Student Perspectives on Paraphrasing English Texts: With and Without ChatGPT

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Abstract

This study examines Indonesian university students' perspectives on paraphrasing English texts, both independently and with ChatGPT's support. This investigation addresses a gap in the literature and highlights the need to understand how students approach paraphrasing tasks in different contexts. Using a mixed-method research design, 50 students were surveyed, and 15 participated in follow-up interviews. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were explored through thematic analysis. Findings reveal that students often lack confidence when paraphrasing independently, citing limited vocabulary and grammatical challenges as key barriers. Many students also reported low motivation to put in personal effort when practicing paraphrasing. In contrast, opinions on using ChatGPT were mixed. While some appreciated its ability to produce grammatically flawless paraphrases, believing it outperformed their own efforts, others criticised its outputs for being too similar to the original text, despite their grammatical accuracy. A recurring concern was the risk of over-reliance on ChatGPT, with several students noting that frequent use could undermine their motivation and effort to improve their language skills independently. Despite its limited generalisability, this study highlights the importance of thoughtfully integrating AI tools like ChatGPT in EFL education to enhance, rather than replace, active learning and skill development.

Introduction

ChatGPT, or Generative Pretrained Transformer, is an AI tool released by OpenAI. It generates human-like text and provides quick responses on a variety of topics, utilising advancements in artificial intelligence and natural language processing to understand and interpret human languages (Adiguzel, 2023). ChatGPT was introduced in late November 2022 (OpenAI, 2022), during a time when many were still navigating the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic (Abdrasheva et al., 2022). While the pandemic caused significant disruptions across all sectors, including education, it also accelerated the shift toward digital solutions. As people sought innovative ways to connect, learn, and work remotely, the education sector embraced ChatGPT—a powerful digital tool that rapidly amassed a substantial user base (UNESCO, 2023). This innovation has made learning more personalised and accessible, enhancing the educational experience for students and educators alike (Rawas, 2024).

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ChatGPT was initially designed to provide easy access to a variety of resources, including educational materials, and to respond to written text prompts (Rawas, 2024). However, significant advancements have led to the development of the current version, GPT-4o, which is reported to be more intelligent, faster, and better equipped to understand text, voice, and vision (OpenAI, 2024). With features such as instant feedback, real-time personalized writing assistance, lexical expansion, and improved grammatical accuracy, ChatGPT has become a favourite among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) students, who often struggle with writing sentences in English due to limited vocabulary and grammatical understanding (Alsalami, 2022; Jarrah et al., 2023; Nugroho et al., 2024; Sasi & Lai, 2021; Xu et al., 2024).

Research conducted in countries such as China (Ge, 2024; Xu et al., 2024), Vietnam (Thao et al., 2023), Indonesia (Nugroho et al., 2023), Morocco (Bekou et al., 2024), and Mexico (Santiago-Ruiz, 2023) indicates that EFL and ESL students favour ChatGPT for writing tasks, citing its perceived effectiveness and ease of use. EFL and ESL students find ChatGPT highly useful and easy to use because it understands prompts and helps with generating ideas, translating, proofreading, paraphrasing, summarizing, and even composing entire writing assignments (Črček & Patekar, 2023). For these tasks, students can depend on ChatGPT to correct grammar, review vocabulary, fix spelling errors, and refine sentence structures (Eunim & Youngsang, 2023; Ge, 2024; Harunasari, 2023; Jarrah et al., 2023; Nugroho et al., 2024; Özçelik & Ekşi, 2024). Research indicates that when EFL and ESL students use ChatGPT, they can improve their self-editing skills in writing (Imran & Lashari, 2023; Marzuki et al., 2023) and enhance their overall writing productivity (Jarrah et al., 2023). This improvement is reflected in increased word count, vocabulary diversity, and average sentence length in their second attempts on the same topic after using ChatGPT as an assistant (Athanassopoulos et al., 2023).

