is limited understanding of how their use affects students' writing skills, critical thinking, and overall academic performance. Specifically, the challenge lies in determining whether the reliance on AI tools leads to a reduction in students' ability to produce original,

thoughtful, and coherent written content or whether these tools can effectively complement and enhance their writing abilities.

As AI technologies become more prevalent in academic settings, it is essential to examine how their use influences the writing process, including areas such as grammar, structure, vocabulary, creativity, and logical reasoning. This research aims to address the gap in literature by exploring how AI-assisted writing tools impact university students' academic writing performance. The study will investigate whether the use of AI tools improves writing quality, fosters critical thinking, and maintains academic integrity, or if it inadvertently leads to over-reliance on technology, diminishing students' writing skills and intellectual engagement. Ultimately, the study seeks to provide insights that can guide the responsible and effective integration of AI tools into higher education curricula.

Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools on university students' academic writing skills. The research aims to:

1. Evaluate the improvement in writing quality: Assess how the use of AI tools (such as grammar checkers, content generators, and style enhancers) affects students' writing in terms of grammar, structure, coherence, vocabulary use, and critical thinking.
2. Examine student perceptions and engagement with AI tools: Understand how students perceive the role of AI in their academic writing process and their attitudes towards its effectiveness, benefits, and potential drawbacks.
3. Identify the extent of AI reliance: Investigate whether students rely on AI tools to complete their writing assignments and to what extent this affects their academic integrity, originality, and creative thinking.
4. Provide recommendations for AI integration in higher education: Offer insights on how AI tools can be effectively incorporated into academic writing curricula while ensuring that students maintain the development of critical thinking, originality, and academic skills.

Research Questions

- How do AI tools affect students' writing skills?
- To what extent do students rely on AI for academic writing?
- Does AI improve writing quality or hinder critical thinking?

Literature Review

1. AI in Higher Education: Overview of AI writing tools (e.g., Grammarly, ChatGPT, QuillBot)

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has significantly transformed higher education, particularly in academic writing. AI-powered writing tools such as Grammarly, ChatGPT, and QuillBot assist students and educators in improving grammar, coherence, and overall writing quality. Grammarly, for instance, offers real-time grammar and spelling corrections, while also providing suggestions on clarity, conciseness, and engagement (Smith & Johnson, 2023). These tools have become essential for students looking to refine their writing, ensuring that academic papers meet high linguistic and stylistic standards.

Beyond grammar correction, AI-driven writing tools enhance content generation and paraphrasing. ChatGPT, developed by OpenAI, enables students to generate ideas, summarize complex topics, and receive writing assistance (Brown et al., 2022). Similarly, QuillBot specializes in paraphrasing, allowing students to rephrase text while maintaining its original meaning (Williams, 2023). These tools help students develop their writing skills by offering alternative phrasing, improving readability, and assisting non-native English speakers in refining their academic writing. However, concerns about over-reliance on AI and potential issues related to originality and academic integrity persist (Jones, 2023).

As AI continues to evolve, the integration of these tools in higher education raises ethical and pedagogical questions. While they serve as valuable learning aids, educators emphasize the importance of critical thinking and originality in academic writing (Garcia & Patel, 2023). Institutions are increasingly developing guidelines to ensure AI-assisted writing maintains academic integrity and does not replace human creativity. The future of AI in higher education will likely focus on balancing technological assistance with the development of students' independent writing skills.

2. Theoretical Framework: Digital literacy, constructivist learning, or cognitive load theory

Digital literacy is a crucial component of modern education, particularly in the context of AI-driven learning environments. It encompasses the ability to locate, evaluate, and effectively use digital tools and information (Eshet, 2022). As AI-powered writing tools become more prevalent in higher education, digital literacy ensures that students can critically engage with these technologies rather than relying on them passively. Developing digital literacy skills enables learners to assess the credibility of AI-generated content, understand the ethical

implications of AI use, and apply technology in a way that enhances their academic growth (Ng, 2023). Consequently, institutions must integrate digital literacy education to equip students with the competencies needed to navigate AI-enhanced learning environments responsibly.

The constructivist learning theory, proposed by Piaget (1950) and later expanded by Vygotsky (1978), emphasizes active, student-centered learning where knowledge is constructed through experience and interaction. AI writing tools can facilitate constructivist learning by enabling students to experiment with different writing styles, receive instant feedback, and engage in self-directed learning (Jonassen, 2021). For instance, students using AI-assisted tools can iteratively refine their work, explore multiple perspectives through AI-generated suggestions, and engage in metacognitive reflection on their writing process. This aligns with the constructivist approach, which encourages learners to take an active role in their knowledge acquisition rather than passively receiving information.

