



CHATGPT AS A DIGITAL MENTOR: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY OF CREATIVE WRITING DEVELOPMENT AMONG EFL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

Despite the growing adoption of AI tools in higher education, limited studies have examined ChatGPT as a digital mentor in EFL creative writing within Indonesian higher education contexts. This study aims to examine how ChatGPT facilitates EFL creative writing development among Sriwijaya University students and to explore the challenges encountered. Employing a qualitative case study design, the research involved English Education students who completed an open-ended questionnaire, followed by semi-structured interviews. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings show that ChatGPT supported Creative Writing development in idea generation, structure quality, textual flow, and student confidence and motivation. However, challenges including overreliance, originality concerns, mismatched responses, and ambiguity were also identified. Theoretically, this study contributes to understanding AI-mediated constructivist learning in EFL contexts, emphasizing that ChatGPT's effectiveness as a digital mentor depends on critical and reflective student engagement. These findings have practical implications for integrating AI literacy and ethical considerations into EFL creative writing instruction.

Keywords: *ChatGPT, creative writing, EFL students, artificial intelligence, higher education.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Creative writing is an essential skill in developing English language proficiency and self-expression toward a language where learners are expected not only to master linguistic accuracy but also to develop imaginative, and critical capacities in the target language. Creative writing plays an essential role in everyday interaction, learning, and impact on society as it related to the changes of the surroundings in education to make learning more meaningful and engaging (Amini & Susanti, 2024; Mei et al., 2025; Chasi-Solórzano et al., 2025). In higher education, especially within English

Education programs, Creative writing plays an important role in preparing the students to become a future teacher with language, literature and culture. Through creative writing, students are encouraged to connect linguistic forms with personal experiences, emotions, and social realities, allowing language learning to become logically and emotionally. Recent studies emphasize that creative writing supports language development by strengthening vocabulary use, syntactic awareness, narrative coherence, and stylistic expression, while simultaneously fostering students' confidence and identity as language users.

However, many English Education students encounter challenges in developing creative writing due to limited exposure to innovative teaching methods and the traditional reliance on static, textbook-based instruction including generating original ideas, constructing engaging storylines, and effectively devices to make the readers interested. Senel (2018), One of the most difficult talents to develop is creative writing since it is taught as a mechanical process, which may cause students to get tired, lose desire, and eventually fail, leading them to quit or even put off writing as much as possible. This situation reveals a discrepancy between the pedagogical expectation that creative writing should nurture creativity and self-expression, and the actual classroom practices that may limit students' creative engagement. An article by Jameel and Muhamood (2017), argued that the writing process should be a source of enjoyment, with students having the freedom to choose their own topics and methods for writing. This idea emphasizes that when students are given agency over what and how they write, they are more likely to engage deeply with the task, making the experience more rewarding and less of a chore.

In recent years, advancements in artificial intelligence (AI) have introduced novel tools that hold significant promise in transforming educational practices. According to Awosanya et al. (2024), artificial intelligence (AI) language models have been in the process of being developed for a lengthy period of time, and in recent times, there has been a significant increase in the use of these models. Shidiq (2023), stated that Artificial Intelligence (AI), as part of technology developments, makes it simple for the world of education and learning. Many AI-based solutions are widely used in education, such as; digital mentors, voice assistants, innovative products, smart classrooms, automatic evaluations, and individualized learning.

One the example is ChatGPT (Chat Generative Pre-Trained Transformer) a state-of-the-art language model that can serve as a digital mentor by providing immediate, personalized feedback and interactive guidance. Unlike conventional classroom settings, ChatGPT offers a dynamic learning

environment where students can experiment with ideas, receive constructive suggestions, and engage in self-paced learning. This digital mentorship approach has the potential to address the gaps in traditional instruction, especially in fostering both interest and proficiency in creative writing. However, ChatGPT, characterized to be "more creative and collaborative" has developed the capability in natural language processing to offer it wide functionality in practical settings such as answering inquiries, conversing automatically, and de/coding equations (Zhang & Li, 2021, as cited in De Matas, 2023).

Furthermore, the use of digital mentors like ChatGPT is in line with broader educational trends that advocate for personalized and technology-enhanced learning environments. As educational institutions strive to adapt to the rapidly evolving digital landscape, it is imperative to explore innovative methods that not only stimulate students' interest but also equip them with the necessary skills to succeed in a digitally connected world. Shidiq (2023), stated that a number of the competencies that students should learn, such as critical, creative, and collaborative thinking abilities, as well as creative writing abilities, may be lowered by using the chatbot system.