However, a contrasting perspective comes from Bašić et al. (2023), who studied the essay-writing performance of second-year master's students in the University Department of Forensic Sciences. Bašić et al.'s (2023) study showed that students using ChatGPT did not outperform those who didn't use ChatGPT. They suggested that students relying on ChatGPT took "more time to finalize the task and assemble the content" (p. 4), possibly due to overreliance on and unfamiliarity with the tool. Hence, the growing reliance on ChatGPT has sparked global concerns that it could hinder creativity and critical thinking in EFL and ESL students' writing, potentially diminishing their accountability for their own learning and development (Cornish & Larter, 2024; Mahama et al., 2023; Mahapatra, 2024; Marzuki et al., 2023; Nugroho et al., 2023; Shakil & Siddiq, 2024; Thao et al., 2023). For instance, Santiago-Ruiz (2023) found that students who overly relied on ChatGPT often lacked critical thinking skills, as they failed to verify or reflect on the credibility of the tool's responses, frequently copying directly from ChatGPT and submitting tasks without any review.

Some studies (Kayaalp et al., 2024; Shakil & Siddiq, 2024) suggest that, to use ChatGPT effectively and critically, students should adopt the role of responsible users who actively engage in the writing process. This entails examining the credibility of ChatGPT's answers and assessing the validity of the information it provides, rather than accepting the tool's responses at face value (Huang, 2023). Moreover, it is important to note that the ChatGPT website includes a disclaimer stating, "ChatGPT can make mistakes. Check important info," which underscores the necessity for students to critically evaluate the tool's outputs (ChatGPT, 2024). When students understand this, ChatGPT can become a valuable tool for fostering critical thinking skills and integrity, allowing them to practice and enhance their analytical reasoning (Memarian & Doleck, 2023; Steele, 2023). By embracing this approach, they are encouraged to explore original sources, such as relevant books, which helps minimise their overreliance on the tool (Steele, 2023).

While numerous studies in Indonesia, including those by Harunasari (2023), Marzuki et al. (2023), and Nugroho et al. (2023, 2024), examined how EFL students perceive ChatGPT as a tool for English language tasks, there remains a significant gap in research comparing Indonesian students' views on their paraphrasing skills with and without the use of ChatGPT. Addressing the gap in research on Indonesian students' perspectives on paraphrasing with and without ChatGPT is crucial, as it can inform educators in developing tailored teaching strategies that effectively integrate AI tools into language learning while promoting critical thinking and creativity. That said, this study aims to address the following questions:
1. What are students' perspectives on paraphrasing English texts independently?
2. What are students' perspectives on paraphrasing English texts with ChatGPT?

To address these questions, this study adopts the Technology Acceptance Model, which provides a framework for understanding how individuals come to accept and use technology (Davis, 1993; Davis & Venkatesh, 1996; Granić & Marangunić, 2019). Within this framework, the study will investigate EFL students' perceptions of the effectiveness and usability of ChatGPT for paraphrasing English texts, alongside their attitudes toward traditional independent paraphrasing methods.
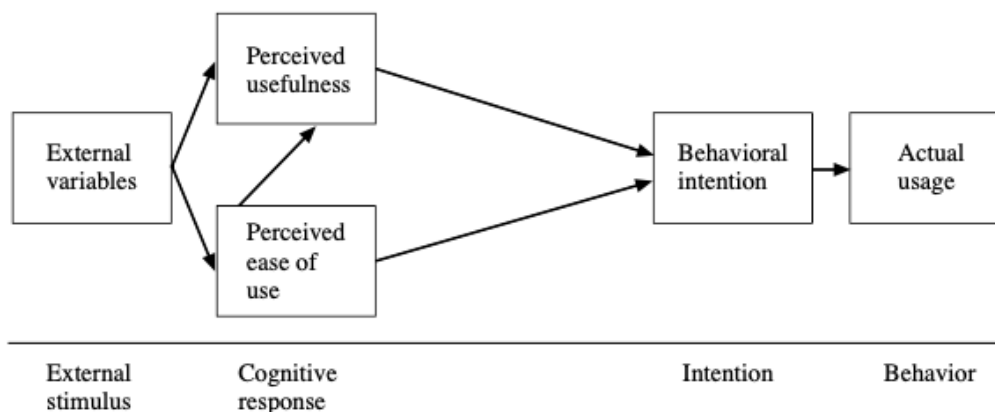
Figure 1. Technology Acceptance Model (adopted from Davis & Venkatesh, 1996, p. 20).

