



ENGLISH DEPARTMENT STUDENTS' VOICES ON AI UNDERSTANDING AND USAGE: A STUDY OF AI LITERACY IN A UNIVERSITY SETTING

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how English Department students perceive Artificial Intelligence (AI) and use AI tools in university learning. It examines their understanding of AI, its academic applications, information verification practices, and ethical considerations in AI-assisted learning. Using a qualitative exploratory approach, data were collected through a Google Forms questionnaire involving 30 fourth-semester English Education students at Universitas PGRI Palembang. Five active AI users were subsequently selected for semi-structured interviews and classroom observations, while documentation supported the research process. The findings show that students viewed AI as a learning assistant for answering questions, improving writing, correcting grammar, generating ideas, translating texts, and explaining complex materials. Frequently used tools included ChatGPT, Grammarly, Gemini, Claude AI, NotebookLM, Meta AI, and Google Translate. However, students rarely verified the accuracy of AI-generated information. The findings provide implications for English language teaching, academic writing, digital literacy, and institutional guidelines for responsible AI use. Lecturers are encouraged to design learning activities that emphasize prompt development, source verification, critical revision, and reflection so that AI functions as a learning support rather than a replacement for independent thinking. This study contributes Indonesian evidence by revealing that positive attitudes toward AI do not necessarily translate into responsible academic practices.

Keywords: *EFL Students, English Pronunciation, Google Translate Speaker, Pronunciation Practice, Text-to-Speech*

1. INTRODUCTION

Artificial Intelligence has moved into ordinary university life. Students meet it when they search for information, translate words, correct grammar, ask a chatbot, summarize a text, or prepare an assignment (Verdegem, 2024; Fattah et al., 2023; Xu, 2024). In language classrooms, these activities are no longer unusual because AI tools are available on phones and laptops (Xiaofan & Annamalai, 2025; Qassrawi et al., 2024; Ngoc et al., 2025). The situation gives English learners useful support, but it also creates a new academic

responsibility: they must decide when AI assistance is helpful and when human judgement is still needed (Rosdiana et al., 2024; Alharbi, 2023; Hapsari & Wu, 2022).

For English Education students, AI is closely connected with daily learning tasks. Writing an essay, revising a paragraph, understanding a reading passage, and translating difficult expressions are common academic routines (Amirjalili et al., 2024; Uli Banjarnahor et al., 2023). Tools such as ChatGPT, Grammarly, Gemini, Claude AI, NotebookLM, Meta AI, and Google Translate can help students produce first ideas, improve

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sentence clarity, check grammar, and compare language options (Kasneci et al., 2023; Ozfidan et al., 2024; Tambunan et al., 2022). Previous studies note that generative AI can support language learning when learners do not treat the output as a finished product (Kohnke & Moorhouse, 2024; Suharto et al., 2025).

The benefit of AI does not remove its risks. AI responses may look fluent but still contain weak explanation, missing context, or inaccurate information (Madhavi et al., 2023; Rahayu et al., 2024; Amin, 2023). Students may also become too dependent on instant answers, especially when assignments are submitted without revision or source checking. UNESCO (2023) stresses that AI in education needs guidance and human control. This issue is important for higher education because responsible learning is not only about completing work faster, but also about maintaining originality, critical thinking, and academic honesty.

This article uses AI literacy as its main lens. AI literacy is understood here as the ability to recognize the role of AI, use it for suitable academic purposes, question the reliability of its output, and make ethical decisions when using AI-supported content (Liu, 2025). Long and Magerko (2020) and Ng et al. (2021) present AI literacy as more than operating a tool; it also includes interpretation and evaluation. In this research, AI literacy is examined through what students say, what they do, and how consistent their awareness is during learning activities.

Although many studies discuss AI in education, student experience in specific Indonesian English Education settings still needs more attention (Hamid et al., 2025; Rofikah et al., 2025). Students may report that they understand the need to check AI output, yet their real behavior may not fully show that awareness. Therefore, this study asks: How do English Department students understand and use Artificial Intelligence as part of AI literacy in their academic environment? The answer is expected to help lecturers and institutions

prepare more practical guidance for responsible AI use.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In higher education, AI can be seen as a set of digital systems that help users process information, generate language, offer feedback, and support decision making. Adhikari and Pandey (2025) explain that AI may strengthen student agency when it is connected with clear teaching purposes. For students, however, AI is usually experienced through simple applications rather than complex institutional systems. A chatbot, grammar checker, translator, or summarizer becomes the most visible form of AI in their academic life (Yusup, 2023; Hapsari & Wu, 2022; Kumar, 2021).

AI literacy gives the conceptual direction for this study. Long and Magerko (2020) connect AI literacy with the ability to understand and evaluate AI. Ng et al. (2021) describe important areas such as knowing AI, applying AI, judging AI, and considering ethical issues. Chiu et al. (2024) also place values and human judgement inside AI competence. Based on these ideas, the present study observes four concerns: how students explain AI, how they use AI in English learning, how they check AI output, and how they understand responsible use.

