

# How AI Paraphrasing Tools Reshape Drafting Habits and Writing Development Among EFL University Students

Nusrat Sultana Mahmud

Principal, Kazi Faruky College, Dhaka, Bangladesh

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## ABSTRACT

The fast absorption of artificial intelligence (AI) paraphrasing tools into the academic writing institution has cast serious concerns regarding its effect on the second language academic writing. It is a qualitative phenomenological research study that examines the experiences of EFL university students in the application of AI paraphrasing tools and how the use repackages their drafting practices, writing processes, and assumes their roles in authorial agency and academic honesty. The data were gathered using the method of semi-structured and in-depth interviews with 12 undergraduate EFL students who claimed to use AI paraphrasing tools on a regular basis when composing academic texts. Using an interpretivist paradigm, the data were examined through a phenomenological thematic approach to obtain the lived experiences of the participants. This is demonstrated by the results that AI paraphrasing tools acted as both linguistic and affective scaffolds decreasing anxiety about accuracy in language and academic tone. Meanwhile, the drafting activities of students were also transformed: drafting was no longer achieved by an independent composition; instead, drafting involved rewriting, with revision now being concerned with surface rewording. The respondents have also had mixed perceptions when it comes to the development of their writing skills: some of them felt that their awareness of the language has heightened due to being exposed to AI-generated versions, but other respondents have been worried about becoming too dependent and less reliable in their ability to paraphrase without AI assistance. Also, students were actively involved in negotiating authorship and academic integrity through post-editing of AI output, but they had no certainty regarding ethical limits. The paper is an attempt to note that the role of AI paraphrasing tools in EFL academic writing is complex and ambivalent and contributes to the necessity to engage in pedagogical strategies that allow promoting reflective, self-regulated, and ethically informed AI use in higher education.

**Keywords**-AI paraphrasing tools; EFL academic writing; drafting habits; phenomenological study; authorial agency

## INTRODUCTION

Academic proficiency in written texts is an essential factor in higher education involving English as a medium of instruction. However, when it comes to university students whose English is a foreign language (EFL), academic writing tends to become one of the most challenging literacy practices since it demands the simultaneous negotiation of the linguistic and rhetorical organization, critical source analysis, and drafting and revision process. As it has been demonstrated in research on second language writing, EFL writers are always unable to balance these competing pressures, especially when it comes to the institutional pressures of assessment, time, and demands to be original and academic (Barkaoui, 2016; Ferris, 2012; Hayes, 2012; Silva, 1993).

In this already complicated writing environment, the fast development of AI-facilitated writing technologies has started changing the patterns by which EFL students write and edit academic texts. Drafting support AI, paraphrasing, and writing assistance apps like QuillBot and Grammarly and more recently generative AI systems like ChatGPT are becoming very prevalent and often integrated into the daily drafting habit of students. These applications provide immediate linguistic assistance by rewriting sentences, replacing lexicons, correcting grammar, and improving styles, offloading the surface load of a second language writing (Dizon and Gayed,

2024; Kohnke et al., 2023; Warschauer et al., 2023). Such tools are viewed as useful applications that assist learners with language constraints to reduce anxiety when writing, which is the case with many EFL learners.

Meanwhile, the increased use of AI paraphrasing devices has caused some serious pedagogical and ethical issues. Although AI-assisted rewriting can be considered as a type of scaffolding, it also can promote over-reliance and diminish the involvement of learners in the cognitive and metacognitive processes, which writing development relies on. Specifically, paraphrasing is not a simple mechanical process but a complicated educational activity, entailing the interpretation of source meanings, re-formulating the thoughts, and placing oneself in the context of the scholarly discourse. Previous studies on source-based writing have demonstrated that writers, particularly in the L2-based context, tend to resort to copying, near-copying or patchwriting when they do not possess enough linguistic and rhetorical resources, which are more of a developmental issue than a deliberate misbehavior (Keck, 2006, 2014; Pecorari, 2003). The AI paraphrasing tools make this developmental path more complicated, as they generate the linguistically acceptable reformulations by requiring the minimal effort of the learners, which might mask the degree of students internalizing paraphrasing strategies or gaining autonomy over academic language (Pecorari and Petric, 2014; Prentice and Kinden, 2018).

This ambivalence of learning support and excessive dependence comes into sharp focus in regard to higher education whereby the development of writing is strongly aligned with graduate qualities in academic literacy, ethical scholarship and authorial responsibility. The studies of automated writing evaluation and digital feedback systems have demonstrated that the technologies may facilitate revision and accuracy, yet their usefulness is conditional upon the manner in which the learners perceive the feedback and the ways in which tools are integrated, to contribute to introspection and deliberate control (Li et al., 2015; Stevenson and Phakiti, 2014). Emerging meta-analytic and review studies also indicate that AI-based writing assistance can have a positive effect on average, but also has uneven learning influences in various settings and on different people (Dizon and Gayed, 2024; Fleckenstein et al., 2023). Such results indicate that it is necessary to go beyond the outcome-centered evaluations and look at the experience of students who use AI tools during their writing process.