According to TAM, a user's decision to adopt a system or technology is influenced by three primary factors: perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, and overall attitude toward its use, which together encapsulate the core motivational variables of the model (Davis, 1993; Davis & Venkatesh, 1996). Davis (1993) introduced the Technology Acceptance Model in 1993 while researching user adoption of electronic mail. The model evaluated employees' perceptions of email as a valuable, user-friendly tool that required no special skills and reduced effort. It examined how email improved work quality, efficiency, productivity, and job performance, while also helping employees complete tasks faster. Later, Davis and Venkatesh (1996) studied university students' intentions to use WordPerfect, focusing on its perceived usefulness and ease of use for academic purposes.

Various studies using Davis's Technology Acceptance Model have consistently validated its accuracy. Recent studies on EFL students across various countries, including research by Xu et al. (2024) and Ge's (2024) on Chinese university students, Bonsu and Baffour-Koduah (2023) on students in Ghana, Silvestre et al. (2023) on Brazilian students, and Thao et al. (2023) on Vietnamese students, revealed a strong preference for ChatGPT in completing English tasks, particularly writing. They highlighted ChatGPT's user-friendly interface and usefulness in providing immediate, personalised feedback, which significantly enhanced their academic performance. In Indonesia, research by Harunasari (2023), Marzuki et al. (2023), and Nugroho et al. (2023, 2024) examining university students' perspectives on using ChatGPT in English classrooms aligned with findings from other non-native English-speaking countries. In particular, Indonesian students favoured ChatGPT for its effectiveness in assisting with translation, addressing linguistic challenges such as grammar, syntax, and sentence structure, as well as helping with paraphrasing. The tool's ability to offer real-time corrections and language support was especially appreciated for enhancing students' writing clarity and fluency, making it an indispensable resource in the EFL learning process.

Despite being favoured in various countries, all studies (Bonsu & Baffour-Koduah, 2023; Ge, 2024; Harunasari, 2023; Marzuki et al., 2023; Nugroho et al., 2023, 2024; Silvestre et al., 2023; Thao et al., 2023; Xu et al., 2024) reported limitations with ChatGPT. These include inaccuracies stemming from insufficient or inappropriate responses, as well as a tendency to provide monotonous replies. Additionally, the tool may impede creative thinking and foster over-reliance, which could lead to dependence and diminished motivation for learning among students. Therefore, ChatGPT should only be adopted as a mediating tool to assist teachers in providing scaffolding during students' writing tasks (Thao et al., 2023). Meanwhile, the presence of a teacher is essential to help students develop their writing skills within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Silalahi, 2019). As more capable

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others, teachers can assess when to reduce scaffolding as students assume greater responsibility for their learning, ensuring that the support provided remains meaningful for their development (Silalahi, 2019).

Methods

This study employs a mixed-method approach to collect data from EFL students at a private university in North Sumatra, Indonesia, specifically those participating in an English class focused on paraphrasing lessons. Using a mixed-methods approach improves the rigor and depth of research by integrating quantitative data with qualitative insights, leading to more robust and nuanced findings. Quantitative data were gathered using a survey administered through Google Forms, which required students to indicate their level of agreement on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." The survey included statements reflecting students' attitudes toward the user-friendliness and usefulness of ChatGPT for writing paraphrases, adapted from the Technology Acceptance Model, as well as their perceptions of their ability to paraphrase independently without the tool. The statements are as follows:
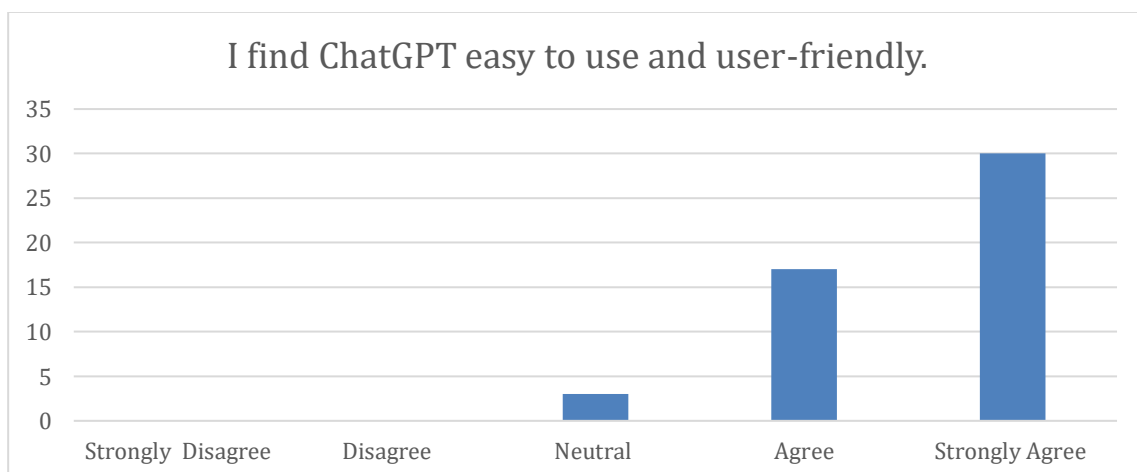
- I find ChatGPT easy to use and user-friendly.
- I feel confident in my ability to paraphrase without ChatGPT.
- I find the paraphrasing process without ChatGPT to be stressful.
- With ChatGPT's assistance, I believe I can produce more effective paraphrases.