Research on AI and language learning shows both support and caution. Kohnke and Moorhouse (2024) discuss the role of generative AI in EFL writing, while Suharto et al. (2025) report that AI-based writing tools can help language learners develop writing competence. At the same time, AI assistance should not replace students' own thinking. If learners only copy a generated response, the task becomes faster but less educational (Fiialka et al., 2024; Mei et al., 2025; Abdelhalim et al., 2025). This is why AI use needs to be linked with revision, explanation, and source comparison.

Student perception is also important because learners adopt technology when they feel that the tool is useful, quick, and easy to access.

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Chan and Hu (2023) found that students may appreciate generative AI while still worrying about accuracy and ethical boundaries. Zambrano et al. (2025) also show that students value AI assistance in academic writing but remain concerned about originality. These studies suggest that a positive attitude is only one part of AI literacy. The more important question is whether students can turn that attitude into careful practice.

This article builds on those studies by focusing on English Department students at Universitas PGRI Palembang. Instead of relying only on questionnaire answers, the research combines questionnaire data with interviews and observation. This design allows the researcher to compare what students claim with what they actually do when AI is used for academic tasks. The gap between awareness and practice becomes a central point in understanding AI literacy as a lived academic habit.

3. METHODS

The research employed a qualitative exploratory design. This design was chosen because the study did not aim to test a statistical relationship. It aimed to understand students' meanings, habits, and decision making when AI tools were used in English learning. The approach followed qualitative inquiry principles in which participants' explanations and observed actions are treated as important evidence (Creswell & Creswell, 2024; Tisdell et al., 2025; Patton, 2020).

The research site was Universitas PGRI Palembang. The first group consisted of 30 fourth-semester students of the English Education Study Program who completed a questionnaire through Google Forms. From the questionnaire responses, five students with frequent experience using AI were selected for interviews and observation. They are referred to as P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5 to protect their identity.

Four sources of data were used. The questionnaire gave an overview of students' familiarity with AI, commonly used tools,

perceived benefits, ease of use, and checking behavior. The interviews explored each participant's personal experience, examples of AI-supported tasks, problems they met, and views on academic honesty. Observation recorded how students interacted with AI during academic work, including prompt revision, grammar checking, translation, idea development, and response review. Documentation supported the data collection record.

The analysis was carried out in several practical steps. First, questionnaire responses were read to identify repeated patterns. Second, interview answers were grouped into themes such as understanding, use, benefit, limitation, and ethics (Miall & Kuiken, 2019; Dornyei & Taguchi, 2019). Third, observation notes were compared with the interview themes (Spradley, 2016; Van Maanen, 2025). Finally, the researcher looked for agreement and difference across the data sources. This comparison was used to strengthen credibility and to show whether students' stated awareness appeared in their actual AI-use behavior.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**RESULTS*****Students' Understanding of Artificial Intelligence***

The findings indicate that participants possessed a practical rather than technical understanding of Artificial Intelligence (AI). Instead of defining AI using concepts such as algorithms, neural networks, or machine learning, they explained it according to its usefulness in supporting learning activities. Most participants perceived AI as a digital assistant that provides answers, explains learning materials, and facilitates academic work.

Interview data illustrate this perspective. Participant 1 viewed AI as a learning companion that supports idea development and comprehension.

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“AI helps me organize ideas when I do assignments. If I do not understand a topic, I ask AI first before looking at other sources.” (P1)

Similarly, Participant 2 emphasized AI's interactive nature.

“For me, AI is like someone who can answer questions immediately. It feels like asking another person, but much faster.” (P2)

Participant 5 demonstrated a broader conceptual understanding by recognizing AI as technology capable of performing tasks commonly associated with human intelligence.

“AI is technology that can think in a certain way and complete tasks that usually require human intelligence, such as writing, translating, or answering questions.” (P5)

These responses suggest that students constructed their understanding primarily through direct experience with AI applications rather than through formal instruction about AI technologies.

AI Use in English Learning

Questionnaire, interview, and observation data consistently showed that AI was mainly employed to support English language learning. Students reported using AI to generate ideas for writing, improve sentence structure, check grammar, translate vocabulary and longer passages, summarize reading materials, expand vocabulary knowledge, and clarify course content.

Classroom observations revealed flexible patterns of AI use. Some students accessed AI through smartphones, while others preferred laptops. Students frequently modified prompts when initial responses were considered too general or inconsistent with assignment requirements. Rather than using AI only to finalize assignments, students integrated it throughout different stages of the learning process.

Interview findings further illustrated these practices. Participant 1 explained:

“I usually use ChatGPT and Gemini to develop ideas before writing descriptive or narrative texts. Sometimes Meta AI helps me understand difficult instructions.” (P1)

Participant 2 stated:

“ChatGPT helps me find ideas, and Grammarly checks my grammar. Sometimes the answers are still too general, so I revise them myself.” (P2)

Participant 3 described AI as a writing assistant.

“Claude AI and ChatGPT help me improve grammar and provide better sentence examples. They make my writing clearer.” (P3)

Participant 4 reported combining several AI platforms according to different purposes.