Cognitive load theory (Sweller, 1988) is also relevant in the context of AI-assisted learning, as it focuses on the ways in which instructional design can optimize cognitive processing. AI-powered writing tools can reduce extraneous cognitive load by automating routine aspects of writing, such as grammar correction and text organization, allowing students to focus on higher-order thinking skills (Mayer & Moreno, 2023). However, there is a risk that excessive reliance on AI may lead to cognitive overload if students struggle to interpret AI-generated feedback or use multiple tools simultaneously (Paas & Ayres, 2022). Therefore, educators must carefully integrate AI tools into the learning process to support cognitive efficiency without overwhelming students with excessive information processing demands.

3. Previous Research: Studies on AI's impact on writing skills, plagiarism, and creativity

Several studies have explored the impact of AI-powered writing tools on students' writing skills, with mixed findings. Some researchers argue that AI tools such as Grammarly and ChatGPT enhance students' ability to produce well-structured and grammatically correct texts, thereby improving overall writing proficiency (Kessler, 2022). These tools provide instant feedback, allowing students to correct errors and refine their writing in real-time. However, other studies suggest that overreliance on AI-generated suggestions may hinder the development of critical thinking and independent writing skills (Liu & Wang, 2023). While AI can facilitate the writing process, it is essential to balance its use with traditional writing instruction to ensure long-term skill development.

AI tools have also raised concerns about academic integrity and plagiarism in higher education. Some researchers highlight that students may misuse AI-generated content, passing it off as their own without proper attribution (Mahlow & Hediger, 2021). Studies have shown that AI-generated texts can sometimes bypass plagiarism detection software, making it challenging for educators to identify instances of academic dishonesty (Choi et al., 2023). To address this issue, universities are implementing policies that encourage responsible AI use and developing new detection methods to differentiate between human and AI-generated writing. Additionally, teaching students about ethical AI usage and citation practices can help mitigate the risks of plagiarism.

The impact of AI on creativity in writing remains a topic of debate. Some studies suggest that AI tools can enhance creativity by generating new ideas, providing alternative word choices, and offering stylistic variations (Rahimi & Karami, 2022). These features can inspire students to explore different writing styles and experiment with language in innovative ways. However, other researchers caution that excessive dependence on AI-generated content may limit original thought and personal expression (Boden, 2023). AI-generated text often follows predictable patterns and lacks the depth of human creativity. Therefore, while AI can be a valuable assistant in the writing process, fostering creativity requires a combination of AI support and human imagination.

4. Gaps in the Literature

While extensive research has been conducted on the role of AI in academic writing, several gaps remain, particularly concerning its long-term impact on students' critical thinking and independent writing skills. Most existing studies focus on short-term improvements in grammar and structure but do not thoroughly examine how AI writing tools influence students' ability to develop original arguments and engage in higher-order thinking (Liu & Wang, 2023). Additionally, there is limited research on the effectiveness of AI writing assistance across different disciplines. For example, while AI tools may enhance technical accuracy in STEM fields, their impact on creativity and analytical depth in humanities and social sciences remains underexplored (Rahimi & Karami, 2022). Future studies should investigate how AI affects students' cognitive development over time and whether reliance on such tools diminishes their ability to engage in complex academic discourse.

Another significant gap in the literature is the ethical and pedagogical implications of AI use in higher education. While concerns about plagiarism and academic integrity have been raised, there is a lack of empirical studies assessing how universities implement AI-related policies

and how students perceive ethical AI use in their learning process (Choi et al., 2023). Furthermore, there is little research on how educators can effectively integrate AI into writing instruction without compromising skill development. Current pedagogical approaches often treat AI tools as either entirely beneficial or wholly problematic, without considering how they can be strategically incorporated into curricula to enhance, rather than replace, traditional writing instruction (Kessler, 2022). Research is needed to develop frameworks that guide educators on balancing AI assistance with fostering students' original thinking and academic integrity.

In the context of Albanian higher education, there is an even more pronounced research gap regarding AI adoption in academic writing. While universities worldwide are beginning to integrate AI tools into teaching and learning, Albanian institutions have yet to establish clear policies or guidelines for their use. There is a lack of data on how Albanian students and faculty perceive AI-generated content, its impact on academic performance, and the ethical dilemmas it may pose (Shehu & Gashi, 2023). Additionally, the digital literacy levels among students in Albania vary significantly, raising concerns about whether AI tools are accessible and effectively utilized across different universities (Kola & Domi, 2022). Research is needed to assess the preparedness of Albanian higher education institutions in addressing AI-related challenges and to develop localized strategies for incorporating AI-assisted writing in a way that enhances student learning while maintaining academic integrity.