The survey was open for four weeks to accommodate the schedules of respondents. During this data collection period, 50 out of the 68 recruited students voluntarily participated in the survey and provided informed consent for the data collection process. The quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, offering insights into students' attitudes and perceptions of ChatGPT's user-friendliness and usefulness for writing paraphrases.

Simultaneously, qualitative data were gathered through interviews lasting 30 to 50 minutes with 15 students who expressed a willingness to engage in further discussions after completing the survey. The qualitative data obtained from these interviews were analysed using thematic analysis to identify key themes. The thematic analysis adhered to Braun and Clarke's (2013) methodological framework, which consists of iterative stages of coding and analysis. The process commenced with initial coding of the dataset, leading to the systematic identification of recurring themes. Each theme underwent a rigorous review and refinement before being thoroughly named and defined.
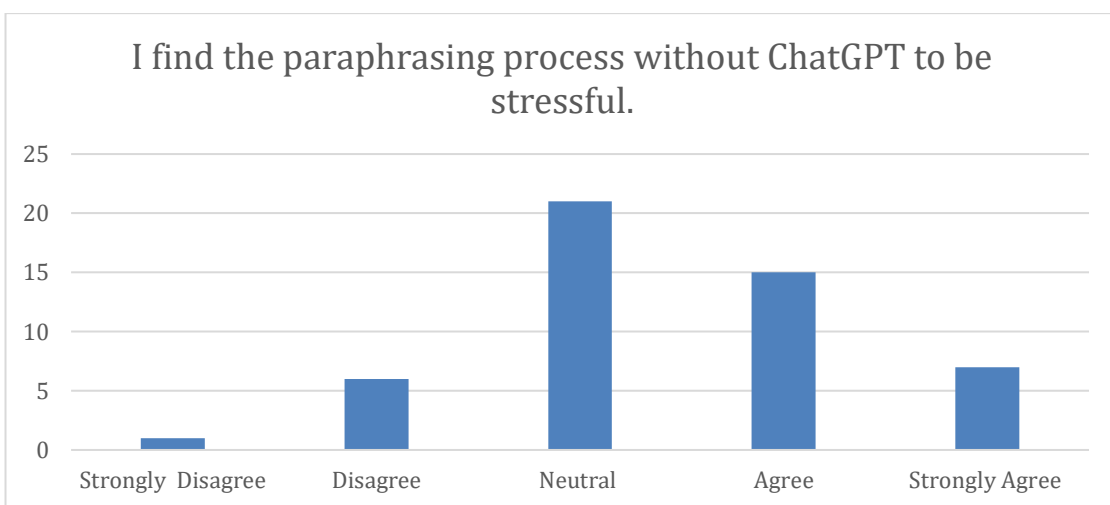
Result and Discussion
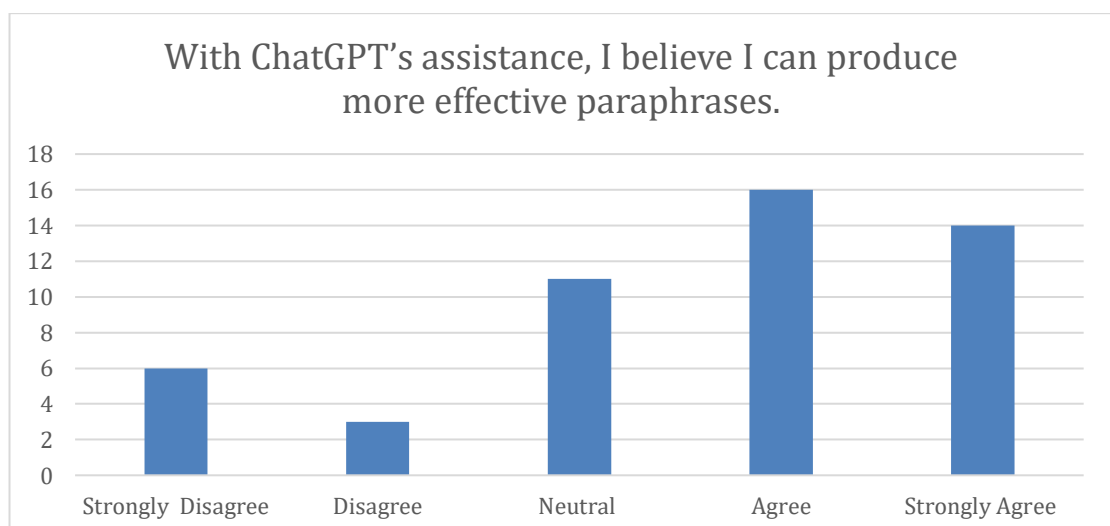## Quantitative Findings

