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## The Use of AI Tools in Writing Research Proposals: Perceptions, Practices, and Academic Implications Among Students

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### ABSTRACT

The increasing integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in academic settings has transformed the way students approach research writing. This study investigates the types of AI tools commonly used by third-year BS Information Technology students at Mindoro State University (MinSU) in developing research proposals. It also explores their perceptions of AI-assisted writing, its influence on research quality and originality, and associated ethical implications. Employing an exploratory research design, in-depth interviews were conducted using a researcher-made guide covering four major objectives. Findings reveal that students frequently use AI-powered tools such as Grammarly, QuillBot, and ChatGPT for grammar correction, paraphrasing, and idea generation. Additionally, citation managers like Mendeley and Zotero, and plagiarism detection tools like Turnitin, are widely adopted. Students view AI tools as beneficial for enhancing writing efficiency, coherence, and content structure. However, concerns about over-reliance, loss of originality, fabricated sources, and ethical boundaries were also expressed. While AI tools support the research writing process, students stress the importance of human revision and critical thinking to ensure authenticity. The study highlights a significant variance in AI use based on individual writing skills, task complexity, and institutional policy clarity. It underscores the dual role of AI—as both a valuable academic aid and a potential threat to intellectual autonomy and academic integrity. The findings emphasize the need for clear institutional guidelines, AI literacy programs, and responsible integration strategies to promote ethical and effective use of AI in research writing across higher education institutions.

### INTRODUCTION

The incorporation of artificial intelligence (AI) into a variety of disciplines has dramatically altered traditional processes, including schooling and academic writing. ChatGPT, Grammarly, QuillBot, and Jasper AI are examples of AI-powered writing tools that are widely used by students and researchers worldwide. These tools help users generate writing, improve language, increase coherence, and even structure research proposals efficiently. According to research, AI-powered writing tools have the potential to boost academic productivity; but, worries about originality, academic integrity, and over-reliance on technology remain serious (Ghosh *et al.*, 2023). While artificial intelligence can help to streamline the research writing process, it also calls into question traditional conceptions of critical thinking, authorship, and ethical writing practices in academia (Dahl & Dalsgaard, 2022).

At the national level, the use of AI in academic writing is becoming more common among Filipino students, particularly in higher education institutions. The Philippines' rapid digital transformation in education has resulted in an increase in AI-assisted learning, as indicated by university regulations on technology-enhanced education. However, academic institutions in the country are still developing thorough rules for the ethical use of AI tools in research writing. Many educators are concerned about plagiarism, decreased student involvement with traditional research approaches, and the potential dilution

of analytical abilities among students who rely primarily on AI-generated content (Salazar, 2023). Despite these issues, AI's significance in assisting students, particularly in enhancing language competency and research structure, should not be underestimated.

Locally, Mindoro State University (MinSU), particularly its College of Computer Studies, has seen an increase in the use of AI tools by students when crafting research proposals. Third-year students, who are obliged to complete research projects as part of their academic requirements, frequently use AI technologies for content development, citation formatting, and coherence enhancement. However, there is little research on how these students perceive AI technologies, how much they rely on them, and the academic consequences of their use. The lack of institutional policies or explicit standards for AI-assisted research writing highlights the need to investigate how students incorporate these technologies into their academic work.

This study aims to address the research gap by investigating the perceptions, practices, and academic implications of AI tools in writing research proposals among third-year students in the College of Computer Studies across MinSU's three campuses. By identifying the AI tools commonly used, assessing their impact on research quality and originality, and evaluating ethical considerations, the study seeks to provide insights that can inform institutional policies and best practices for responsible AI integration in academic writing.

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## Research objectives

This research intends to explore the use of AI tools in writing research proposals, focusing on students' perceptions, practices, and the academic implications of AI-assisted research writing. Specifically, this aims:

1. To identify the types of AI tools students commonly use in writing research proposals
2. To examine students' perceptions of the benefits and challenges of using AI tools in research writing.
3. To analyze the extent to which AI tools influence the quality and originality of students' research proposals.
4. To evaluate the ethical considerations and academic integrity concerns related to the use of AI tools in research writing.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This part presents the methodology the researcher will employ in analyzing and interpreting the data about the variables in the study.

Exploratory research design will be used to study unsolved problems, allowing for exploring new ideas and identifying patterns without the limits of a formal framework. According to Saunders *et al.* (2014), this strategy is especially useful when the researcher is unsure about the exact nature of the problem or phenomenon being examined, as it allows for the development of more explicit research questions and hypotheses for further examination. It is frequently the beginning point for expanding knowledge in areas where existing information is scarce.

