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The Use of AI Generative Feedback in Writing Theses for 8th-Semester Students English Education Study Program at the University of Bengkulu

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Abstract

Thesis writing in higher education poses a significant challenge for many students. With the rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI), students have begun using AI tools, particularly to obtain feedback during the writing process. This study investigates how AI-generated feedback is utilized in thesis writing and explores students' perceptions of its effectiveness. Six eighth-semester students from the English Education Study Program at the University of Bengkulu were selected using criterion sampling. A qualitative phenomenological design was adopted, and data were collected through semi-structured interviews and documentation. Thematic analysis revealed that students used Chat GPT as their primary tool and engaged in three main activities: requesting, receiving, and responding to feedback. Participants reported that the feedback was generally helpful in improving the quality of their thesis writing, especially in terms of clarity, coherence, and self-revision. However, concerns regarding the relevance and accuracy of the feedback prompted them to verify it through self-evaluation, discussions with peers, or consultations with their supervisors. Despite its limitations, AI-generated feedback was perceived as a valuable support tool that enhanced students' autonomy and writing development. This suggests that while AI cannot fully replace human feedback, it can significantly contribute to the academic writing process by fostering independent learning and revision.

Keywords: AI-generated feedback; student perceptions; thesis writing.

Introduction

Writing is a fundamental skill in education that plays a crucial role in processing, organizing, and understanding information. It enables students to construct meaning, critically analyze ideas, and communicate their thoughts in a coherent and structured manner. In higher education, the ability to write effectively becomes increasingly essential, especially during the thesis writing process. Thesis writing requires students to

develop arguments, structure chapters, and revise drafts, all of which enhance their engagement with academic content and foster critical thinking skills.

Strong writing skills are not only vital for academic achievement but are also highly valued in various professional fields, including journalism, law, business, and academia. However, writing remains a persistent challenge for many students, particularly in the context of academic writing. Research has shown that students often struggle with organization, coherence, and language use when composing complex texts such as theses (Swales & Feak, 2004). These challenges are further compounded for students in non-native English-speaking contexts, where issues of grammar, academic vocabulary, and sentence structure can hinder effective communication (Lillis & Curry, 2010).

Feedback is one of the most powerful tools to support students in developing their writing. Effective feedback helps students identify weaknesses, refine their arguments, and improve the overall quality of their work. According to Suke (1991), feedback derived from assessments plays a crucial role in enhancing learning outcomes. However, not all feedback is equally effective. As Sadler (2010) argues, simply telling students what is right or wrong is insufficient; feedback should also provide elaboration and guidance (Kulhavy & Stock, 1989). Moreover, the delivery mode of feedback whether direct or indirect, written or oral affects its effectiveness (Ferris, 2002). Ellis (2009) distinguishes between direct feedback, which offers explicit corrections, and indirect feedback, which prompts students to find and correct errors independently. While indirect feedback fosters long-term learning and critical thinking (Ferris, 2004), direct feedback may be more efficient for immediate clarification and reinforcement (Shute, 2008).

In recent years, technological advancements have introduced new approaches to delivering feedback, particularly through the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI). AI tools such as Grammarly, Chat GPT, and Turnitin have become widely adopted in academic settings due to their ability to provide instant, automated feedback on grammar, coherence, structure, and overall writing quality. AI-generated feedback can help students identify areas for improvement and enhance their self-revision skills. According to Ingley and Pack (2023), AI systems can act as writing instructors or proposal reviewers, guiding students through the writing process. Ferris (2002) also notes that such tools assist students in eliminating

unnecessary words, correcting grammar, and maintaining an academic tone. As these systems evolve, they are increasingly capable of offering feedback on more complex writing elements, such as argument structure and content relevance.