Figure 2. Students' response to statement "I find ChatGPT easy to use and user-friendly"
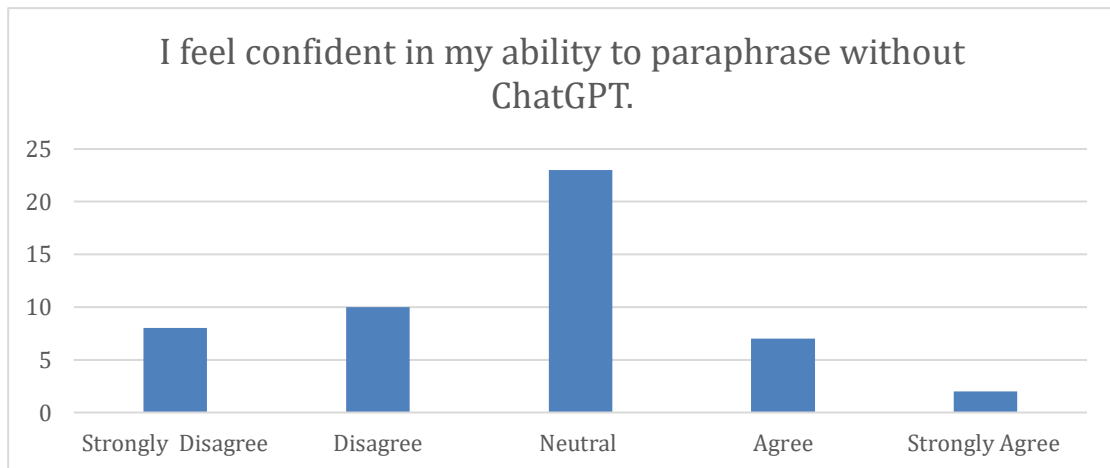
Figure 3. Students' response to the statement "I feel confident in my ability to paraphrase without ChatGPT"

Figure 4. Students' response to the statement "I find the paraphrasing process without ChatGPT to be stressful"

Figure 5. Students' response to the statement "With ChatGPT's assistance, I believe I can produce more effective paraphrase"

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The survey responses reveal several key insights regarding students' attitudes toward using ChatGPT and their confidence in paraphrasing. First, when asked about the ease of use of ChatGPT (figure 2), a significant majority of students found the tool to be user-friendly. Specifically, 30 students strongly agreed with this statement, while 17 agreed, and only 3 remained neutral. Notably, no respondents indicated disagreement, suggesting a strong overall satisfaction with the tool's usability. In contrast, students expressed a lack of confidence in their ability to paraphrase independently without ChatGPT (figure 3). Eight students strongly disagreed with the statement, and 10 disagreed, indicating significant apprehension. A substantial portion of respondents (23) remained neutral, while only 7 agreed and 2 strongly agreed that they felt confident in their paraphrasing abilities without assistance.

