



# The Use of AI as an Assistant of University Students for their Research Proposal

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## Abstract

This research examines the role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) as an assistant for university students in drafting their research proposals. Addressing challenges such as ineffective research strategies, time management issues, and writing difficulties, the study explores how AI tools enhance productivity and support academic writing. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected through questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and observations of university students utilizing AI tools like Grammarly and ChatGPT. The findings reveal that AI tools significantly aid students in generating ideas, structuring proposals, and refining their writing. However, challenges include ethical concerns, the risk of over-reliance on AI, and limitations in addressing complex academic requirements. By understanding students' perceptions and experiences, this research highlights the potential of AI to complement traditional academic support systems, fostering more efficient and effective research proposal development.

**Keywords:** *Artificial Intelligence, Research Proposal, Academic Writing*

## Introduction

To finish the study of bachelor's degree (S1, students must write a research article. Before writing the research article, the students must present the proposal research first. One of components of the research proposal is writing. Writing is an essential skill and one of the linguistic competencies that has profoundly influenced human work (Muchyidin, 2023). A research proposal is one of scientific literatures written in an academic writing. The research proposal is a critical phase in a university student's academic journey, requiring substantial effort, intellectual rigor, and careful planning (Nguyen et al., 2024).

Research proposals are critical academic documents that outline a planned study, communicating the research problem and proposed methods (Jackowski & Leggett, 2015). Traditionally, this process has been highly dependent on independent research, note-taking, and structured writing, often with minimal support beyond faculty advisors (Hazwani, 2024). One of aspects noticed is writing, especially academic writing.

Despite its importance, the research proposal process is not without challenges. Students frequently struggle with formulating effective research strategies, organizing their thoughts coherently, managing time efficiently, and adhering to academic writing standards. This often leads to stress, procrastination, and suboptimal outcomes in the final proposal (Khalifa & Albadawy, 2024).

Recent advancements in digital technology have significantly transformed the academic research and writing landscape (Malik et al., 2023). The availability of online databases, digital writing tools, and collaborative platforms has improved access to information, allowing students to gather data more efficiently and explore a broader range of sources. However, this abundance of information has also introduced new challenges, including the need for digital literacy, source verification, and plagiarism prevention.

"According to a survey by Tirto and Jakpat, 87 percent of Indonesian students use AI to do their assignments. This is something that needs to be noted," said Meutya Hafid at UGM, Wednesday (11/12/2024). As students navigate the vast array of online resources, they are increasingly expected to demonstrate critical thinking skills and ensure academic rigor in their writing (Jebrel et al., n.d.).

In recent years, the development of artificial intelligence (AI) has revolutionized the academic writing process. AI tools, powered by natural language processing (NLP) and machine learning (ML), are designed to assist students with various aspects of research writing. To enhance clarity, the research should explicitly identify other AI tools analyzed, such as Grammarly, QuillBot, Zotero/Mendeley, and Elicit. These tools can offer grammar and style checks, plagiarism detection, paraphrasing, and even content generation (Al-Sofi, 2024).

AI writing assistants have gained significant attention as potential solutions to the challenges faced by students, especially those struggling with writer's block, organization, and adherence to academic writing styles. Some advanced AI tools also assist in brainstorming, outlining, and drafting, thus potentially saving students valuable time in the early stages of writing (Miao et al., 2023).

Despite the growing use of AI in academic contexts, there are limitations and ethical concerns surrounding these tools (Goodfellow, 2024). While AI can support students by identifying errors and suggesting improvements, concerns about plagiarism, over-reliance on AI, and the potential loss of critical thinking skills

persist. Moreover, the applicability of AI tools to the specific demands of research writing—such as literature reviews, data analysis, and research methodologies—remains underexplored. The complexity and unique requirements of research demand AI systems tailored to address the distinct challenges of academic writing in this domain.

This study seeks to fill this gap by investigating the role of AI as an assistant for university students in writing their research proposals. The study examines qualitative data from interviews, questionnaires, and observations conducted at Universitas Islam Kadiri Kediri. The research aims to evaluate how students perceive AI as a writing aid, explore the influence of AI tools on the development of their proposals, and identify which tools are most commonly used.