Several studies have explored the role of AI in supporting student academic writing. Astuti and Baysha (2024) found that AI-based feedback systems contribute to improvements in comprehension, motivation, and learning outcomes. Prihartono (2024), in a study focused on short story writing, demonstrated that AI-generated feedback effectively addressed structure, language use, and writing style. Despite these insights, the application of AI-generated feedback in extended academic writing tasks, particularly thesis writing, remains under-researched. Most existing literature focuses on general or short-form writing, leaving a gap in understanding how AI supports more complex academic endeavors. Recent international studies have further expanded this area. Jacobsen and Weber (2023) emphasized the importance of prompt quality, showing that Chat GPT could outperform novice feedback in clarity and depth when well-designed prompts were used. Escalante et al. (2023) reported that English language learners responded positively to AI feedback, showing comparable preferences between Chat GPT and human tutors. Chan et al. (2024) found that AI-assisted feedback improved not only writing performance but also student engagement and motivation. Meanwhile, Evmenova et al. (2024) highlighted AI's potential in complementing teacher feedback, especially for struggling writers, though the feedback sometimes lacked personalization. While these studies demonstrate the growing value of AI in educational settings, few have examined how students in EFL contexts engage with and respond to AI-generated feedback specifically during thesis writing.

This study seeks to address that gap by exploring how eighth-semester students in the English Education Study Program at the University of Bengkulu use AI-generated feedback during their thesis writing process. The study also investigates students' perceptions of the usefulness and effectiveness of such feedback in enhancing their academic writing.

Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design using a phenomenological approach to explore students' experiences in using AI-generated feedback during thesis writing. A phenomenological method was deemed appropriate because it

sought to understand the essence of lived experiences with a specific phenomenon in this case, AI-generated feedback. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), qualitative research enabled researchers to interpret meanings within natural settings, while van Manen (1990, 2014) emphasized the importance of reflecting on how a phenomenon was experienced by participants in real-world contexts.

The target population consisted of eighth-semester students from the English Education Study Program at the University of Bengkulu, who were in the process of writing their thesis and had experience using AI tools such as Chat GPT to receive feedback. The unit of analysis was individual students. Participants were selected through criterion sampling, which was commonly used in phenomenological studies to ensure the inclusion of individuals with direct experience of the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The main criterion was that the student had used AI, particularly generative tools like Chat GPT, to obtain feedback on their thesis drafts.

Six students were purposively selected, aligning with Dukes' (1984) suggestion that 3 to 10 participants were sufficient in phenomenological research to allow in-depth exploration. The selected students had diverse academic and extracurricular backgrounds, including involvement in national programs such as *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM)*, and Grade Point Averages ranging from 3.61 to 3.83. These characteristics suggested strong academic engagement and reflective capacity, making them suitable for providing insights into AI integration in academic writing.

Data collection was conducted through face-to-face semi-structured interviews and documentation. This combination allowed for methodological triangulation to increase the trustworthiness of findings. The interviews were guided by four core questions designed to explore how students requested, received, and responded to AI feedback, as well as how they perceived its effectiveness. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes, was conducted in person to promote open conversation, recorded with participants' consent, and transcribed verbatim.

To support and validate the interview data, documentation was collected in the form of thesis drafts and records of student interactions with AI tools (e.g., prompts and feedback exchanges). These documents served to confirm the students' reported behaviors and provided tangible examples of their engagement with AI-generated feedback. The use of multiple data sources enhanced the richness and reliability of the analysis.

Thematic analysis in this study was conducted by following the structured steps proposed by Creswell and Poth (2018), which are commonly used in phenomenological research. The process began with organizing and preparing the data, where interview transcripts and supporting documents were compiled, labeled, and systematically stored. This was followed by a phase of reading and familiarizing, in which the transcripts were read multiple times to develop a deep understanding of the data, accompanied by reflective note-taking to guide the coding process. The third stage was coding, using a deductive strategy grounded in pre-established theoretical frameworks, including types of feedback (Ferris, 2003), the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989), and learner autonomy (Little, 1991). Manual coding was applied to ensure close engagement with the data. In the fourth stage, codes were grouped into themes that represented key aspects of participants' experiences with AI-generated feedback. Finally, the themes were synthesized to construct a coherent narrative that captured the essence of the students' lived experiences, supported by direct quotations from participants. To ensure the credibility of the findings, participant checking was conducted, in which each participant was provided with a summary of the emerging themes derived from their interview data.