Regarding the stress associated with paraphrasing without ChatGPT (figure 4), responses indicated a sense of discomfort among students. Only 1 student strongly disagreed, and 6 disagreed, while 21 were neutral. Meanwhile, 15 students agreed and 7 strongly agreed that they found the paraphrasing process to be stressful, highlighting a common concern among respondents. Finally, when considering the effectiveness of paraphrasing with ChatGPT's assistance (figure 5), the majority of students recognized its benefits. Fourteen respondents strongly agreed, and 16 agreed that they could produce more effective paraphrases with ChatGPT's help. Only 6 strongly disagreed, 3 disagreed, and 11 were neutral on this matter. Overall, these results reflect a positive perception of ChatGPT's user-friendliness and effectiveness, contrasted with a significant lack of confidence in students' ability to paraphrase independently.

Qualitative Findings

Reflections of Students on Their Independent Paraphrasing Skills without ChatGPT

Interviews with 15 students confirmed that while they agree paraphrasing is a crucial skill for their studies, only a few feel confident in their abilities, with many describing paraphrasing tasks as stressful. A thematic analysis of these interviews revealed three key issues: limited vocabulary, inadequate grammatical knowledge, and insufficient effort.

Limited Vocabulary

The students found paraphrasing difficult due to their limited vocabulary, which hindered their understanding of the main ideas even after reading. Although they learned strategies for paraphrasing, applying them proved challenging. They understood that it involves "rewriting information differently" (Student 1) and "expressing the author's ideas in their own words" (Student 12) but struggled with comprehension. One student shared, "I don't know many words in the text, so paraphrasing is tough" (Student 3). Others agreed, noting, "It's hard to find the right words" (Student 4), "Finding synonyms is even more challenging" (Student 11), and "It's tough to express my own thoughts even after reading" (Student 5).

Inadequate Grammatical Knowledge

Most students recognised that their limited grammatical knowledge hindered their paraphrasing ability. While they understood that paraphrasing involves changing word forms—like converting nouns to adjectives—they struggled with practical application. One student remarked, "It was hard to switch between adjectives and nouns" (Student 2), while another admitted, "I just don't know how to change the words" (Student 13). Many also faced challenges with sentence structure, saying, "I don't know how to change sentences from active to passive" (Student 15). Their frustrations were evident in comments like, "I found it very difficult to make a sentence" (Student 6), "I couldn't arrange words into a sentence well" (Student 8), and "Writing an English sentence is really challenging" (Student 10). These issues underscore the significant impact of language barriers on their paraphrasing skills.

Insufficient Effort

Another significant issue students faced was a lack of practice. One student admitted, "I hardly practised paraphrasing after class" (Student 9). Others echoed this sentiment, stating, "I should have

practised paraphrasing more texts after learning it in class" (Student 4) and "I honestly never read an English text, let alone paraphrase it" (Student 13). As a result, some students inadvertently copied the original text during the test, creating sentences that were too similar because they struggled to rephrase effectively.

Students' Reflections on Their Ability to Paraphrase with ChatGPT

Students' opinions on using ChatGPT to paraphrase an English text—the same text they had paraphrased themselves—revealed a distinct divide in perspectives. Some students were satisfied with the results generated by ChatGPT, while others expressed dissatisfaction. Additionally, concerns emerged about the implications of relying on the tool for paraphrasing. The thematic analysis identified several key themes: ChatGPT is user-friendly for paraphrasing, ChatGPT is helpful for paraphrasing, ChatGPT paraphrasing lacks effectiveness, and the unintended effects of using ChatGPT for paraphrasing.

ChatGPT is User-friendly for Paraphrasing

Students found using ChatGPT to be straightforward; the students typically provided simple prompts like "Paraphrase the text" (Student 2). Some even reported that they didn't use any prompts at all, merely copying the text directly into ChatGPT. Interestingly, a few students took a more critical approach, instructing ChatGPT to generate multiple options so they could select the most relevant one. Their prompts often included requests such as, "Make five new paraphrases from this text" Student 14).