By examining the strengths and limitations of AI in the context of research proposal writing, this research will provide insights into the benefits and challenges of integrating AI into academic writing. This study is particularly novel in its focus on AI's role in the initial stages of research writing, an area that remains under-explored in the current literature.

## **Method**

This study employed a qualitative approach to explore university students' perceptions and experiences with AI tools in writing their research proposals. As Creswell (2018) suggested, qualitative research aimed to understand participants' perspectives in their natural settings, which aligned with the goal of investigating the role of AI in academic writing assistance. The research was conducted at the Universitas Islam Kadiri Kediri, which was recognized for its academic achievements and active participation in national programs like *Kampus Merdeka*. The university's diverse student body and engagement with educational innovations provided an ideal setting for the study.

The participant selection criteria extended beyond merely choosing students who had used AI tools. Participants were selected based on their academic background, ensuring they had prior experience in writing research proposals and had actively engaged with AI tools for academic purposes. The study also considered diversity in academic disciplines to capture a broader perspective on AI utilization. Ethical considerations were carefully addressed through informed consent procedures, where participants were briefed about the study's objectives, their voluntary participation, and data confidentiality measures.

The questionnaire was structured into multiple sections, covering demographic information, frequency and purpose of AI tool usage, perceived benefits and challenges, and its impact on academic writing skills. Observations were conducted in academic settings, focusing on students' real-time interactions

with AI tools, including how they generated content, edited AI-generated text, and verified the accuracy of AI outputs. To ensure reliability and validity, the research instruments underwent expert review and pilot testing before full implementation. This study was conducted over a seven-month period, from **March to October 2024**, allowing sufficient time for data collection and analysis.

The sample consisted of 30 participants from the 7th semester, selected using purposeful sampling, a technique recommended by Creswell (2018) for choosing participants who had used AI tools like Grammarly and ChatGPT during their research writing. This sampling method ensured that the participants could offer relevant and in-depth insights into the research topic. Data were collected through a combination of questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and observations.

The researcher administered the qualitative data regarding the use of AI tools. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to provide a deeper understanding of students' personal experiences with these tools, and observations were made to capture real-time interactions with AI tools during the writing process.

To ensure the reliability of the findings, data triangulation was employed by combining the data from the questionnaires, interviews, and observations (Gerring, 2024). This approach validated the results by cross-checking insights from multiple sources and offered a comprehensive understanding of AI's role in research proposal writing. The data analysis involved coding and thematic analysis. The questionnaire data were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively to identify usage patterns and preferences. Interview transcripts were examined to uncover key themes related to students' experiences with AI tools.

The observational data were categorized to identify interaction patterns and the frequency of AI tool usage. This process provided a detailed understanding of how students engaged with AI tools during their research -writing process.

The research proceeded in three stages: the distribution of the questionnaire, conducting semi-structured interviews with selected students, and observing their use of AI tools in real-time. This multi-method approach ensured a thorough exploration of how AI tools were integrated into the research proposal writing process.

## **Results**

### ***Data of Interviews***

A seventh-semester student shared their experience with AI tools in academic writing. While AI wasn't used to write the research proposal, it was found helpful for brainstorming and clarifying ideas.

#### **Reasons for Using AI in Research Proposal Writing**

Initially encountered while looking for ways to make academic tasks easier, AI tools—especially for idea generation—helped organize thoughts and express them more clearly.

#### **AI Tools Used in Research Proposal Writing**

The student mentioned that AI tools, particularly ChatGPT, improved confidence by assisting in connecting ideas and paragraphs. However, challenges included incomplete or imprecise answers from the AI, which required verification. AI struggled with research-specific terminology and sometimes provided responses that didn't fully match the needs, necessitating double-checking information elsewhere.

#### **Challenges and Limitations of AI in Proposal Writing**

Despite these limitations, the student acknowledged AI's importance for idea generation but emphasized that it couldn't replace the depth of research and personal insight required for academic writing. The student recommended using AI for brainstorming but stressed the importance of verifying information before including it in academic work. They rated AI tools' overall value for research proposal support at seven out of ten, noting their usefulness for idea generation but limitations in providing reliable research.