This study was motivated to examine the potential of ChatGPT in enhancing creative writing skills among English Education students at Sriwijaya University. Despite increasing research on AI in education, limited studies have examined ChatGPT specifically as a digital mentor in EFL creative writing within Indonesian higher education. Grounded in the Cognitive Process Theory of Writing (Flower & Hayes, 1981) and Constructivist Learning Theory (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), this study seeks to address that gap. This study aims to evaluate whether the utilization of ChatGPT can stimulate creativity, enhance narrative structuring, and improve stylistic expression in student writing. By examining both the advantages and limitations of using an AI tool in the creative writing process, this study contributes to the broader discussion on technology-enhanced EFL education.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

There have been many studies related to the utilization of ChatGPT in the development of Creative Writing for EFL university students. According to Alwasilah (2024), creative writing serves as a vehicle for expressing and bringing to life one's thoughts, emotions, personal experiences, dreams, and testimonies. It goes beyond simply informing the reader it invites them to feel and reflect, unbound by the rigid conventions of formal academic styles. As Fitria (2024) notes, writing helps individuals express their thoughts and feelings clearly by using appropriate vocabulary, grammar, structure, and coherence. Through creative writing, students can enhance not only their communication skills but also their ability to think deeply and critically.

Ginting and Zaim (2023) emphasize that teachers must understand their students' needs in order to support effective English learning. They assert that learning English should help students think critically, creatively, and collaboratively, while also strengthening their communication and innovation skills.

Pokhrel (2023) highlights that students are sometimes capable of writing deeply meaningful texts, even if those writings may initially appear unclear or disorganized to their teachers. In fact, encouraging creativity can reveal unexpected insights and expressions from students that might otherwise remain hidden in more rigid writing tasks. Nevertheless, as Pokhrel (2023) further suggests, when students are given the freedom and opportunity to express themselves creatively, they often produce work that exceeds their teachers' expectations.

Creely (2024) also highlights that AI's adaptability allows for a more personalized and engaging learning environment, helping students feel more supported in their individual learning journeys. In the context of creative writing, such tools can assist learners in constructing more coherent, structured, and fluent texts. Creely (2024) identifies two main concerns associated with excessive use of AI in language learning. First, there is a growing worry about the authenticity and accuracy of

AI-generated content. Second, learners who depend heavily on generative AI tools may lose their ability to think independently and creatively, especially if they accept AI responses without critical evaluation. According to Zhang and Li (2021, as cited in Elkatmis, 2024), ChatGPT has been trained on a vast collection of books, online texts, and user interactions to closely mimic human language patterns. The study by Shidiq. (2023) found that the use of ChatGPT can positively influence the world of education. However, it is also necessary to realize that ChatGPT may not having a really good impact on developing student skill in learning, especially creative writing which can be misuse by students in doing their assignment.

Another study by Formosa et al. (2025) In this study, the researchers found out that human assistants were seen to have greater rates of authorship, creativity, and responsibility than AI assistants who provided the same amount of assistance. Additionally, these findings aid in understanding of the new standards surrounding material produced by both humans and artificial intelligence.

However, Shidiq (2023) warns that the use of chatbot systems like ChatGPT may diminish essential skills such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and independent writing development. While ChatGPT can serve as a helpful assistant for teachers and a virtual tutor for students, caution is necessary, as it may occasionally provide inaccurate or fictitious information (As Lo, 2023, as cited in Elkatmis, 2024). Despite its many advantages, there are also notable challenges in using ChatGPT to support students' creative writing development. The tool is not yet fully reliable, and its responses require careful review for accuracy and appropriateness (OpenAI, 2023, as cited in Elkatmis, 2024).

3. METHODS

In this study, qualitative approach is used in order to explore the utilization of ChatGPT in developing Creative Writing among English Education students at Sriwijaya University (Tisdell et al., 2025;

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Patton, 2020). Qualitative approach was considered appropriate in order to gain a deep understanding of students' experiences, perceptions and opinions toward ChatGPT on Creative Writing development process. Qualitative research drew from the constructivist and interpretivist perspectives, attempting to truly understand a study topic rather than anticipate results (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, as cited in Tomaszewski, et al., 2020). This approach allowed the researcher to gather students' insight on how ChatGPT impact the students' Creative Writing process and what challenges they face while using ChatGPT compared to measuring the data quantitatively. This research use case study as a design which focused on specific educational context in order to provide a valuable and relevant analysis of AI-assisted Creative Writing practices in an EFL higher education setting.