To ensure the credibility of the findings, participant checking was conducted. Each participant was shown a summary of the emerging themes from their interview and was asked to confirm whether the interpretation accurately reflected their experiences. Their feedback was incorporated into the final analysis.

In addition, methodological triangulation was employed by comparing interview data with supporting documentation. This cross-validation reduced potential bias and increased confidence in the consistency of the findings. Although the small and context-specific sample limited generalizability, the study maintained rigor through transparent procedures, rich description, and validation strategies.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

This section presents the key findings from the thematic analysis, combining results from both research questions: (1) How do students use AI-generated feedback in their thesis writing process? and (2) How do students perceive the use of AI-generated feedback in improving their thesis writing?. Within each theme, subthemes are discussed to highlight the most salient patterns, supported by direct participant

quotes, tables, and figures. These findings provide nuanced insights into how students engage with AI tools like Chat GPT and how they interpret the value and limitations of such feedback in the academic writing process.

A. How do students use AI-generated feedback in their thesis writing process?

Table 1: This is the research finding that answer RQ 1

Category	Description	Subthemes
Requesting Feedback	Students crafted prompts strategically, often sending excerpts instead of full texts.	- Used specific prompts - Avoided full drafts due to privacy
Receiving Feedback	AI responses were perceived as well-structured, often in bullet form.	- Suggestions on grammar, coherence, clarity - List of error corrections
Responding to Feedback	Students chose to apply, revise, verify, or ignore suggestions based on relevance and accuracy.	- Verified with supervisors - Cross-checked with sources

Students followed a three categories process when using AI to assist with thesis writing: requesting feedback, receiving suggestions, and responding to those suggestions. First, requesting Feedback. Participants demonstrated thoughtful strategies in crafting prompts. Most preferred to send selected excerpts rather than full documents due to privacy concerns. Prompts varied in specificity, ranging from simple grammar checks to complex rhetorical analysis. Some employed academic terminology to ensure higher-quality feedback. Second, receiving Feedback. Students reported that Chat GPT offered structured and helpful feedback, often in bullet point form, which made it easier to understand and apply. Last, responding to

Feedback. Responses varied. Some participants immediately applied the suggestions, while others revised prompts, cross-checked with academic sources, or consulted supervisors before incorporating changes.

B. How do students perceive the use of AI-generated feedback in improving their thesis writing?

Table 2 : This is the research finding that answer RQ 2

Category	Description	Subthemes
Positive	Students appreciated AI for its availability, structured feedback, and ability to self-revise before consulting humans.	- Accessibility - Clarity - Autonomy

Negative	feedback was misleading an too general in obtaining feedback.	- Inaccuracy - Lack of Depth - Too General

Positive Perceptions

Students generally viewed Chat GPT as a helpful support tool in their thesis writing. Key positive aspects is flexibility to accessible without scheduling constraints, clarity and structure of Feedback was typically well organized, and promoting autonomy of students used AI to self-reflect and improve before consulting human supervisors. Students showed a high degree of strategic autonomy, using AI as a preliminary tool while still validating suggestions through academic sources and supervisor input.

Negative Perceptions

Despite the benefits, students were cautious about fully trusting AI-generated feedback. Concerns included inaccuracy of students reported receiving misleading or fabricated content, particularly when seeking references. And superficiality of feedback was sometimes too generic, failing to address field-specific issues. These limitations reinforced students' belief that AI is best used as a complementary tool, not a replacement for human expertise.

These findings contribute to the understanding of how students integrate AI into academic writing workflows. The three categories usage process and the dual perceptions positive and negative reveal a sophisticated engagement with AI that blends technological affordances with human judgment. The findings suggest that AI tools, when used reflectively, can promote writing development without compromising academic integrity. Further research is needed to explore how this balance can be nurtured across disciplines and institutions, especially as AI continues to evolve in educational contexts.