#### **The Impact of AI on Students' Academic Skills**

Another student, initially skeptical about AI, later found it beneficial for tasks like idea generation and vocabulary enhancement. Using tools such as ChatGPT, QuillBot, and Grammarly helped improve the academic quality of writing and boosted confidence, especially with sophisticated vocabulary. However, challenges included difficulty in matching the context and generating results aligned with specific requirements. AI sometimes needed rewording or clarification to meet the user's needs and may not fully understand complex academic concepts without proper guidance.

Reflecting on the ethical implications, the student believed that AI should be seen as a helpful tool rather than a replacement for critical thinking and writing skills. Although AI tools have limitations, they rated their overall value in supporting the research proposal at Eight out of ten, advising others to use AI cautiously and not rely on it entirely. Another student found AI particularly useful for idea generation during the research process, noting that it helped overcome

writer's block. Despite challenges like difficulty verifying references, the student supported AI for academic purposes, seeing it as a tool for generating ideas but cautioned against overreliance. They rated AI tools at nine out of ten for supporting their research proposal writing.

**Data of Questionnaire**

The respondents of the questionnaire were students from various semesters, providing a range of perspectives on the use of AI tools in academic writing. The respondents represented different experience levels, offering valuable insights into how students across semesters interact with AI tools like ChatGPT and Grammarly.

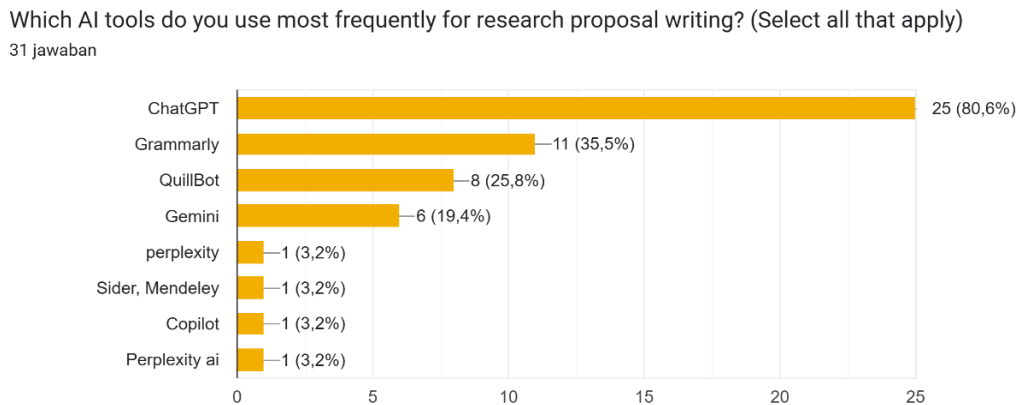


Figure 1: The most used AI

The data reveals that **ChatGPT** is the most widely used AI tool for research proposal writing, chosen by **80.6% of students**, followed by **Grammarly (35.5%)** and **QuillBot (25.8%)**, which are valued for grammar correction and paraphrasing. Other tools like Gemini, Perplexity AI, and Mendeley are less frequently used, highlighting students' preference for versatile, user-friendly tools that directly enhance writing quality. These tools were generally familiar to most students, with a small group reporting being somewhat familiar, indicating that while AI tools are widely recognized, some students may still need additional exposure or training.

Regarding ease of use, responses varied from very easy to very difficult, though many students found the tools somewhat easy to use. This suggests that while AI tools are generally accessible, the ease of use can depend on both the specific tool being used and the user's familiarity with technology. In terms of

satisfaction, most respondents expressed a high level of satisfaction with the outputs generated by AI tools, although a few students remained neutral, possibly due to unmet expectations or specific concerns with AI-generated content.

Trust in AI tools was generally moderate, with most respondents expressing cautious optimism. Many students indicated that they trust AI tools for academic purposes, though some expressed reservations, particularly regarding the accuracy and relevance of AI-generated suggestions. This suggests that while students are open to using AI in academic writing, they remain cautious about its reliability and are likely to cross-check the information AI provides.

Most respondents reported that using AI tools had positively impacted the quality of their research proposal writing, with only a few stating that AI tools had no effect or worsened their work. Additionally, many students found AI tools to be time-saving, with some respondents reporting significant time savings. A small group remained neutral, indicating that for some, the efficiency gains from AI tools may not be as apparent.