In a sociocultural approach, writing development can be considered a mediated process as it is influenced by the tools, practice and social expectations (Vygotsky, 1978). It is possible thus to think of AI paraphrasing tools as mediational, that is, they are ways to restructure the writing process by redistributing the cognitive effort and affecting what writers focus their attention on during the drafting and revision process. Meanwhile, writing development relies on the ability of learners to engage in self-regulations learning which encompasses setting of goals, strategy use, monitoring and evaluation (Zimmerman, 2002). The self-regulated learning strategies have been associated with better writing performance and confidence in EFL writing research, especially when the learner participates in planning and revising writing instead of using external correction on its own (Teng and Zhang, 2016, 2020). The use of AI paraphrasing tools can be in support or opposition of these regulatory processes, based on whether the tools are used as reflective learning tools or as the replacement of independent composing.

Very similar in this respect is the concept of authorial agency which is the feeling of ownership, control and responsibility of writers to their texts. The linguistic and rhetorical options of agency and identity negotiation in L2 academic writing are represented in the ways writers paraphrase their sources and locate themselves in relation to a prior scholarship (Hyland, 2002). In case AI tools interfere with the process of formulating and rewording sentences, they can change the perception of authorship and voice, leaving questions on who is going to write the final piece and how learners will view the limitation of the acceptable help. Even though some recent studies have initiated data gathering focused on the perception of students towards AI writing tools and their possible affordances (El-Garawany, 2024; Nazari et al., 2021), the qualitative information on the experiences of EFL students using AI paraphrasing tools in their daily writing routine and the impact these experiences have on their comprehension of writing instruction, agency, and academic honesty is scarce.

In this regard, qualitative, phenomenological studies that predict the lived experiences of EFL students using AI paraphrasing tools are required. Instead of assuming the use of tools to be inherently helpful or inherently harmful, in such a way, it is possible to nuancedly study how students make sense of AI-mediated writing, how

paraphrasing-tools become as part of the drafting practice, and how learners manage tensions between efficiency, learning, and ethical responsibility in actual academic writing situations.

This study aims to:

- Explore EFL university students' lived experiences of using AI paraphrasing tools during academic writing.
- Examine how AI paraphrasing tools reshape students' drafting habits and perceived writing development.
- Investigate how students negotiate authorial agency and academic integrity when incorporating AI paraphrasing tools into their writing practices.

## METHODOLOGY

The qualitative phenomenological research was adopted in the study, and it aimed to investigate the experiences of EFL university students in the use of AI paraphrasing tools in academic writing. The qualitative approach is suitable in those cases when the researcher wants to learn about meanings, perceptions, and interpretations, as opposed to measuring predetermined variables or drawing causal conclusions (Creswell and Poth, 2018). In particular, phenomenology was chosen due to its focus on capturing the lived experience of the participants, the meaning that they attribute to a common phenomenon, which makes it perfectly fit the investigation of the perception and meaning that students attribute to AI-mediated writing practices (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2016).

An interpretivist research paradigm guided the study as it presupposes that the reality is social and that the knowledge is also produced through the interaction of the participants with their social, institutional, and technological environments (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018). In this view, the activities of students who use AI paraphrasing tools are not seen as objective actions but as meaning practices that are influenced by the conventions of writing, the anxiety of assessment and writing history.

### Research Context

The study was done in one of the institutions of higher learning, where English is the foreign language of instruction and where academic writing in English is mandatory part of the undergraduate curriculum. In this respect, learners are called on to accomplish a series of writing-intensive tasks, such as essay, reports, and research-based work, frequently with strong indicators of originality, paraphrasing and citation. In the past, it was demonstrated that these institutional expectations have a powerful implication on the manner in which EFL students engage the processes of drafting and revision, especially when they have to write sources (Keck, 2014; Pecorari and Petric, 2014).

During the research period, AI paraphrasing systems like QuillBot and AI-assisted rewriters built-in in grammar-checking tools were available to students in large numbers. Nevertheless, institutional guidelines on the pedagogical and ethical application of such tools were scarce, which manifests greater ambiguity in the context of higher education concerning how AI writing technologies must be controlled and become a part of academic activity (Warschauer et al., 2023).

