

STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF THE USE OF ChatGPT AS A WRITING ASSISTANT IN EFL CLASSROOM OF GRADE IX AT SMP NEGERI 10 PEMATANGSIANTAR

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Abstract

The rapid advancement of technology, particularly artificial intelligence (AI), has transformed English language learning, including the development of students' writing skills. ChatGPT, an AI-based language model, has increasingly been used as a writing assistant to help learners generate ideas, organize text structure, improve grammar, and expand vocabulary. This study aims to explore the perceptions of ninth-grade students at SMP Negeri 10 Pematangsiantar regarding the use of ChatGPT as a writing assistant in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach with a case study design, the study investigates students' perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEOU), guided by the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). Data were collected through open-ended essay questionnaires distributed to 28 students who had received direct instructional exposure to ChatGPT through guided writing activities. The data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model, including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that the majority of students hold positive perceptions of ChatGPT. In terms of PU, students reported that ChatGPT effectively supported idea generation, improved writing structure and grammar, expanded vocabulary, enhanced writing quality, and increased their confidence in writing English texts. ChatGPT was also perceived as helpful in overcoming writing difficulties and completing academic tasks more efficiently. Regarding PEOU, students stated that ChatGPT was easy to learn, accessible through mobile devices, and provided clear and understandable responses. Many students also felt comfortable using it independently without teacher supervision. Nevertheless, several challenges were noted, such as unstable internet connectivity and difficulties in formulating appropriate prompts. Overall, the results indicate that ChatGPT is well-accepted by students and has the potential to serve as an effective tool for supporting English writing instruction at the junior high school level. The study recommends guided and ethical integration of ChatGPT in EFL classrooms to prevent overreliance and promote critical engagement with AI-generated content.

Keywords: ChatGPT, student perception, writing assistant, EFL, Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of technology has significantly influenced almost every aspect of human life. Various digital innovations, ranging from the internet, mobile devices, to artificial intelligence (AI), have transformed the way people work, communicate, and learn. In education, technology has become an essential tool to support a more effective, flexible, and accessible learning process. It enables students and teachers to access information quickly, interact virtually, and use various interactive and adaptive learning applications according to their needs. Technological developments have also brought about major changes in teaching methods and how students learn. Learning is no longer limited to face-to-face classroom settings but can also be conducted online through various digital platforms. Technology allows more interactive, self-directed learning tailored to the individual needs of students. Learning applications, interactive videos, and artificial intelligence are now widely used to support language learning, reading, and writing. Writing is one of the essential skills in language learning because it not only reflects students' mastery of linguistic structures but also demonstrates their ability to organize

ideas and think critically. According to Harmer (2004), writing is a complex process involving planning, drafting, and revising, which demands more than linguistic ability alone. However, in practice, many students face challenges in writing, such as limited vocabulary, insufficient grammar knowledge, difficulty composing coherent paragraphs, and low self-confidence to express ideas in writing. These challenges often make students passive and reluctant to improve their writing skills independently without intensive guidance. Overall, Indonesian students' writing skills are generally categorized as low to moderate. Several studies have reported that students struggle to compose effective sentences, develop paragraphs, use appropriate vocabulary, and apply correct spelling and punctuation. Research at various educational levels, particularly in junior high schools, indicates that students' average writing scores fall within the "fair" to "poor" categories, typically ranging from 50 to 70. Although the Ministry of Education and Culture has not released specific national data on writing literacy at the elementary and junior high levels, a systematic review of hundreds of literacy studies (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2023) revealed that students' main difficulties lie in organizing content, using grammar correctly, and applying accurate spelling. This condition highlights the urgent need for concrete efforts to improve writing instruction, particularly through innovative approaches that bridge the gap between students' current abilities and the expected standards.

Good writing is measured not only by the quantity of students' written work but also by their ability to communicate ideas clearly, coherently, and in accordance with language rules. Brown (2001) states that good writing skills consist of five components: content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics. Similarly, Hyland (2003) emphasizes that good writing should follow a logical and orderly flow, enabling readers to understand the text easily. However, the reality shows that many junior high school students still struggle to meet these standards. They often copy model texts without understanding the process of writing their own, and many feel insecure or anxious when asked to write independently. Limited classroom time and insufficient teacher feedback further exacerbate this issue. At the same time, opportunities exist to address these challenges through the use of technology. Data shows that almost all ninth-grade students at SMP Negeri 10 Pematangsiantar own smartphones with internet access. These devices, often used for entertainment, can also serve as learning tools, particularly in developing writing skills. One relevant technology that aligns with students' needs is ChatGPT, an AI-powered tool that can act as a writing assistant by helping students organize ideas, construct sentences, improve grammar, and receive immediate feedback. In fact, teachers in North Sumatra have already begun utilizing AI in their teaching. For example, in July 2024, the North Sumatra Provincial Teacher Training Center held a workshop titled "Creating Differentiated Teaching Modules Using AI", attended by approximately 100 teachers from Medan and surrounding areas. Similarly, in October 2024, the English Language Education Program at UINSU collaborated with TEFLIN Sumut to conduct a workshop titled "Using AI in English Language Teaching", which introduced teachers to AI tools such as ChatGPT. These developments highlight the growing relevance of AI integration in schools.