The participants of this study were undergraduate students from the English Education Study Program at Sriwijaya University who had previously taken a Creative Writing course. The participants were sixth and eighth semesters students in the academic years 2021 and 2022 to ensure they possessed enough experience to the creative writing tasks. Purposive sampling technique is used to during the selection of the participant who had experience the use of ChatGPT in their Creative Writing assignment. Adeoye (2024) stated that the benefits of purposive sampling included the ability to generate a rationale for generalizing from the sample. A crucial sample could be used to determine the worth of a study, while the sampling method allowed for a thorough review of the data. A total of 53 students were participated in the open-ended questionnaire, and four students agreed voluntarily to participate in further interviews. All of the participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the flexibility to participate at any time during the data collection period, and their information will be kept confidentially. In this study, no real name was used, and participants were identified using initials in all reports in order to protect their information.

The Instruments that were used for data collection consisted of and open-ended

questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The open-ended questionnaire consisted of 14 questions and was designed to explore the students' frequency and purposes of using ChatGPT, the ways it supported idea generation and writing development, perceived impacts on creativity, confidence, and motivation, as well as concerns related to originality, dependency, and ethical issues. The semi-structured interview was also conducted in order to receive a further explanation toward students' respond on the questions and gain a deep understanding toward their cognitive processes, decision-making, and attitudes toward ChatGPT as a creative writing assistant. Before the data collection were conducted, both instruments were validated by two expert validators who had expertise in the field of English language education teaching and research. This feedback led to revisions in wording, structure, and clarity to ensure the instruments were relevant and aligned with the research objectives.

The data collection was employed in two stages. The first stage involved the distribution of the open-ended questionnaire via an online platform, Google Forms, which allowed participants to respond flexibly and reflectively. The questionnaire link was shared through an online communication among the students, WhatsApp. The participants were asked to give a detailed explanations based on their personal experiences and perceptions toward ChatGPT in Creative Writing. The responses then automatically recorder and collected for the analysis through Google Sheets. The second stage involved semi-structured interviews using the a widely accessible platform that support video, audio and chat communication, Zoom Workplace. Archibald et al. (2019) highlighted that Zoom was an effective tool for qualitative research, as it supported meaningful interactions and helped address platform-specific challenges, enabling researchers and participants to collaborate more smoothly and productively. Four participants from different semesters and genders were selected in order to capture diverse perspectives. Each interview lasted between 30 to 60 minutes and was conducted in an online platform that allowed for interactive discussion. With the participants'

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consent, all interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed directly in order to maintain the accuracy of the data. As Dahlin (2021) suggested, researchers aiming to gather rich qualitative data through online methods benefited from using strategies that included open-ended questions, follow-up prompts, and the ability to explore multiple perspectives simultaneously.

Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the data as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The goal of thematic analysis was to evaluate how the collected material addressed the research questions and promoted conceptual understanding (Lochmiller, 2021). The analysis began with careful reading and organization of data to identify key patterns. Data were systematically coded to capture information related to the utilization of ChatGPT, perceived benefits, challenges, and ethical considerations. These codes were grouped into broader themes representing patterns across participants' responses, which were then reviewed and refined to ensure consistency. This process involved the academic advisor to minimize researcher bias. To ensure methodological rigor, multiple dimensions of trustworthiness were addressed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was established through data triangulation, combining questionnaire and interview data to cross-validate findings. Dependability was maintained through a detailed audit trail documenting the analytical process. Confirmability was ensured by involving the academic supervisor in the theme review process, thus reducing the influence of researcher subjectivity. The purposive sampling technique was selected because it enabled the identification of participants with direct and relevant experience using ChatGPT in creative writing tasks. A sample of 53 questionnaire respondents and four interviewees was determined to be appropriate for a qualitative case study given the depth of data sought (Adeoye, 2024; Kvale, 2021). The final themes were then interpreted in relation to relevant

theories and previous studies to address the research objectives comprehensively.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1) Results

The research was exploring on how ChatGPT facilitates students in developing their Creative Writing.



Figure 1. Students' responses on how they use ChatGPT in Creative Writing

Based on Figure 1, the figure illustrates that students primarily used ChatGPT in Creative Writing for six main purposes: idea generation, grammar checking and editing, rewriting, writing editing, improving writing flow, and paraphrasing. These patterns indicate that ChatGPT was predominantly perceived as a writing support tool rather than a replacement for students' own creative efforts, reflecting a selective and purposeful mode of AI engagement.

The students stated that ChatGPT guided them in overcoming writer's block and expanding narrative possibilities, especially when they struggled to initiate or continue their stories that enabled the students to explore ideas more confidently and flexibly. Most participants utilized ChatGPT selectively to get a new unique idea, rather than getting their assignment entirely made by it and ready for the submission. This indicates that ChatGPT was used as a guidance rather than a tool to get a quick result. This finding also suggests that student use ChatGPT carefully during the planning and revising stages rather than relying toward ChatGPT as a substitute for their Creative Writing assignment.