The study will be conducted at Mindoro State University, Main Campus, Alcate, Victoria, Oriental Mindoro. The selected BS Information Technology (BSIT) third-year students from the College of Computer Studies will be chosen as respondents because they are at a critical stage of writing their research proposals, requiring extensive engagement in academic writing and research structuring. As IT students, they are more likely to be familiar with AI tools due to their background in computing and digital technologies, making them ideal participants for assessing AI-assisted research writing. Their technical competence allows for a deeper exploration of AI usage beyond basic text generation, potentially influencing research quality, originality, and ethical considerations. Additionally, there is limited research on how AI tools impact research writing among IT students, particularly in the local context of MinSU's three campuses. By focusing on this group, the study aims to provide insights into responsible AI integration in academic writing, addressing gaps in literature and institutional policies.

In-depth interviews will be conducted for the purpose of this research. The study utilized a researcher made interview guide with four parts as the main data gathering instrument. The first part will be composed of questions on identifying the types of AI tools students commonly use in writing research proposals. The second part will examine students' perceptions of the benefits and

challenges of using AI tools in research writing, while the third part consists of questions that will analyze the extent to which AI tools influence the quality and originality of students' research proposals. And lastly, will be composed of questions that will assess the students' ethical considerations and academic integrity concerns related to the use of AI tools in research writing.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Based from the analyzed responses of the respondents on the different questions assessing the four major objectives of the study, here are the generated themes:

### Identify the types of AI tools students commonly use in writing research proposals

#### Predominant Use of AI-Powered Writing Assistants

The most commonly mentioned AI tools among students are Grammarly, QuillBot, and ChatGPT. These tools support grammar correction, sentence rewording, and content generation. Grammarly is consistently used for proofreading and clarity enhancement, while QuillBot helps students paraphrase and avoid redundancy. ChatGPT is employed for brainstorming and content drafting. These findings are consistent with studies showing that AI-based writing tools enhance language accuracy and student confidence in academic writing tasks (Kohnke & Moorhouse, 2022).

### Widespread Adoption of Generative AI for Brainstorming and Drafting

ChatGPT, Perplexity AI, Gemini, and Google Bard emerged as widely used tools for idea generation, outlining, and drafting initial versions of research proposals. Students rely on these tools during the early stages of the writing process to explore topics, structure arguments, and get sample introductions or related literature overviews. This aligns with recent research showing that large language models are increasingly integrated into the prewriting and ideation stages of academic work (Baidoo-Anu & Owusu Ansah, 2023).

### Use of Citation and Reference Management Tools

A significant number of respondents reported using Mendeley, Zotero, Scribbr, and ResearchRabbit for managing references, generating citations, and reviewing related literature. These AI-enhanced tools help organize bibliographic data and ensure adherence to citation styles. This confirms literature noting that digital reference managers are now essential components of academic writing, particularly when integrated with AI for automated source recommendations (Martin & Tang, 2020).

### AI Tools for Plagiarism Detection and Academic Integrity

Tools like Turnitin, Scribbr, and Copilot are frequently used for plagiarism checking and ensuring originality in research proposals. Students commonly utilize these tools as part of the final stage of their writing to comply

with institutional requirements on academic honesty. This usage supports recent studies that show students rely on AI not just for writing assistance but also for maintaining academic integrity (Cikrikci & Griffiths, 2023).

### **Emerging Use of Specialized AI Tools for Literature Search and Review**

Less commonly, but still notably, students mentioned the use of specialized AI tools such as Elicit, Scite.ai, Semantic Scholar AI, Consensus, Skolar, and FlowGPT for finding, summarizing, and evaluating academic papers. These tools are particularly useful during the review of related literature (RRL) phase, helping students identify gaps and support claims with credible studies. Their use represents an emerging trend of AI-supported academic discovery, making literature search faster and more focused (Wang *et al.*, 2023).

### **Examine students' perceptions on the benefits and challenges of using AI tools in research writing**

#### **Enhanced Writing Efficiency and Productivity**

A recurring perception among students is that AI tools significantly enhance the speed and efficiency of writing research proposals. Tools like Grammarly, ChatGPT, and Quillbot help in quickly generating drafts, improving grammar, and organizing content. This results in reduced time spent on mechanical aspects of writing and allows more time for content development. This aligns with findings by Dwivedi *et al.* (2023) who noted that AI tools streamline academic writing tasks, allowing students to focus on higher-order thinking skills. Similarly, Zawacki-Richter *et al.* (2019) emphasize that AI in education enhances productivity by automating routine tasks like grammar checking and structure refinement.

#### **Improvement in Grammar, Clarity, and Organization**

Students widely perceive AI tools as beneficial in enhancing their writing quality, particularly in grammar, sentence structure, coherence, and vocabulary. Many users cited Grammarly and Quillbot as useful in polishing drafts and improving clarity. This is supported by Bai and Wang (2023), who reported that AI writing assistants significantly improved students' grammatical accuracy and sentence clarity. Kumar *et al.* (2022) further argue that AI tools contribute to improving academic expression among non-native English speakers.