ChatGPT, developed by OpenAI, is a language model designed to understand and generate text in various contexts. In English learning, particularly writing, ChatGPT has the potential to serve as a writing assistant that supports students in brainstorming ideas, developing outlines, correcting grammar, expanding vocabulary, and revising sentences. It also provides immediate feedback, which makes the writing process more efficient and reflective. In addition, students may feel more comfortable interacting with ChatGPT because it provides a judgment-free environment that reduces anxiety and encourages confidence. Nevertheless, teacher guidance remains essential to ensure that students use ChatGPT ethically and critically, rather than merely copying generated text. To better understand how students adopt such technology, the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) by Davis (1989) offers a relevant theoretical framework. TAM emphasizes two key constructs: Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU). In this context, PU refers to the extent to which students believe that ChatGPT improves their writing performance, while PEOU refers to the extent to which students consider ChatGPT easy to use. If students perceive ChatGPT as both useful and easy, they are more likely to adopt it actively. Prior research (Hasanah & Safitri, 2024) has shown that university students reported positive perceptions of ChatGPT, noting that it was easy to use, helped with writing ideas, structure, and grammar, and provided quick responses.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Students' Perception

Students' perceptions refer to learners' subjective interpretations, beliefs, and attitudes toward a specific educational tool, method, or experience in this case, their views on using ChatGPT as a writing assistant in EFL

classrooms. This study in this study, the focus of student perceptions analyzed was perceived usefulness, and perceived ease of use.

ChatGPT

ChatGPT is an artificial intelligence (AI)-based language model developed by OpenAI using GPT architecture. Through natural language processing (NLP), ChatGPT is capable of understanding and generating human-like text in various languages and contexts. As a writing assistant, ChatGPT helps with grammar correction, idea development, vocabulary selection, and text composition. In this study, ChatGPT was used as a writing assistant to help students with their English writing skills.

Writing assistant

A writing assistant is an AI-based tool that assists with writing by providing grammar corrections, vocabulary suggestions, and text structure. In EFL learning, this tool supports the improvement of writing skills. In this study, ChatGPT was used as a writing assistant.

EFL Classroom

An EFL classroom is a classroom where English is taught as a foreign language. The challenges include limited exposure to the language and differences in the structure of the mother tongue. In this research, the EFL classroom refers to ninth-grade students at SMP Negeri 10 Pematangsiantar.

METHOD

Design of the Research

This research employed a qualitative descriptive approach with a case study design. This approach was chosen because it enabled a detailed and systematic description of ninth-grade students' perceptions regarding the use of ChatGPT as a writing assistant in learning English as a foreign language at SMP Negeri 10 Pematangsiantar. The case study design allowed an in-depth exploration of students' perceptions in their real context. The main focus was to obtain an accurate description of the phenomenon under investigation. In this research, data were obtained through open-ended essay-style questionnaires, which allowed students to freely express their opinions and experiences. This method provided an opportunity to gather a variety of perspectives regarding the usefulness and ease of use of ChatGPT in helping students improve their writing skills.

Setting of the Research

This research was conducted at SMP Negeri 10 Pematangsiantar, located on Jln.Sisingamangaraja Kompleks Rindam I/BB, Kec. Siantar Sitalasari, Pematangsiantar, North Sumatra.