Chat GPT is Helpful for Paraphrasing

Students noted that ChatGPT's paraphrases were "easier to understand" (Student 6). Additionally, some students observed that the paraphrases generated by ChatGPT demonstrated improved grammar. In contrast to their own attempts, which often lacked clarity, one student remarked, "ChatGPT could produce grammar-free paraphrases" (Student 11). Others expressed satisfaction with the clarity of the ChatGPT-generated paraphrases, stating that they "communicated meaning clearly" (Student 1).

ChatGPT Paraphrasing Lacks Effectiveness

Nevertheless, some other students considered the paraphrases generated by ChatGPT to be less effective than their own. They expressed concerns that the ChatGPT paraphrases were "excessively long" (Student 15), describing them as "overly detailed and too formal" (Student 8). Additionally, several students criticised ChatGPT for its lack of creativity, noting that many paraphrases were "merely shifts from active to passive voice" (Student 7). One student articulated that ChatGPT's paraphrasing "lacks a personal touch" (Student 4), emphasising that the application prioritises mechanics and sentence restructuring over individual expression. Some students felt that the ChatGPT-generated paraphrases sometimes "closely resemble the original text, almost like duplicates." Interestingly, when asked about the prompts they used, these students often responded similar to those who found ChatGPT's paraphrases satisfactory, typically opting for straightforward requests such as "paraphrase the following text" (Student 7).

Unintended Effects of Using ChatGPT for Paraphrasing

While evaluating the quality of the paraphrases generated by ChatGPT, students uncovered additional issues stemming from their experiences with the tool. They acknowledged that using ChatGPT for paraphrasing could result in negative consequences, such as "demotivation to learn" (Student 12) and "limitations on creativity" (Student 1). With ChatGPT able to answer questions and complete tasks for them, students found themselves "less inclined to engage in reading and truly understand the text" (Student 8). This reliance on ChatGPT for paraphrasing tasks diminished their motivation to actively engage with the reading material.

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DISCUSSION

Students' Perspectives on Paraphrasing English Text Independently

The study revealed that students struggled more with independent paraphrasing of English text than when using ChatGPT, largely due to limitations in their vocabulary and grammar knowledge. This finding supports previous research indicating that language barriers are among the most significant challenges faced by EFL and ESL students (Alsalami, 2022; Jarrah et al., 2023; Nugroho et al., 2024; Sasi & Lai, 2021; Xu et al., 2024). Additionally, the survey findings also revealed that students lacked confidence in their paraphrasing abilities, contributing to increased stress when attempting to paraphrase without the assistance of ChatGPT. This not only highlights a common limitation among EFL students due to language barriers but also suggests that students are developing a degree of dependence on ChatGPT (Bašić et al., 2023). According to Vygotsky (Silalahi, 2019), experiencing stress or crisis is a natural part of the learning process, signalling that students are undergoing cognitive development. In such situations, more capable individuals, such as teachers, should provide scaffolding to help students navigate these challenges. The teachers might provide structured feedback, model effective paraphrasing strategies, or design tasks that gradually reduce reliance on AI tools.

Although dedicating more time to practice could improve their paraphrasing skills, the study highlighted a lack of motivation among students to invest that extra effort. Personal effort is one of the key factors influencing a student's success in task completion in addition to ability, task difficulty, and task (Weiner, 1985, 2010). If students were to invest more time and effort into practising paraphrasing, they could substantially enhance their skills, especially given their foundational understanding of the theoretical principles involved. Regular practice would be particularly crucial, as many students currently have limited exposure to English in their daily lives—both through reading and listening. This lack of immersion may inhibit their vocabulary growth and grammatical proficiency, highlighting the necessity for structured practice to bridge these gaps. Moreover, engaging more consistently with English-language materials, such as books, articles, and podcasts, could significantly enrich their language experience. This exposure would not only improve their paraphrasing abilities but also boost their overall confidence in using the language, ultimately fostering a more proactive approach to their learning.