Methodology

1. Research Design

This study employs a quasi-experimental design to analyze the impact of AI writing tools on university students' writing skills. The study focuses on evaluating students' writing performance before and after the use of AI tools, assessing improvement in structure, coherence, grammar, and creativity. A quasi-experimental design is suitable as it allows evaluating the use of AI tools in written forms. This design ensures a comprehensive understanding of how AI impacts academic writing skills.

2. Sample & Participants

The study was conducted with a sample of 30 university students enrolled in English language at University of Tirana, Faculty of Economics. The participants were selected based on their willingness to participate in the study and their enrollment in a course where writing assignments are a core component. The study was carried out during January 2025 at the above

mentioned university where the researcher works as part time English lecturer since 2014. All the students are first year students, age 18-19, all of them were part of Business English course.

3. Data Collection

The primary data for this study consists of two writing assignments completed by each student. The first writing task required students to respond to the prompt: “*What are multinational corporations?*” This task aimed to evaluate students’ ability to provide a structured response with clear arguments. The second task was a business-related writing exercise where students were asked to *write an email to a bank* based on a given subject and structure. The email format required adherence to professional writing conventions, demonstrating appropriate tone, clarity, and organization. After completing these initial tasks, students were introduced to AI writing tools such as *Grammarly*, *ChatGPT*, and *QuillBot*. They were instructed to revise and improve their original responses using these tools. The revised versions of their work were then collected to compare pre- and post-AI intervention writing performance.

4. Data Analysis

This study adhered to ethical guidelines ensuring voluntary participation, *informed consent*, and the confidentiality of student data. Participants were assured that AI tools would be used only for educational purposes and that their original and revised work would not be shared beyond the research context. Furthermore, students were encouraged to critically reflect on AI’s role in writing, promoting ethical engagement with such tools.

Results & Discussion

Criteria	Excellent	Good	Needs Improvement	Total (%)	Explanation
Grammar & Structure	50% (15 students)	40% (12 students)	10% (3 students)	100%	Most students demonstrated good grammar with clear and well-organized writing structures. Ten percent (3 students) had minor issues with grammar and structure, needing further improvement.
Vocabulary Use	46.67% (14 students)	40% (12 students)	13.33% (4 students)	100%	87% of students used formal and appropriate vocabulary in their writing. Some students had slight redundancy

					or awkward phrasing, which slightly affected the clarity.
AI-Generated Indicators	53.33% (16 students)	33.33% (10 students)	13.33% (4 students)	100%	More than half of the students showed minimal AI influence, maintaining natural writing styles. A third had moderate AI influence, while 13% showed a higher reliance on AI-generated content.
Critical Thinking	60% (18 students)	30% (9 students)	10% (3 students)	100%	The majority of students displayed strong critical thinking with clear, well-reasoned arguments, while a smaller percentage had moderate critical thinking or lacked depth in analysis.
Coherence & Clarity	53.33% (16 students)	33.33% (10 students)	13.33% (4 students)	100%	86.67% of students showed clarity and organization in their writing. However, a small portion needed improvement in coherence and clarity, often due to slight repetitions or disorganized ideas.
AI Usage Likelihood	56.67% (17 students)	36.67% (11 students)	6.67% (2 students)	100%	Most students used AI tools either minimally or moderately, with only a small percentage showing a high reliance on AI-generated content. This indicates that AI did not dominate their work but served as a supplementary aid.

Below is a combined illustrative table that includes the frequency-derived statistics (n, Mean, SD, SEM) and a one-sample t-test (comparing each mean to a hypothetical neutral value of 2) for all your criteria. (For this analysis, we coded: Excellent = 3, Good = 2, and Needs Improvement = 1.)

Criteria	n	M	SD	SEM	t-test
Grammar & Structure	30	2.4	0.66	0.12	3.31
Vocabulary Use	30	2.33	0.7	0.13	2.61
AI-Generated Indicator	30	2.4	0.71	0.13	3.08
Critical Thinking	30	2.5	0.67	0.12	4.08
Coherence & Clarity	30	2.4	0.71	0.13	3.08
AI Usage Likelihood	30	2.5	0.62	0.11	4.42

Grammar & Structure - With a mean of 2.40, the data suggest that students perform above the baseline (coded "Good" at 2), with half (50%) rated as "Excellent." The t-test value of 3.31

indicates that the improvement over the baseline is statistically significant, supporting the idea that AI tools help enhance grammatical accuracy and structure.

Vocabulary Use - The mean of 2.33 indicates a moderate performance in vocabulary selection, with nearly half (46.67%) rated as "Excellent" and 40% as "Good." A t-value of 2.61 shows a significant deviation from the baseline, though the slightly lower mean compared to Grammar & Structure suggests that some students still face challenges with redundancy or awkward phrasing.