Subject of the Research

The subjects of this research were ninth-grade students of SMP Negeri 10 Pematangsiantar. According to Arikunto (2010), a research subject refers to individuals, groups, or objects that become the focus of attention. Creswell (2012) further explains that participants in a research study are individuals who provide data in the form of answers to survey questions, responses in interviews, or other instruments. In total, 28 students were purposively selected to represent the population of Grade IX. These students were considered appropriate subjects because they had direct experience in using ChatGPT during the learning process designed for this research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To reinforce the process of drawing and verifying conclusions, the students' responses were visualized through several diagrams. These diagrams show the distribution of positive and negative responses on the two main constructs of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), namely Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU), as well as a combination of the two. Presenting the data in visual form provides a clearer picture of the patterns that emerge so that the conclusions drawn are truly supported by valid data.

a. **Distribution of Positive and Negative Responses on the Perceived Usefulness (PU) Indicator**

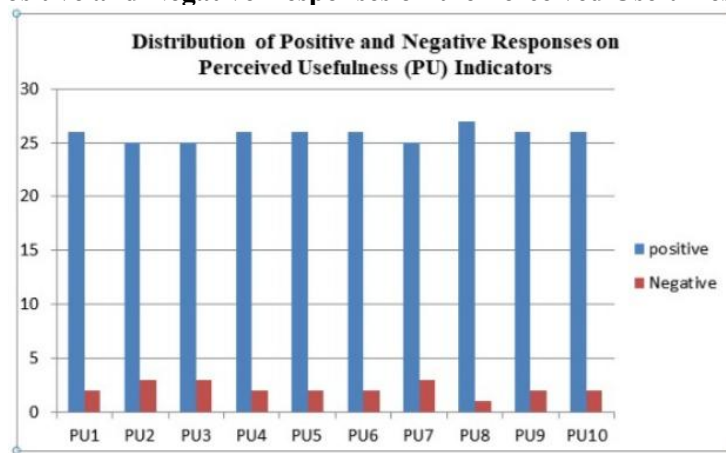


Figure 1 Distribution of Positive and Negative Responses on the Perceived Usefulness (PU)

Figure 1 shows the distribution of student responses on ten PU indicators. The results show that positive responses dominate all indicators, with a total of 25–27 responses per indicator. This indicates that most students agree that ChatGPT is useful in various aspects of writing, such as generating ideas, improving grammar, enriching vocabulary, and helping to revise writing. Meanwhile, negative responses appear in much smaller numbers, only about 1–3 per indicator, generally related to situations where ChatGPT's answers are considered inaccurate or not entirely in line with students' expectations. These findings confirm that ChatGPT is widely accepted as a useful tool in supporting students' writing skills.

b. **Distribution of Positive and Negative Responses on the Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU) Indicator**

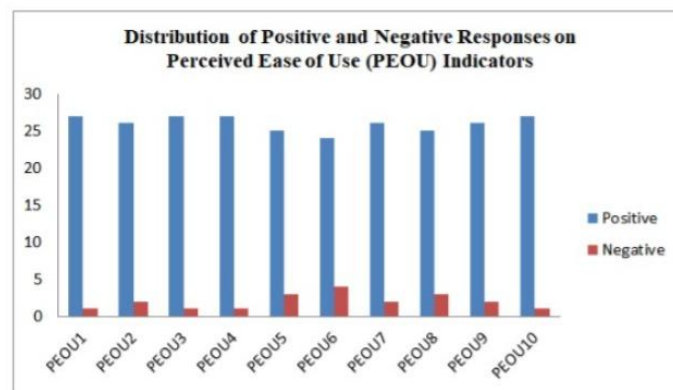


Figure 2 Distribution of Positive and Negative Responses on the Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU)

Figure 2 shows the distribution of student responses on ten PEOU indicators. As with PU, positive responses far outnumber negative responses on all indicators. Most students stated that ChatGPT was easy to access, simple to use, and practical to apply in writing tasks. Negative responses only appeared in small numbers, around 1–3 per indicator, which were mainly related to difficulties in giving commands (prompts) or understanding ChatGPT's answers. Thus, these data show that ChatGPT is not only considered useful, but also perceived as a user-friendly and efficient tool.

c. Overall Student Response to ChatGPT (PU and PEOU)