Discussion

The results indicate that students were not passive recipients of AI assistance. Instead, they demonstrated autonomy and evaluative thinking in how they requested feedback by using strategic prompt design, received and interpreted suggestions from Chat GPT, and responded by adapting, verifying, or rejecting the AI-generated output. This active engagement aligns with the findings of Jacobsen and Weber (2023), who emphasized that the quality of AI-generated feedback depends heavily

on the structure and specificity of user prompts. Similarly, participants in this study reported that well-crafted prompts produced more relevant and helpful responses. Moreover, students expressed a balanced perception of AI feedback, acknowledging its advantages in efficiency and clarity while also being aware of its limitations in depth, disciplinary specificity, and factual accuracy. This nuanced perspective reflects the findings of Escalante et al. (2023), who found that students considered AI feedback a viable alternative to human feedback, especially due to its accessibility and immediacy. However, as also observed in the current study, participants noted that AI suggestions could lack contextual and disciplinary depth.

Additionally, the motivational benefits reported by participants such as reduced anxiety and increased confidence echo those found by Chan et al. (2024), who noted that AI-supported feedback enhanced students' emotional engagement and willingness to revise their writing. Nonetheless, consistent with the findings of Evmenova et al. (2024), this study found that AI feedback was not always personalized or aligned with students' specific academic needs. These insights reinforce the importance of critical engagement and the role of learner agency in navigating AI-generated suggestions.

From a theoretical perspective, students' selective and intentional engagement with Chat GPT reflects Benson (2011) and Little (1991) concept of learner autonomy, particularly their ability to self-direct learning processes. Furthermore, their strategic use of prompts aligns with Davis (1989) Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), as students perceived the tool to be useful and easy to use, especially when prompts yielded actionable feedback.

When receiving feedback, students benefited from structured, direct, and occasionally metalinguistic responses. This confirms Ferris (2002) classification of feedback types, particularly the effectiveness of direct and metalinguistic feedback in fostering writing development. The dialogic nature of Chat GPT, where it posed questions and elaborated on suggestions, also aligns with Vygotsky (1978) concept of scaffolding and learning within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). In this context, Chat GPT functioned not only as a corrective tool but also as a cognitive partner that encouraged reflection and revision an approach that mirrors Hattie and Timperley (2007) model of feedback levels. Students reported receiving both task-

level corrections (e.g., grammar, sentence structure) and process-level guidance (e.g., paragraph unity, logical flow).

Importantly, students were also selective in responding to AI feedback. They did not accept suggestions uncritically but evaluated them based on academic integrity, topic relevance, and alignment with institutional standards. Some even formulated hypotheses or sought clarification by consulting their supervisors or academic sources. These behaviors reflect higher-order thinking and self-regulation, consistent with Hattie and Timperley (2007) framework, which positions self-regulation as the highest level of effective feedback. At this level, learners monitor, evaluate, and adjust their learning strategies demonstrating autonomy, critical reflection, and goal-oriented behavior. The students in this study exhibited such traits by questioning the reliability of AI feedback and making informed decisions about whether to accept or reject it.

Conclusion and Suggestion

This study explored how students used and perceived AI-generated feedback, particularly from Chat GPT, during their thesis writing process. The findings revealed that students actively engaged with AI tools through three stages: requesting, receiving, and responding to feedback. Rather than relying passively, they demonstrated autonomy, critical thinking, and self-regulation. While students generally valued the flexibility, speed, and clarity of AI-generated feedback, they also expressed concerns regarding its accuracy, depth, and disciplinary relevance.

These insights hold practical implications. For students, AI tools can foster learner autonomy and metacognitive awareness when used critically. For educators, the findings suggest a need to integrate AI literacy and ethical feedback practices into academic writing instruction. As AI becomes more embedded in higher education, support should emphasize critical engagement over mere adoption.

Despite its contributions, this study is limited by its small, context-specific sample and exclusive focus on Chat GPT. It also relied on self-reported data, which may involve subjective bias. Future research could expand to diverse academic settings and explore how different AI tools affect writing development and student agency.

Future research should expand to larger and more diverse populations across institutions and disciplines. Comparative studies between AI-generated feedback and supervisor feedback, or between different AI tools, would also be valuable to

further understand effectiveness and trust. Longitudinal research could explore how students' perceptions and usage of AI evolve over time, particularly as they gain experience in academic writing. Moreover, there is potential to investigate how institutional policies and digital pedagogy influence the responsible use of AI in higher education writing contexts.

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