

Students' Perception of ChatGPT Use in Thesis Proposals Writing at a Pesantren-Based University

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Abstract

This study investigates students' perceptions of use ChatGPT for thesis proposal writing within a pesantren-based university in East Java, Indonesia. A quantitative survey design was employed involving 20 seventh-semester students from the English Education Department. Data were collected through a 20-item Likert-scale questionnaire adapted from a validated instrument and analyzed using descriptive statistics. The study examined three constructs: perception of the use of ChatGPT, the benefits of use, and challenges of the use of ChatGPT. The results demonstrate a significant degree of student acceptance, particularly regarding ChatGPT's usefulness in generating ideas, improving grammar, and organizing writing structure. These results demonstrate that students meaningfully integrate the tool into their academic writing process. However, students also reported challenges related to maintaining originality, avoiding dependency, and ensuring academic appropriateness. Notably, concerns about content accuracy were less dominant than issues related to ethical considerations, formatting standards, and academic conventions. The results show that students in this educational context use ChatGPT critically and responsibly, positioning it as a supportive aid rather than a substitute for their own writing ability.

Keywords

ChatGPT; Pesantren-Based University; Students' Perception; Thesis Proposal Writing

INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth of artificial intelligence (AI) has profoundly altered educational practices, particularly in higher education. One of the most prominent AI tools is ChatGPT Wen & Wang (2023), which has been widely used by students to support academic writing activities. Its ability to generate ideas, improve grammar, and assist in structuring texts has made it a popular tool in writing tasks, including thesis proposal writing (Tlili et al., 2023). Academic writing remains a foundational pillar of tertiary education, the integration of ChatGPT presents both opportunities and challenges in

supporting students' writing processes (Ramli et al., 2024).

Prior research have emphasized the growing role of ChatGPT in academic writing. Research by Črček & Patekar (2023) found that students frequently use ChatGPT for idea generation, paraphrasing, and proofreading, although ethical concerns remain. Similarly, Strobl et al. (2024) demonstrated that ChatGPT can enhance students' awareness of linguistic accuracy and writing structure. In the Indonesian context, Salwa & Tyas (2024) reported that Students perceive ChatGPT as a valuable scaffold that enhances both their writing productivity and engagement. Furthermore, Hasanah &

Nurcholis (2024) revealed that while students perceive ChatGPT as helpful, concerns about dependency and originality persist. Edi et al. (2025) also emphasized that ChatGPT as the tool's capacity to bolster ideation and self-efficacy is often tempered by concerns regarding academic dishonesty and ethical implications.

Despite these findings, existing literature have concentrated on generic academic discourse or language learning contexts, with limited attention to thesis proposal writing as a specific academic genre. Additionally, prior research predominantly examines general university settings, without considering institutions that integrate moral and religious values into academic practices. This creates a research gap in understanding how students perceive ChatGPT within a more value-based educational environment, particularly pesantren-based university located in east java.

Moreover, previous studies tend to employ qualitative or mixed-method approaches, leaving a need for more focused quantitative evidence that measures students' perceptions systematically. In this regard, perception can be analyzed through observable and measurable constructs, including perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and perceived challenges, which are essential in understanding students' acceptance of technology in academic writing.

Based on this gap, the main problem of this study is to investigate students' perceptions of the use of ChatGPT in thesis proposal writing. This study specifically focuses on measuring

how students' perception of the uses, benefits, and challenges of ChatGPT in supporting their writing thesis proposals process.

The novelty of this study lies in three aspects. First, it specifically examines ChatGPT use in thesis proposal writing, which requires higher-order academic skills compared to general writing tasks. Second, it focuses on students in a pesantren-based university, where academic activities are influenced by ethical and moral values. Third, this study employs a quantitative approach to provide systematically measurable evidence of students' perceptions. Specifically, this can be examined in terms of perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and perceived challenges. Unlike many previous studies that rely on qualitative or mixed-method designs, this study emphasizes statistical description to generate clearer patterns and generalizable insights within the specific context of a pesantren-based university.

Grounded in the theoretical framework and prior empirical studies, this research hypothesizes that students demonstrate a positive perception of ChatGPT in facilitating the process of thesis proposal writing, particularly in terms of usefulness and efficiency. However, it is also hypothesized that students experience challenges related to maintaining originality of ChatGPT-generated content.

Therefore, this study aims to examine students' perceptions regarding the use of ChatGPT in the process of thesis proposal writing, focusing on its perceived usefulness, benefits, and

challenges in a pesantren-based university context.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a quantitative survey design to investigate students' perceptions of the use of ChatGPT in thesis proposal writing. The quantitative approach was selected to obtain systematically measurable data and to identify general patterns of students' perceptions through numerical analysis. The study was grounded in The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) highlights perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness as the primary determinants of technology acceptance. In addition, this study incorporated perceived challenges as a complementary variable to capture potential difficulties experienced by students when using ChatGPT.