#### **Risks of Over-Reliance and Reduced Critical Thinking**

While students acknowledge the convenience of AI, many express concerns about becoming too dependent. They worry that overusing AI tools might hinder creativity, critical thinking, and independent learning. Some even mentioned that their own ideas feel less personal or original when too influenced by AI. This theme is echoed in Selwyn (2019) who cautioned that AI could lead to a reduction in students' cognitive engagement with academic content. Luckin *et al.* (2016) also noted

that AI must be used judiciously in education to avoid compromising learner autonomy.

Concerns About Accuracy, Originality, and Ethical Issues A major limitation students encounter is the potential for misinformation, lack of source credibility, and ethical concerns such as plagiarism. Many noted that AI-generated citations are sometimes fabricated, and that AI may suggest content that lacks academic rigor or is overly generic. Floridi *et al.* (2018) emphasize the ethical challenges of using AI in academia, especially regarding content authenticity and proper citation. Vinuesa *et al.* (2020) also discuss the implications of AI misuse, including misinformation and academic dishonesty, reinforcing the need for proper guidelines in its use.

#### **Perceived Learning Aid vs. Skill Replacement**

Most students see AI as a helpful learning assistant that supports but should not replace human effort. While it helps improve research writing skills through suggestion and correction, students feel a balance must be struck to avoid eroding independent thought and academic skill-building. This reflects Holmes *et al.* (2021) who argue that AI should function as a formative tool in learning, not as a substitute for student reasoning. Additionally, Lim *et al.* (2022) support that AI can scaffold learning if used with pedagogical oversight and critical reflection.

#### **Analyze the extent to which AI tools influence the quality and originality of students' research proposals**

##### **AI Tools Enhance Clarity, Coherence, and Structure in Research Proposals**

The majority of respondents indicated that AI tools—particularly those like Grammarly and ChatGPT—significantly enhance the clarity, coherence, and structure of their writing. Students noted improvements in sentence flow, logical organization, transitions between ideas, and overall readability. AI tools act as digital writing assistants that support users in achieving polished and professional academic outputs. This finding aligns with the literature, which acknowledges AI tools' role in refining academic writing. According to Kasneci *et al.* (2023), AI-based writing assistants provide structural suggestions and improve clarity by offering real-time feedback, especially beneficial for non-native English speakers or novice researchers. Similarly, Zou *et al.* (2023) found that students using AI tools experienced enhanced writing fluency and organizational coherence in academic tasks.

##### **AI as a Brainstorming and Drafting Tool Rather Than a Sole Author**

Students reported that they primarily use AI for brainstorming, generating outlines, and refining drafts—rather than relying on AI to write full sections. Many emphasized that AI-generated content serves as inspiration or a scaffold rather than a final product. This responsible use shows a balanced engagement where human creativity and AI functionality complement each

other. Studies suggest that AI is most effective when used as a co-writing tool. According to Dwivedi *et al.* (2023), the best outcomes emerge when students use AI to support, rather than replace, their critical thinking and composition skills. The co-creative model fosters productivity without undermining the student's voice and authorship.

### **AI Encourages Dependency Risks and Ethical Concerns**

Several respondents expressed concern about becoming overly dependent on AI tools. While AI can provide grammatically correct and logically structured suggestions, overreliance could compromise academic integrity and personal learning. Students recognized the importance of maintaining authorship and critical thinking in the research process. The risk of AI dependency has been widely discussed. Floridi and Chiriatti (2020) argue that AI can lead to the erosion of intellectual autonomy if students begin to treat AI outputs as substitutes for original thought. Furthermore, concerns about ethical usage—including plagiarism and AI hallucinations—are well documented in educational research.

### **Students Actively Maintain Originality Through Human Revision and Plagiarism Checking**

Many students shared their strategies to ensure originality, including rewriting AI-generated content, cross-checking sources, and using plagiarism detection tools like Turnitin. Students emphasized that while AI is helpful for initial drafts and ideas, the final content is carefully revised to reflect their own voice and understanding. This practice reflects the growing awareness of academic integrity in the age of AI. According to Yeo (2023), students can effectively balance AI support with originality by engaging in reflective writing, citing AI contributions appropriately, and using detection tools. Institutions also play a role in fostering ethical AI use.

### **AI Usage Varies Based on Skill Level, Topic Complexity, and Institutional Guidance**

Students reported varying levels of reliance on AI depending on their confidence in writing, topic difficulty, and clarity of institutional policies on AI use. Those with stronger writing skills used AI as a supplementary tool, while others leaned more heavily on it when facing challenging content or deadlines. Varying degrees of reliance on AI are influenced by external and internal factors. According to Chiu *et al.* (2023), students' prior writing proficiency, task complexity, and access to ethical AI guidelines significantly impact how they interact with AI tools. Institutions must provide clear policies and training to guide appropriate usage.