What is your primary purpose for using AI tools in writing your thesis proposal?

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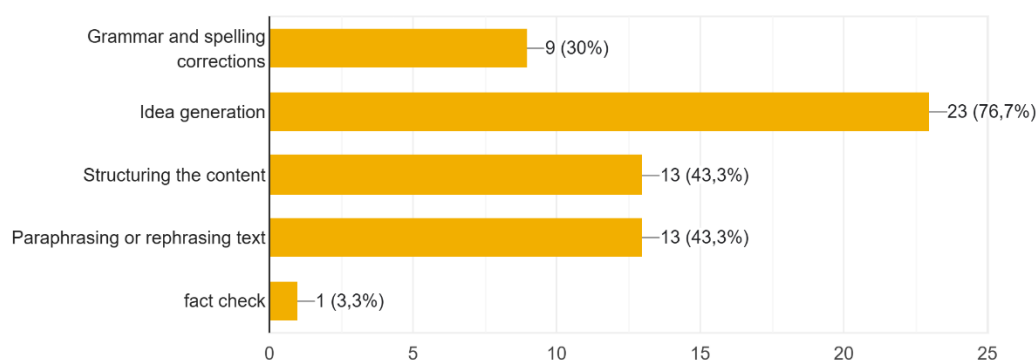


Figure 2: The reasons of using AI

The chart shows that **idea generation** is the primary purpose for using AI tools in thesis proposal writing, chosen by **76.7% of students**. Other significant uses include **structuring content** and **paraphrasing** (43.3% each), while **grammar corrections** (30%) and **fact-checking** (3.3%) are less common. This highlights AI's key role in creativity and content organization over detailed verification tasks.

The questionnaire respondents included students from various semesters, allowing for a diverse range of perspectives on AI usage in academic writing. Their experience levels varied, offering valuable insights into how students interact with AI tools such as ChatGPT and Grammarly at different stages of their academic

journey. The findings indicate that **ChatGPT is the most widely used AI tool for research proposal writing**, chosen by **80.6% of students**, followed by **Grammarly (35.5%)** for grammar correction and **QuillBot (25.8%)** for paraphrasing.

Other tools, such as **Gemini, Perplexity AI, and Mendeley**, are used less frequently, highlighting a preference for AI tools that are user-friendly and directly enhance writing quality. While most students found AI tools relatively easy to use, some faced difficulties, suggesting that usability depends on the tool and the user's familiarity with technology. Satisfaction levels were generally high, though some students remained neutral due to unmet expectations or concerns over AI-generated content.

**Trust in AI tools was moderate**, with many students expressing cautious optimism; while AI is viewed as helpful, concerns remain regarding accuracy and reliability. The majority of respondents acknowledged a positive impact on their research proposal writing, particularly in terms of **idea generation (76.7%)**, content structuring, and paraphrasing (43.3% each). However, fewer students used AI for grammar corrections (30%) or fact-checking (3.3%), suggesting that AI plays a stronger role in creativity and organization than in detailed verification tasks.

Additionally, many students reported that AI tools helped them save time, though a small group felt the efficiency gains were negligible. **Regarding critical thinking, students had mixed opinions**, with some believing AI fosters analytical skills, while others remained neutral. Patterns of AI dependency also varied; some students admitted to frequent reliance on AI tools, whereas others maintained a more balanced approach. Ultimately, ChatGPT and Grammarly emerged as the most preferred tools due to their **accuracy, affordability, and ease of use**, reflecting students' priorities when integrating AI into their academic work.

Finally, students indicated a positive influence of AI tools on critical thinking, with many believing that these tools somewhat or strongly promote critical thinking. However, some respondents remained neutral, suggesting that not all students perceive a significant intellectual impact from using AI. In terms of dependency, usage patterns showed varied levels of reliance, with some students admitting to regular reliance on AI tools, while others noted they seldom or never felt overly dependent. The preferred tools were mainly ChatGPT and Grammarly, with features such as accuracy, affordability, and ease of use being the most valued by the students.