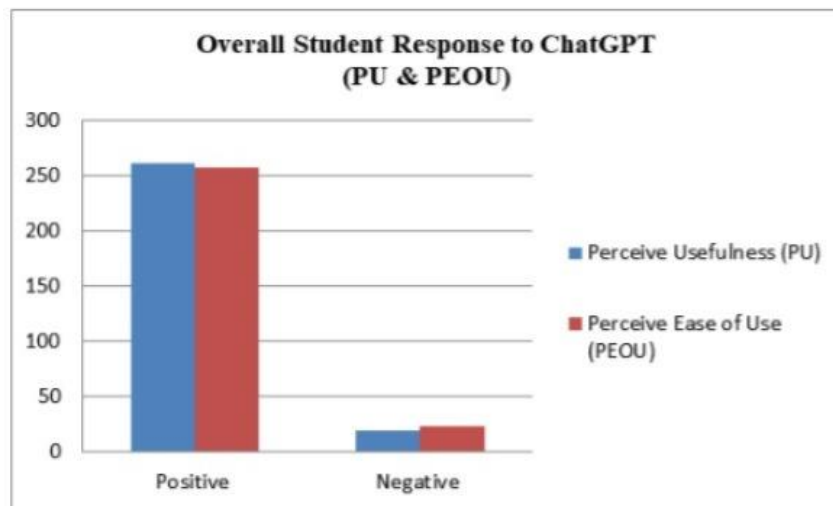


Figure 3 Overall Student Response to ChatGPT (PU and PEOU)

Figure 3 presents the combined responses from all PU and PEOU indicators. Out of a total of 560 responses, there were 518 positive responses and only 42 negative responses. The dominance of positive responses indicates that the majority of students accept ChatGPT as a useful and easy-to-use writing tool. The relatively small number of negative responses indicates that despite some challenges, these do not diminish the overall acceptance of ChatGPT. The results of the three diagrams show that positive responses are far more dominant than negative responses, both in PU and PEOU. This indicates that students accept ChatGPT as a useful and easy-to-use writing tool. The small number of negative responses provides additional insight that despite some shortcomings, the students' experiences are still clearly reflected in this research.

Findings

Based on the results of the analysis and findings presented in the previous section, it can be concluded that students' perceptions of the use of ChatGPT as a writing assistant in EFL learning tend to be positive. The majority of students consider ChatGPT useful in helping them generate ideas, improve the structure of their writing, enhance the quality of their writing, and support the development of their writing skills. In terms of ease of use, most students also consider ChatGPT easy to learn, efficient, and simpler than other tools, although there are still technical obstacles related to internet access and devices.

Table 1 Recapitulation of Students' Responses by Indicator

No.	Indicator	Positive	Negative	Total
1	PU-1	26	2	28
2	PU-2	25	3	28
3	PU-3	25	3	28
4	PU-4	26	2	28
5	PU-5	26	2	28
6	PU-6	26	2	28
7	PU-7	25	3	28
8	PU-8	27	1	28
9	PU-9	26	2	28
10	PU-10	26	2	28
11	PEOU-1	27	1	28
12	PEOU-2	26	2	28
13	PEOU-3	27	1	28
14	PEOU-4	27	1	28
15	PEOU-5	25	3	28

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No.	Indicator	Positive	Negative	Total
16	PEOU-6	24	4	28
17	PEOU-7	26	2	28
18	PEOU-8	25	3	28
19	PEOU-9	26	2	28
20	PEOU-10	27	1	28
TOTAL		518	42	560

The summary table above shows that a total of 560 data points were analyzed, consisting of 518 positive responses and 42 negative responses. This number shows that students' perceptions of the use of ChatGPT as a writing assistant in EFL classes tend to be very positive. On the Perceived Usefulness (PU) indicator, almost all students rated ChatGPT as useful, especially on the PU8 (Grammar Improvement) aspect, which received the highest positive response with 27 students stating that it was helpful. Meanwhile, negative responses still appeared in small numbers, for example in PU2 (Improving Writing Structure) and PU7 (Vocabulary Development) with 3 negative responses each, which were generally related to difficulties in understanding the suggestions provided.

In terms of Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU), positive trends were also very dominant. The PEOU1 (Learning to Use ChatGPT), PEOU3 (Interpreting ChatGPT Responses), PEOU4 (Frequency of Use), and PEOU10 (Simplicity Compared to Other Tools) indicators even reached 27 positive responses, indicating that students found ChatGPT easy to learn, clear, frequently used, and simpler than other tools. However, there were also technical obstacles that generated negative responses, especially in PEOU6 (Difficulties Experienced), with 4 students stating that they encountered obstacles due to unstable internet connection quality.

From this pattern of numbers, it can be concluded that ChatGPT's internal factors such as features, functions, and response quality generally receive strong positive ratings, with an average of more than 80% of students giving positive responses on almost all indicators. The obstacles that arise are more related to external factors, such as internet stability, the devices used, or students' learning habits. Thus, ChatGPT can be said to have strong potential to support students' writing skills, although its effectiveness remains influenced by technical conditions and users' readiness to utilize it. Overall, the data shows that ChatGPT has strong potential to support the writing learning process in EFL classes, with the caveat that its use still needs to be supervised by teachers to overcome technical and linguistic limitations.