### **Ethical considerations and academic integrity concerns related to the use of AI tools in research writing**

#### **Plagiarism and Misrepresentation of Authorship**

Across responses, the dominant concern is plagiarism from copying AI-generated text verbatim to submitting

work that does not reflect the student's own understanding. Students also worry about fabricated or unverifiable references and about where to draw the line between acceptable assistance and misrepresentation of authorship. These concerns directly implicate academic integrity, authorship credit, and transparent disclosure of AI assistance. Studies warn that generative AI can enable new forms of contract cheating and blurred authorship (Cotton *et al.*, 2023). Editorial ethics bodies emphasize that AI output must not be credited as an author and that use of AI should be disclosed and appropriately cited (COPE Council, 2023; ICMJE, 2023). APA likewise provides rules for citing AI tools to avoid misrepresentation (APA Style, 2023).

#### **Misinformation, Hallucinations, and Bias**

Students repeatedly note risks of inaccurate, generic, biased, or hallucinated content, including invented citations. Over-trusting such output jeopardizes the factual integrity of proposals and can propagate bias. Hallucination and bias are well-documented limitations of large language models (Ji *et al.*, 2023). Ethical AI frameworks urge verification, transparency, and accountability for AI-assisted content to mitigate harm (Floridi *et al.*, 2018).

#### **Over-Reliance and Erosion of Critical Thinking**

Many respondents fear that heavy dependence on AI diminishes original thinking, analytic depth, and personal voice. While AI can scaffold organization and clarity, excessive reliance may offload cognition and undermine learning. Educational scholars caution that AI can reduce learner autonomy and critical engagement if uncritically adopted (Selwyn, 2019). Emerging work highlights the need to position AI as a co-writer/coach rather than a surrogate author to preserve learning benefits (Kasneci *et al.*, 2023).

#### **Data Privacy, Transparency, and Fairness**

Students point to privacy and transparency gaps: where their data go, how prompts/outputs might be stored, and whether models introduce systemic bias into academic work. Responsible use requires informed consent about data practices and openness about AI's role. Global AI ethics guidance stresses privacy, transparency, accountability, and fairness as preconditions for responsible use in education (UNESCO, 2023; Floridi *et al.*, 2018).

#### **Policy Clarity, Disclosure Practices, and Skills for Ethical Use**

Respondents describe inconsistent or unclear university rules, variability among instructors, and uncertainty over what counts as acceptable use. Students also describe good-faith practices (rewriting, cross-checking, using plagiarism checkers) but want clearer, shared expectations. Sector guidance calls for explicit institutional policies, assessment redesign, and AI literacy so students can use tools responsibly without compromising integrity (Cotton *et al.*, 2023; UNESCO, 2023). Editorial bodies

recommend transparent disclosure and appropriate citation of AI assistance (COPE Council, 2023; APA Style, 2023).

## CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study reveal a broad and growing integration of AI tools in the academic writing process, particularly in research proposal development. Students commonly use AI-powered tools such as Grammarly, QuillBot, ChatGPT, and citation managers like Mendeley and Zotero for a range of functions—from grammar correction and paraphrasing to brainstorming, literature search, and plagiarism checking. While students recognize the efficiency and support these tools provide, they also express concerns about over-reliance, loss of originality, data privacy, and ethical misuse. Overall, the results emphasize the dual nature of AI in education—as both a powerful enhancer of writing and a potential threat to academic integrity if used uncritically. The study highlights the urgent need for clear institutional guidelines and ethical awareness to ensure that AI use complements, rather than compromises, student learning and authorship.

## Recommendations

It is recommended that academic institutions develop and disseminate clear, standardized policies on the ethical and appropriate use of AI tools in research writing. These guidelines should include expectations on disclosure, proper citation of AI-generated content, and limitations of AI usage in academic tasks. Additionally, integrating AI literacy programs into the curriculum can empower students to use these tools responsibly—balancing efficiency with originality and critical thinking. Educators should also design assessments that emphasize the writing process, reflective learning, and human-authored outputs to discourage misuse and foster academic integrity in the age of AI.

## Compliance with Ethical Standards

The authors hereby declare that this work was conducted in strict accordance with ethical research guidelines. All respondents were provided informed consent prior to participating, ensuring that they were fully aware of the study's nature and objective. Respondents were informed that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any moment, without consequence or detriment. The respondents' anonymity was protected throughout the research procedure, and all personal information was kept private. The respondents' well-being was prioritized, and all measures were taken to protect their rights and dignity. The author additionally confirm that no conflicts of interest arose during the course of the investigation. Every attempt was taken to avoid plagiarism, and all sources were appropriately mentioned. Additionally, the findings were interpreted honestly and without bias. Finally, the findings of this study were used purely for research reasons, benefiting the academic and scientific communities.

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