While ChatGPT is able to support students as a guidance in developing Creative Writing, the findings also found out that there are some challenges that the students encountered during the use of ChatGPT. These challenge shows that the use of ChatGPT need a raises critical concern that require careful consideration.



Figure 2. Students’ Opinion About Disadvantages or Weaknesses of Using ChatGPT in Creative Writing

As depicted in Figure 2, the figure reveals several perceived disadvantages of using ChatGPT in Creative Writing. The most frequently cited weaknesses include: overly general and predictable responses, reduced student motivation to think independently, message limitations for non-premium users, mismatched or inaccurate responses, risk of plagiarism, and concerns about originality. Students noted that ChatGPT responses often felt like recycled or borrowed ideas rather than genuinely creative content. These concerns reflect the risk of cognitive offloading and dependency when ChatGPT is used uncritically.

Overall, these findings indicate that ChatGPT facilitated students’ in developing Creative Writing by supporting students’ cognitive, linguistic, and affective aspects of the writing process. Rather than hindering creativity as ChatGPT is able to support students in giving some new and unique ideas, become more confident and motivated, and improve their writing structure. These results suggest that when used critically and reflectively, ChatGPT can align with contemporary theories of writing as a process-oriented and learner-centered activity. However, as the next finding will show, these benefits were accompanied by several

challenges that complicated students’ engagement with AI-assisted creative writing. The challenges also demonstrated that the use of ChatGPT in developing creative writing is not a straightforward process as there is also a risk of disadvantages and challenges related to dependency, originality, cultural relevance and ethics. These findings suggest that the effectiveness of ChatGPT in creative writing development depends largely on how critically and reflectively students engage with the tool.

Discussion

The findings confirm that ChatGPT facilitated creative writing development among EFL students at Sriwijaya University. This can be theoretically explained through the Cognitive Process Theory of Writing, which frames writing as a recursive process involving planning, translating, and reviewing (Flower & Hayes, 2019). ChatGPT's scaffolding functions such as idea generation and structural feedback directly support these cognitive stages by reducing the mental burden on students during early drafting (Royani, & Sihombing, 2023; Gunawardena & Wilson, 2021; Mohammadzadeh et al., 2020). Furthermore, from a Constructivist perspective, students who engaged interactively with ChatGPT were able to construct knowledge actively, consistent with Creely (2024) finding that AI tools enable learners to build more coherent and fluent texts. The perception of ChatGPT as a digital mentor aligns with Shidiq (2023) observation that AI tools simplify the educational process when used as a complement to human instruction. This is further supported by Putri and Ginting (2025), who found that ChatGPT integration in writing classes offers advantages when guided by appropriate pedagogical frameworks. advantages, disadvantages and challenges that can be overcome with the correct use of ChatGPT.

Several contextual factors account for students' patterns of ChatGPT use. First, difficulty initiating writing tasks suggests that ChatGPT functioned as a catalyst during the planning stage, helping students overcome writer's block through brainstorming support. Second, limited vocabulary and structural uncertainty led students to use ChatGPT as a linguistic resource, which is consistent with the scaffolding function (Creely, 2024; Ida Royani & Sihombing, 2024; Mazrou & Alzyoudi, 2024). Third, academic pressure from strict deadlines incentivized students to seek efficient writing support, which may inadvertently increase dependency rather than build long-term writing competence. Importantly, this finding echoes Formosa et al. (2025) concern that AI assistance can blur boundaries of authorship and creative ownership when used without critical awareness.

The cultural and educational context of Sriwijaya University may also influence the finding. As most technological teaching and learning has become a main source of education in Sriwijaya University in which making the students become even more familiar on using technology in education that leading the student on the usage of AI especially ChatGPT. In addition, the unique characteristic that was found from the sample was the differences of the ChatGPT strength and knowledge on both semester as semester 8 students was using an earlier version of ChatGPT on doing their Creative Writing assignment in which ChatGPT does not respond as accurately compared to semester 6 students who are using the latest version of ChatGPT.

5. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that ChatGPT plays a significant role in supporting EFL students' creative writing development by enhancing idea generation, organization, textual flow, confidence, and motivation when used critically and reflectively as a digital scaffold. However, challenges such as overreliance on AI, reduced independent

thinking, concerns about originality and authorship, as well as cultural and ethical issues, indicate the importance of balancing technological assistance with students' cognitive engagement and creative ownership. Therefore, educators and curriculum designers should provide clear guidance on ethical AI use, integrate reflective and metacognitive activities, and promote AI literacy within creative writing instruction. Future research is recommended to investigate the long-term effects of AI-assisted writing on creativity and learner autonomy, compare instructional models for AI integration, and explore teachers' perspectives on managing AI use in EFL classrooms to ensure more effective, ethical, and pedagogically sound implementation.

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