DISCUSSION

This section discusses the research findings by relating them to the theory used and previous studies. The aim is not only to explain the results, but also to understand how students' perceptions of ChatGPT as a writing assistant can be placed within the conceptual framework and previous studies. From the aspect of Perceived Usefulness (PU), students assessed that ChatGPT helped them in several important ways, such as generating ideas, improving structure, and enhancing the quality of their writing. This is in line with the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989), which emphasizes that technology acceptance is influenced by the extent to which users believe the technology improves their performance. These findings support the research of Hasanah and Safitri (2024) and Kurniahtunnisa (2025), who also found that ChatGPT plays a role in supporting writing development, despite differences in context and educational level.

In terms of Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU), the majority of students stated that ChatGPT was relatively easy to use, especially when instructions were given clearly. However, there were still limitations such as unstable internet connections, unsupported devices, and difficulties in understanding how to write commands (prompts). This nuance shows that although PEOU conceptually supports technology acceptance, external factors remain the determining factor for its successful use in the classroom. This is in line with Johri's (2024) findings, which confirm that although AI can help academic skills, digital access factors still have a major influence on its effectiveness. In addition, aspects of motivation and self-confidence also emerged strongly in this study. Many students felt more motivated to write when they received support from ChatGPT because they felt more confident and helped in organizing their ideas or sentences. These findings are in line with Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which emphasizes the importance of a sense of competence in increasing intrinsic motivation. These results also support the research by Ahmad and Yamat (2020), which shows that digital technology can increase student motivation in English language learning. However, not all students experienced the same improvement; some remained cautious and preferred to rely on their own abilities. This can be explained by Expectancy-Value Theory (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002), which states that the use of technology is influenced by

beliefs about success and the extent to which users assess the importance of its use. One interesting finding is the emergence of mixed responses. Some students acknowledged the benefits of ChatGPT, but at the same time highlighted its limitations, such as overly general ideas or the need to double-check answers. This phenomenon has rarely been highlighted in previous studies, such as Jasmari (2024), which tended to emphasize the positive aspects. Thus, this study makes a new contribution by showing that the acceptance of technology among junior high school students is not absolute, but is still in the adjustment stage and is influenced by contextual factors. Overall, students' perceptions of ChatGPT are influenced by the benefits they perceive, ease of use, learning motivation, and external factors such as internet access and devices. These findings are consistent with previous theories and research, but also add a new perspective with the presence of mixed responses. This shows that although ChatGPT has the potential to support writing learning in junior high school, its use cannot stand alone, but still requires teacher guidance, infrastructure support, and student awareness to use it in a balanced manner.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings from questionnaire responses of 28 students from SMP Negeri 10 Pematangsiantar, it can be concluded that students generally have a positive perception of using ChatGPT as a writing assistant in English language learning. Most students believe that this technology helps them generate ideas, organize the structure of their writing, and improve the quality of the texts they produce.

In terms of Perceived Usefulness (PU), ChatGPT is considered very helpful in finding ideas. A total of 25 students stated that ChatGPT was able to provide inspiration when they ran out of ideas, making the writing process smoother. This shows that ChatGPT can serve as an effective trigger for creativity.

In addition to ideas, ChatGPT also helps improve the structure of writing. Students said that their texts became more coherent and organized after following the suggestions provided. Thus, ChatGPT not only serves as a source of ideas, but also as a guide in organizing writing to make it easier to understand.

In terms of quality, most students stated that their writing became more complete, detailed, and interesting. ChatGPT was considered capable of adding variety to vocabulary and providing appropriate sentence alternatives, thereby helping students enrich the content of their writing while improving the clarity of their expression.

In terms of Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU), the majority of students found ChatGPT relatively easy to use, especially when the instructions given were clear and specific. A total of 26 students stated that they did not experience any significant difficulties. However, obstacles were still encountered, such as unstable internet connections, device limitations, and initial confusion in writing commands (prompts).

Another interesting finding is the mixed response. Some students acknowledge the benefits of ChatGPT but also criticize its limitations, such as overly general ideas or answers that need to be double-checked. This shows that students do not rely entirely on ChatGPT, but continue to critically evaluate the results provided.

Overall, it can be concluded that ChatGPT has great potential as a writing assistant for junior high school students. Although the prevailing perception is positive, its effectiveness is still influenced by external factors such as internet access, devices, and student readiness. Therefore, the role of teachers, infrastructure support, and student awareness to use this technology wisely are key to ensuring that ChatGPT can truly support writing learning in EFL classrooms.

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