### ***Data of Observation***

This observation study provides valuable insights into how students utilize AI tools during the process of working on their research proposals. Eighteen key questions were posed to assess various aspects of their interaction with these tools, capturing behaviors, preferences, and outcomes.

Students were observed using AI tools for diverse purposes, including brainstorming ideas, structuring their research proposals, checking grammar and spelling, and performing citation or plagiarism checks. The findings indicate that many students actively engaged with AI tools throughout their work sessions. Repeated references to these tools during their workflow suggest that they serve as continuous support rather than a one-time aid.

Confidence and satisfaction emerged as notable themes, with several students appearing confident while using AI tools and satisfied with the outputs they received. These tools were particularly relied upon for major portions of research work, showcasing their growing importance in academic writing. However, some students encountered difficulties or expressed frustrations, highlighting areas where usability or trust in AI tools could be improved.

Interestingly, while many students followed AI-generated suggestions to enhance their work, others explored alternatives, reflecting a balanced approach to integrating AI into their academic routines. The data also revealed that students trusted AI tools to varying degrees, often depending on the specific task or feature in question. Additionally, the observation showed that students were not entirely dependent on AI tools, with some using them strategically alongside manual efforts.

Overall, this study sheds light on the nuanced ways students adopt AI tools in academic writing. It highlights both the benefits, such as increased efficiency and support, and the challenges, such as trust and usability. These findings emphasize the importance of designing user-friendly and reliable AI tools that can seamlessly integrate into students' academic workflows.

### **Discussion**

The integration of AI tools in academic writing has become a significant trend among university students which are found by August et al. (2023), as reflected in the data gathered from interviews, questionnaires, and observations. The respondents, representing various experience levels, revealed a complex relationship with AI tools like ChatGPT and Grammarly, demonstrating both their usefulness and limitations. Most students were familiar with AI tools, with a majority acknowledging their benefits in tasks such as brainstorming, grammar correction, and idea generation.

However, as indicated in the interviews, students highlighted that while AI tools are useful for organizing thoughts and clarifying ideas, they are not flawless. Challenges such as incomplete or imprecise answers, difficulty in handling complex terminology, and the need for verification were common concerns. These findings align with research by Khalifa & Albadawy (2024), who argue that AI tools are valuable for supporting academic writing but should not be relied upon as the sole source of information.

Students also expressed moderate trust in AI tools, reflecting a cautious approach to their use (Kim et al., 2024). The data indicated that many students trust AI tools for general tasks, such as grammar correction and idea generation, but remain skeptical about their reliability when it comes to more complex academic tasks. This cautious optimism mirrors findings by Safrai & Orwig (2024), who reported that while students appreciate the convenience of AI tools, they are wary of their accuracy and often cross-check the information provided. This suggests that AI tools can serve as useful aids in academic writing, but students are still learning to critically assess the outputs they generate.

The influence of AI tools on critical thinking also emerged as a notable theme (Tang et al., 2024). While most respondents believed that AI tools somewhat or strongly promote critical thinking, some remained neutral, suggesting that AI's impact on intellectual engagement is not universally perceived. This reflects a broader discussion in the literature on the role of AI in education. For example, studies by Golan et al. (2023) found that AI tools can encourage critical thinking when used effectively, but over-reliance can limit students' engagement with deeper analytical processes. The questionnaire data supported this by showing that while AI tools helped with structuring ideas and generating content, they did not necessarily foster the depth of analysis required for academic research.

From the perspective of tool preferences, students frequently turned to ChatGPT and Grammarly, noting their ease of use and overall effectiveness. These findings resonate with observations from previous research, which highlighted the importance of user-friendly interfaces in ensuring the adoption of AI tools by students (Duymaz & Tekin, 2023). Interestingly, despite the widespread use of AI tools, the observation data suggested that students did not become entirely dependent on them.

While some students used AI tools as continuous support throughout their writing process, others balanced AI suggestions with manual work, indicating a strategic approach to AI integration. This observation underscores the importance

of fostering a balanced relationship with AI tools, ensuring that students retain control over their academic work while benefiting from the efficiency that AI provides.