The study was carried out at a pesantren-based university in East Java, Indonesia. The participants were seventh-semester students from the English Education Department who had experience using ChatGPT in writing their thesis proposals. The total population consisted of 20 students, and due to the relatively small number, This study employed a total sampling technique, whereby all members of the population were included as the research sample. This approach ensured that the data fully represented the target group relevant to the study.

Data were gathered through a structured questionnaire comprising 20 items, measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). The questionnaire

was adapted from a previous study by Alkamel & Alwagieh (2024), which reported a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.805, indicating a satisfactory level of reliability. The instrument was organized into three main constructs: Students' perception of the use of ChatGPT, the benefits of the use of ChatGPT, and challenges of the use of ChatGPT. These constructs were designed to measure students' perceptions of ChatGPT in supporting their thesis proposal writing process.

The data collection process was administered online through Google Forms to facilitate efficient and accessible participation. Students were asked to respond to the questionnaire based on their actual experiences in using ChatGPT during thesis proposal writing. Prior to completing the questionnaire, participants were informed of the study's purpose and assured that their responses would remain confidential and be used exclusively for academic purposes.

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques with the assistance of SPSS. The analysis included frequency and percentage to describe the distribution of responses, as well as mean and standard deviation to identify central tendencies and variability. To interpret the results, mean scores were categorized into five levels, ranging from very low to very high. Additionally, The following presents a descriptive interpretation of the mean scores adapted from (Sözen & Güven, 2019).

Table 1. Interpretation of Mean Score

No	Mean Score	Descriptive Interpretation
1	1.00 – 1.80	Very Low
2	1.81 – 2.60	Low
3	2.61 – 3.40	Moderate
4	3.41 – 4.20	High
5	4.21 – 5.00	Very High

The table above illustrates the mean score criteria classified into five categories: very low, low, moderate, high, and very high. From Sözen & Güven (2019) emphasized that if the mean score is high, then the students have a positive perception. Conversely, if the mean score is low, then students have a negative perception. Furthermore, the analysis was conducted for each variable to determine of the use, the benefits of the use, and the challenges contribute to students' overall perceptions of ChatGPT.

Finally, this study complied with ethical research standards by ensuring voluntary participation, preserving respondent anonymity, and maintaining the confidentiality of all collected data. The research was conducted solely for academic purposes and aimed to provide reliable and valid findings regarding students' perceptions of ChatGPT in a pesantren-based university context.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This section presents the results of the data analysis and discusses them in relation to the research objectives and hypotheses outlined in the introduction. The findings are based on descriptive statistical analysis of students' responses to the questionnaire regarding the use of ChatGPT in thesis proposal writing.

The analysis concentrates on three constructs derived from the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM): perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, and perceived challenges. The results are presented using mean scores and are interpreted to determine students' overall perceptions.

1. Students' Perception of the Use of ChatGPT

To answer the first research question regarding students' overall perception of ChatGPT, the researcher analyzed the aggregated mean score of all questionnaire items. The findings are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2. Mean Score of Students Perception

No	Item	Mean	Category
1	X1	4.35	Very High
2	X2	4.45	Very High
3	X3	3.80	High
4	X4	4.10	High
5	X7	3.75	High
6	X16	3.80	High
Average		4.04	High

As shown in Table 1, the mean average score for perceived ease of use is 4.04, which is categorized as high. This indicates that students' perception of the use of ChatGPT as easy to access, easy to operate, and easy to understand during thesis proposal writing.

This result answers part of the research objective that investigates how students' perception of the use of ChatGPT. The high score in items 1 and 2

indicates that students do not experience technical barriers when using the tool.

From the perspective of the Technology Acceptance Model introduced by Davis (1993) Perceived ease of use constitutes a pivotal factor influencing technology acceptance. The findings show that the easier ChatGPT is to use, the more students are willing to utilize it in their writing proposals process.

2. The Benefits Of the Use of ChatGPT

To examine the level of the benefits and its contribution to students' perception, the mean scores of relevant questionnaire items were calculated. The findings are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3. Mean Score of the Benefits

No	Item	Mean	Category
1	X5	4.20	High
2	X6	3.70	High
3	X8	4.00	High
4	X9	3.90	High
5	X10	3.95	High
6	X11	3.85	High
7	X12	4.35	Very High
8	X13	4.20	High
9	X14	3.65	High
10	X15	3.95	High
Average		3.97	High

Table 3 shows that the average mean score of the benefits is 3.97,

categorized as high. Students strongly agree in item 12 that ChatGPT is useful in helping them generate ideas, improve grammar, and organize the structure of their thesis proposals.

This finding directly answers the main hypothesis of this study, which states that students have a positive perception of ChatGPT in supporting thesis proposal writing, particularly in terms of usefulness and efficiency.