“I use ChatGPT, Claude AI, NotebookLM, and Google Translate. Each one has a different function for translation, grammar checking, and understanding reading materials.” (P4)

Participant 5 similarly explained:

“AI helps me write assignments faster, translate difficult vocabulary, improve grammar, and understand lecture materials.” (P5)

Across participants, AI functioned as a language-learning aid, a cognitive support tool, and a means of improving efficiency during academic tasks.

Students' Perceived Benefits and Challenges

Students generally expressed favorable attitudes toward AI-assisted learning. They believed that AI reduced learning time, simplified difficult concepts, improved English writing quality, and increased confidence during assignment completion. They also

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appreciated the accessibility and ease of use offered by AI platforms.

Despite these advantages, participants identified several challenges. The most frequently mentioned limitation concerned the reliability of AI-generated information. Students acknowledged that AI occasionally produced inaccurate, incomplete, or overly general responses.

Participant 2 commented:

“Sometimes the answer looks convincing, but after checking another source I realize it is incomplete.” (P2)

Participant 4 similarly noted:

“AI is helpful, but I still have to compare the information because sometimes it gives different answers.” (P4)

Observation data further demonstrated differences in students' verification behavior. While several participants compared AI outputs with textbooks, lecture materials, or online references, others accepted AI responses without additional verification whenever the information appeared relevant to the assignment.

These findings indicate that although students recognized the importance of evaluating AI-generated information, verification practices remained inconsistent across participants.

DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate that students' understanding of AI is predominantly functional and experience-based. Rather than conceptualizing AI from a technological perspective, participants interpreted AI according to its usefulness in solving academic problems. This reflects the growing normalization of AI within higher education, where students engage with AI primarily as an educational resource instead of an emerging technological innovation.

The findings also reveal that AI has become integrated into multiple stages of English learning rather than functioning solely as a proofreading or translation tool. Students used AI for brainstorming, language development, grammar revision, translation, summarization, and comprehension. This pattern suggests that AI increasingly serves as both linguistic and cognitive scaffolding that supports independent learning processes.

These findings correspond with Chan and Hu (2023) and Kohnke and Moorhouse (2024), who argue that students are more willing to adopt AI technologies when they improve learning efficiency, reduce cognitive demands, and provide immediate academic support. The present study extends these findings by demonstrating that Indonesian EFL students employ multiple AI platforms strategically according to specific learning purposes instead of relying exclusively on a single application.

A particularly important finding concerns the discrepancy between students' ethical awareness and their actual learning practices. Most participants acknowledged that AI-generated information should be evaluated critically and that direct copying constitutes inappropriate academic behavior. Nevertheless, classroom observations revealed that verification was not consistently practiced. Some students carefully compared AI responses with academic sources, whereas others accepted generated information without additional checking when it appeared sufficiently relevant.

This inconsistency suggests that AI literacy involves more than technological familiarity. Consistent with Long and Magerko (2020), Ng et al. (2021), and Chiu et al. (2024), AI literacy should encompass critical evaluation, ethical judgement, and responsible decision-making alongside technical competence. Although participants recognized the potential limitations of AI-generated content, they frequently prioritized efficiency over verification during assignment completion.

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Consequently, their ethical awareness had not yet developed into a consistent academic habit.

The present findings also complement recent Indonesian studies on AI-assisted English learning. Hamid et al. (2025) argue that AI integration in higher education presents both educational opportunities and ethical challenges, while Rofikah et al. (2025) and Suharto et al. (2025) emphasize AI's effectiveness in supporting EFL writing. The present study contributes additional evidence by highlighting a behavioral gap between positive perceptions of AI and responsible academic practice. Positive attitudes toward AI do not automatically translate into critical and ethical use.

From a pedagogical perspective, English lecturers should explicitly integrate AI literacy into classroom instruction rather than merely permitting or restricting AI use. Learning activities may require students to document prompts, justify their acceptance or rejection of AI suggestions, compare AI-generated responses with scholarly sources, and explain how they revised AI outputs using their own understanding. Such activities position AI as a scaffold that enhances learning while preserving critical thinking, learner autonomy, and academic integrity. At the institutional level, universities should also establish clear guidelines regarding acceptable AI use in writing, translation, and assignment preparation to promote responsible and ethical AI-assisted learning.

5. CONCLUSION

This study found that English Department students understand AI mainly through its practical role in learning. They see it as a helper for answering questions, building ideas, correcting English sentences, translating text, and understanding course materials. Their strongest AI literacy appears in tool familiarity, positive perception, and everyday academic use.

The study also found that critical checking and ethical consistency still need improvement. Students generally know that AI output may be inaccurate and that direct copying should be avoided, but observation showed that verification was not always done. The main contribution of this article is the identification of a practical gap between knowing responsible AI use and applying it during real academic tasks.

Students should strengthen source checking, prompt planning, revision, and ethical decision making when using AI. Lecturers are encouraged to design assignments that require reflection on AI use, not only final answers. Universities should prepare guidance and training so AI literacy develops as a responsible academic competence in English education.

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