Students' Perspectives on Paraphrasing English Text with ChatGPT

The study found that most students considered ChatGPT easy to use and beneficial for paraphrasing, though some expressed concerns about the effectiveness of its paraphrases. Hence, the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1993; Davis & Venkatesh, 1996) is relevant for exploring the research questions. Students particularly appreciated the ease of simply copying text into the ChatGPT application, which would generate an instant paraphrase, often without requiring a typed prompt. In addition, the study found that students favoured ChatGPT for its capacity to address their language barrier issues. This aligns with previous research (Habibi et al., 2023; Strzelecki, 2023), which indicates that many students turn to ChatGPT to improve their writing performance. By offering instant assistance with vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structure, ChatGPT allows students to produce higher-quality work.

Nevertheless, the study found that some students questioned the validity of ChatGPT's responses in generating appropriate paraphrases. This finding aligns with Bašić et al.'s (2023) research, which concluded that students are still capable of producing better-quality writing than digital tools like ChatGPT. Furthermore, this finding suggests that ChatGPT can serve as a valuable resource for fostering critical thinking in EFL students during English writing classes, supporting findings from previous studies by Huang (2023), Memarian and Doleck (2023), and Steele (2023). The findings also highlight that, unlike animals and machines, humans can employ advanced cognitive processes to analyse and

synthesise information. This capability is rooted in Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development (Silalahi, 2019), which underscores the significance of social interaction in learning.

The study revealed that students understood that excessive reliance on ChatGPT for writing tasks could undermine their creativity and impede their learning, as authentic critical thinking is fundamentally rooted in independent thought and active engagement. Some noted that reliance on the tool could lead to a form of addiction, reducing opportunities for genuine learning and problem-solving as they became increasingly dependent on it to complete their tasks. These concerns echo findings from previous studies (Cornish & Larter, 2024; Mahama et al., 2023; Mahapatra, 2024; Marzuki et al., 2023; Nugroho et al., 2023; Santiago-Ruiz, 2023; Shakil & Siddiq, 2024; Stefanoudis et al., 2021; Thao et al., 2023) that highlighted the potential risks associated with increased reliance on ChatGPT among EFL and ESL students.

Conclusion

This study found that EFL students often lack confidence in paraphrasing without ChatGPT, primarily due to limitations in their vocabulary and grammatical knowledge. Students reported that ChatGPT is easy to use, user-friendly, and helpful in overcoming language barriers. However, relying on ChatGPT may have drawbacks, including less effective paraphrasing results, increased dependence on the tool, and a tendency toward laziness, as students may feel less motivated to invest effort in learning and practicing paraphrasing skills. While ChatGPT has evolved significantly since its launch, becoming more sophisticated and user-friendly, it is important to recognise that AI retrieves information instantaneously and often lacks the depth and context derived from human cognitive processing and lived experiences. Therefore, it is crucial to remain vigilant about the potential negative impacts of digital technology on students' learning. Although ChatGPT can provide personalised learning experiences, it cannot replace the meaningful, interactive engagement that human educators offer. Thus, AI should be viewed as a complement to traditional teaching methods, enhancing students' learning experiences while encouraging their independence and ability to learn on their own.

This study has several limitations. The small sample size and lack of diversity may restrict the generalisability of the findings to a broader population of EFL students. Additionally, including other stakeholders, such as teachers, could enhance data validity and provide a more comprehensive perspective. Gathering insights from teachers who evaluated the students' paraphrasing in both contexts—with and without the assistance of ChatGPT—would offer valuable context to the findings. Focusing exclusively on ChatGPT may overlook other AI tools that could also influence students' paraphrasing abilities, potentially skewing the overall understanding of AI's effectiveness. To address these gaps, further research is essential to investigate a broader range of AI tools and their effects on various writing skills among EFL students, extending beyond paraphrasing alone. Such research would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how AI impacts the development of writing competencies in EFL learning contexts. Despite its limitations, this study underscores the significance of integrating AI tools into language education, providing valuable insights into their potential benefits and challenges for enhancing students' writing skills—especially in paraphrasing, which is crucial for university students to avoid plagiarism in academic writing tasks. Additionally, this study encourages teachers to offer appropriate support to their EFL students during English classes, helping to keep them motivated and responsible for their own learning, whether they choose to adopt AI tools like ChatGPT or not.

Acknowledgments

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