The overall impact of AI tools on the quality and time-efficiency of academic writing was generally positive (Nguyen et al., 2024). Most students reported that AI tools improved the quality of their research proposals, helping them to refine ideas and structure their arguments more effectively. This finding was consistent with the survey results, where many respondents noted significant time savings.

However, it is essential to recognize that AI tools, while helpful, cannot replace the critical research and personal insight required for research writing. As one respondent noted, AI tools are best used for brainstorming and generating ideas, but the final product must be grounded in thorough research and critical thinking. This conclusion aligns with recommendations from earlier studies, which caution against over-reliance on AI tools for academic writing, emphasizing that they should serve as complements rather than substitutes for human expertise (Ersöz & Engin, 2024).

While AI tools have proven to be valuable aids in the academic writing process, their limitations cannot be overlooked. Students must use these tools judiciously, relying on their strengths for idea generation and grammar correction while remaining critical of their outputs. As AI technology continues to evolve, it is crucial to develop tools that are not only user-friendly but also reliable and capable of handling more complex academic tasks. Future research should focus on exploring the long-term effects of AI on critical thinking and academic writing, as well as the ethical considerations surrounding its use in educational settings.

## **Conclusion**

This study concludes that AI tools play a significant role in assisting university students with research proposal writing, offering a range of benefits that make the process smoother and more efficient. Tools like ChatGPT and Grammarly have proven particularly helpful in brainstorming ideas, refining thoughts, and improving grammar and structure. Many students reported that these tools helped them overcome challenges such as writer's block and boosted their confidence in organizing their work.

However, while AI tools provide valuable support, they are not without limitations. Students often had to verify the accuracy of AI-generated content, particularly when dealing with complex academic terminology or nuanced research topics. These findings suggest that AI tools are best used as aids rather than replacements for critical thinking and research.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This research acknowledges some limitations. The study focused on a specific group of students from one university, which may limit its broader applicability. Additionally, the qualitative nature of the study provided rich insights but may not capture all possible perspectives. Future research could expand on these findings by including more diverse participants and examining how AI tools impact academic writing across various disciplines. Such studies could offer a clearer understanding of how AI tools can be optimized for educational use.

### **Recommendations for Educators and AI Developers**

Based on these insights, it is recommended that educators integrate AI literacy into academic programs. Teaching students how to effectively and ethically use AI tools could enhance their academic writing while ensuring they remain critical and reflective users. Furthermore, developers of AI tools should work toward addressing current limitations, such as improving the tools' ability to handle subject-specific terminology and ensuring the reliability of their outputs. By bridging these gaps, AI tools can better serve students as reliable companions in their academic journeys. Ultimately, this study highlights the potential of AI to transform academic writing when used thoughtfully and responsibly.

### **Final Thoughts**

One unexpected finding from this study was that while AI tools significantly aid students in research proposal writing, their impact varies based on individual experience and discipline. Contrary to the assumption that AI universally enhances writing efficiency, some students struggled with AI-generated content that lacked contextual accuracy, particularly in complex academic fields. For instance, AI tools like ChatGPT were highly effective for brainstorming and structuring content but often provided overly generalized or misleading information when dealing with technical or research-specific terminology.

This suggests that AI tools, while beneficial, are not infallible and require students to engage in critical evaluation rather than relying on them as absolute authorities. Additionally, the tendency of some students to overuse AI for sentence construction raised concerns about potential reductions in original thought and analytical depth, highlighting the need for a balanced approach to AI-assisted learning.

The practical implications of these findings emphasize the necessity for AI literacy in higher education. Integrating AI education into university curricula can help students develop critical awareness of AI capabilities and limitations, ensuring they use these tools as supplements rather than replacements for

intellectual effort. In STEM disciplines, where precision and factual accuracy are crucial, AI tools need refinement to handle domain-specific language accurately. In contrast, in the humanities and social sciences, AI's role in argument development and critical discourse must be further explored.

To enhance AI's reliability, developers should focus on improving factual accuracy, refining paraphrasing mechanisms, and incorporating discipline-specific customization. Theoretically, this study aligns with constructivist learning principles, suggesting that AI should serve as a scaffold for knowledge construction rather than an automated solution. By strengthening the connection between AI and education, these insights contribute to the ongoing discourse on how technology can support, rather than replace, human cognition in academic writing.

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