In TAM theory, perceived usefulness is the strongest predictor of technology acceptance. The data confirm that students continue to use ChatGPT because they find it beneficial for their writing thesis proposals tasks. This result is also consistent with previous studies that reported ChatGPT's role in enhancing academic writing performance, which is specially in this case is writing thesis proposals.

3. Challenges of the use of ChatGPT

To analyze the challenges of ChatGPT as perceived by students, the mean scores of challenges-related items were computed. The results are shown in Table 4.

Table 3. Mean Score of Perceived Challenges

No	Item	Mean	Category
1	X17	3.80	High
2	X18	3.45	Moderate
3	X19	3.70	High
4	X20	3.70	High
Average		3.66	High

As shown in Table 4, students also report challenges in using ChatGPT, with a mean average score of 3.66. The

challenges mainly in item 17 relate to concerns about originality, dependency, and the accuracy of information generated by ChatGPT.

This finding answers the second hypothesis, which states that students experience challenges related to maintaining originality and evaluating the accuracy of ChatGPT-generated content. Although students perceive ChatGPT positively, they remain cautious in its use.

Discussion

The overall findings clearly answer the research problem stated in the introduction: Students at a pesantren-based university demonstrate a positive perception of ChatGPT in the context of thesis proposal writing.

The average scores in students' perception of the use of ChatGPT (4.04) and the benefits of the use of ChatGPT (3.97) confirm the first hypothesis that students positively accept ChatGPT as a supportive academic tool. These findings support the relevance of the Technology Acceptance Model in explaining why students adopt ChatGPT in their writing process.

At the same time, the mean score for the challenges of using ChatGPT (3.69) supports the second hypothesis, indicating that students are aware of potential risks related to originality and content accuracy when employing the tool in academic writing. This awareness appears to be influenced by the moral and academic values embedded in the pesantren-based educational environment, where ethical considerations are strongly emphasized in learning practices.

A particularly important finding emerges from item 18, which shows a Neutral mean score. This item measures students' doubts about the accuracy of the academic content generated by ChatGPT. The neutral response indicates that content inaccuracy is not perceived as a dominant challenge in the context of writing a thesis proposal. This result is distinctive, as much of the previous literature emphasizes that the main weakness of ChatGPT use in academic contexts lies in unreliable or inaccurate information. In contrast, the respondents in this study did not position accuracy as their primary difficulty.

Instead, students reported greater challenges related to academic formatting, referencing practices, and ethical considerations. This pattern suggests that students do not passively accept ChatGPT's outputs but actively review, adjust, and align them with established academic standards. Such behaviour reflects a critical and selective use of the technology rather than unreflective dependence.

Therefore, this study demonstrates a meaningful difference from previous research conducted in general higher education contexts. The uniqueness revealed in item 18 clearly highlights the distinction between this study and earlier studies, as the primary challenge identified is not the accuracy of information, but how students ensure that the use of ChatGPT remains consistent with academic conventions, thesis proposal structure, and moral principles. Students in a based-pesantren university environment appear to approach ChatGPT with greater academic caution and ethical awareness,

a pattern that has not been widely reported in prior studies.

In conclusion, the findings of this study indicate that students at a pesantren-based university demonstrate an open attitude toward the integration of technology in the academic sphere. This high level of acceptance is influenced by the perceived ease of use and the effectiveness of ChatGPT in supporting the preparation of thesis proposals. At the same time, these findings emphasize the importance of user responsibility and adherence to scientific writing ethics in order to maintain academic integrity.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine students' perceptions of using ChatGPT in thesis proposal writing within a pesantren-based university. In line with the research objective and hypotheses, the findings indicate that students generally accept ChatGPT as a supportive academic tool. Their acceptance is primarily shaped by the perception that ChatGPT is easy to use and beneficial for assisting idea development, language accuracy, and writing organization. These perceptions explain why students integrate the tool into their thesis proposal writing process.

At the same time, the study reveals that students are aware of several challenges associated with ChatGPT use, particularly concerning originality, dependency, and the need to verify the accuracy of generated content. This awareness demonstrates that students do not rely on the tool uncritically. Instead, their use of ChatGPT is influenced by

ethical and academic considerations that are strongly embedded in the pesantren-based educational environment. Thus, the findings not only confirm the relevance of the Technology Acceptance Model proposed by Fred Davis in explaining technology acceptance, but also highlight how contextual values shape responsible use of AI tools in academic writing.

In summary, this study concludes that students' positive perceptions of ChatGPT are balanced by critical awareness of its limitations. ChatGPT is viewed as a helpful assistant rather than a replacement for students' own thinking and writing abilities.

Suggestions. Future studies are recommended to involve larger and more diverse samples to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Researchers may also apply inferential statistical methods to examine relationships between variables more deeply. In addition, further research could explore institutional strategies, ethical guidelines, and instructional approaches that guide students in using AI tools like ChatGPT responsibly in academic writing contexts.

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