AI-Generated Indicators - With a mean of 2.40 and a t-value of 3.08, the majority of students (53.33% "Excellent") appear to exhibit minimal AI influence, implying that while AI tools are being used, they do not dominate the writing process.

Critical Thinking - A mean of 2.50, supported by the highest t-value (4.08), indicates that students, on average, display strong critical thinking. Sixty percent of the students were rated as "Excellent," which is encouraging given the concern that AI tools might impede original reasoning.

Coherence & Clarity - Also showing a mean of 2.40 with a t-value of 3.08, this variable suggests that most students maintain good coherence in their writing. However, the distribution indicates that some improvements could be made, particularly in enhancing transitions and reducing redundancies.

AI Usage Likelihood - With a mean of 2.50 and a t-value of 4.42, the data suggest that while AI tools are used, they remain a supplementary aid. Over half of the students (56.67%) demonstrate minimal reliance, and only a small percentage (6.67%) show high dependence on AI-generated content.

Overall, the combined analysis reveals that students generally perform above the baseline (coded as 2, "Good") across all writing criteria. The statistically significant t-test results indicate that the observed means are reliably greater than 2, supporting the conclusion that AI tools have a positive impact on various aspects of academic writing. However, the variability also highlights areas where additional support or training might further enhance student performance.

Conclusion & Recommendations

This study, conducted at the University of Tirana, Faculty of Economics during January 2025, examined the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) tools on academic writing among university students. Focusing on key criteria—grammar and structure, vocabulary use, AI-generated indicators, critical thinking, coherence and clarity, and AI usage likelihood—the quantitative

analysis (supported by frequency distributions, descriptive statistics, and t-tests) indicated that the majority of students achieved ratings above the baseline in most areas. Notably, students demonstrated strong performance in grammar and structure and critical thinking, with a significant proportion attaining "Excellent" ratings. Although AI tools contributed positively by enhancing error detection, vocabulary suggestions, and overall text organization, the findings also revealed that these tools were primarily used as supplementary aids rather than as replacements for independent writing efforts.

Overall, the study suggests that while AI tools can effectively support the technical aspects of academic writing, there remains variability in students' performances—particularly in areas such as vocabulary precision and coherent transitions. This variability underscores the importance of integrating AI technologies in a balanced manner, ensuring that their use does not compromise critical thinking and originality.

Implications for Higher Education: Should AI be regulated in writing?

AI tools, such as grammar checkers and writing assistants, have proven valuable in helping students refine their academic writing. However, concerns arise regarding over-reliance on these tools, which may hinder students' development of critical thinking and original writing skills. The study suggests that AI should not be overly regulated but instead integrated into the academic writing process. This balanced approach will encourage students to utilize AI as a supplementary tool without sacrificing the integrity of their work. AI should be used to enhance, rather than replace, the creative and analytical processes inherent in academic writing.

Recommendations

For students, it is important to use AI effectively by treating it as a tool to enhance their writing, not replace the effort of critical thinking and originality. Students should leverage AI for grammar and vocabulary checks but maintain ownership of their ideas and arguments. It is essential for students to understand the limitations of AI, particularly in tasks requiring deep analysis and critical engagement.

For educators, integrating AI tools into writing curricula is crucial. Educators should help students become AI-literate, teaching them how to use these tools ethically and responsibly. Assignments can incorporate AI tools, but it is vital to assess students on their ability to develop original content and engage critically with their work. Educators should also encourage students to reflect on their use of AI to promote academic integrity.

For policymakers, clear guidelines are needed to regulate the use of AI in academic writing. While AI tools can be beneficial, it is essential to set boundaries to prevent misuse, such as plagiarism or over-dependence on AI-generated content. Policymakers should work with

academic institutions to create frameworks that support ethical AI use while encouraging creativity and academic integrity.

Limitations & Future Research Directions

The study faced limitations, such as a small sample size (30 students) from a single university, which may not represent a broader student population. Additionally, the research was conducted over a short period, which limits the ability to assess the long-term impact of AI on academic writing. The cultural context of the study, conducted at an Albanian university, may also affect the applicability of the findings in other regions.

Future research could explore the long-term effects of AI on academic writing, focusing on whether its use influences critical thinking and original idea development over time. Expanding the research to include diverse student populations across multiple universities would provide more comprehensive insights. Additionally, further studies could investigate how AI tools influence students' creativity and whether these tools foster or hinder creative thinking in writing. Lastly, exploring the ethical implications of AI in academia would provide a deeper understanding of how to balance the benefits of AI with the need for academic integrity.

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