### Participants and Sampling Strategy

Participants were chosen through purposeful sampling, which is a frequent approach to qualitative studies and, in this case, focuses on the cases that are highly informative and can help clarify the phenomenon being researched (Patton, 2015). The purposeful sampling approach used in phenomenological research enables the researcher to concentrate on individuals who have first-hand and prolonged exposure to the topic at hand (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

The inclusion criteria involved that (a) the participants must be enrolled as undergraduate EFL students, (b) completed at least one academic writing course in the English language and (c) have regular experience with the AI paraphrasing tools during academic writing. The sample size of 12 participants is also appropriate considering the recommendations of phenomenological research that focus on depth and richness of data instead of big sample sizes (Moustakas, 1994; Guest et al., 2012). The sample was diverse in terms of academic fields and English proficiency level, which allowed exploring similar and different experiences.

### **Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity**

In qualitative inquiry, the researcher is viewed as a part and parcel of the data collection and analysis process, where reflexivity is crucial in methodological rigor (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The scholar of this study has work experience with EFL students in academic writing and is conversant with institutional arguments about the use of AI in higher learning. Although this positionality was contextually sensitive, it could also have given a number of assumptions regarding what should have been done in writing or the utilization of technology. To overcome this, the researcher practiced reflexivity persistently, and he kept a reflexive journal where he recorded his assumptions, analytic decisions, and developing interpretations. The concept of reflexivity was viewed as a continuous process and not a fixed disclosure according to the suggestions to improve the transparency and confirmability of qualitative research (Tracy, 2020).

### **Data Collection**

Semi-structured and in-depth interviews were used to gather data, which is quite a well-known approach in the phenomenological study as it allows one to obtain rich and first-person accounts (Kvale, 2000). Semi-structured interviews will give the participants the opportunity to describe their experiences in their own words and give enough flexibility during probing and clarification.

All the participants participated in a single interview that lasted about 40-60 minutes. Participants-centered interviews related to their writing habits, the reasons to use AI paraphrasing tools, the ways to integrate them into writing and revision, the perceived impacts on the development of writing, and author-self and academic integrity. The open-ended questions were applied to promote the development of narrative answers, which aligns with the principles of phenomenological interviewing that put a higher emphasis on depth and meaning rather than standardized answers (van Manen, 2016).

All the interviews were recorded on audio, informed consent by the participants and transcribed verbatim. They allowed the participants to explain the meanings in their first language where there was a need to ensure the accuracy and richness of the expression and this has been recommended in qualitative research in L2 in order to avoid the narrowing down of meaning-making (Temple and Young, 2004).

### **Ethical Considerations**

Data collection was classified under institutional research ethics and therefore, a meeting with the institutional research ethics board was held before data collection. All the participants were informed of the purpose of the study, the procedures involved, and the voluntary nature of the study, and informed consent was signed by all the participants. They were told that they had a right to withdraw any time without being penalized.

All identifying information has been taken out of transcripts and pseudonyms were applied to ensure confidentiality. Information was saved safely and only the researcher had access. Since the topic of AI use and academic integrity is sensitive, specific attention was paid to ensuring the participants that their answers would not influence their academic performance, which is why the major attention is paid to ethical principles in conducting studies that include students (British Educational Research Association, 2018).

### **Data Analysis**

The analysis of data was done using phenomenological thematic approach based on frameworks of phenomenological procedures (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2016). The analysis was inductive and iterative as it enabled themes to emerge as the participants described their experiences and not a priori as they have been assigned.

The analysis process had a number of steps. To have a holistic picture of the experiences of participants the first step was to repeat the transcripts. Second, the meaning units that apply to AI paraphrasing, drafting habit, learning perception, and agency were determined and coded. Third, codes were grouped into higher themes which show common trends in the experience of the participants. Lastly, themes were condensed to explain the fundamental framework of lived experience of the students with AI paraphrasing tools.

Data were organized and made transparent with the help of qualitative data analysis software. During the analysis, convergence and divergence of experiences were considered, as it is an important principle of phenomenological studies to maintain the complexity instead of diminishing the variation (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

### Trustworthiness

The issue of trustworthiness was met by strategies that are consistent with the existing qualitative rigor standards (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The credibility in the study was improved by conducting the study over an extended period of time and member checking, in which the study participants would read summaries of the interpreted themes. Reliability was also ensured through an audit trail that records decisions on codes and analytic changes. Reflexive journaling and systematic reports on interpretations enhanced the confirmability. The issue of transferability was resolved by providing rich description about the research context and the participants so that the readers can make judgement on whether the findings can be applied in other EFL writing situations.

## FINDINGS

This part of the paper contains the results of the phenomenological examination of the interview material. The presentation starts with the description of the demographic features of the participants, and then, the key themes, which represent the experiences of students in terms of working with AI paraphrasing tools in academic writing, are described in detail. Themes are conveyed in a descriptive manner with representative quotes of the participants.

### Participant Demographic Characteristics

The study involved twelve EFL undergraduate students. The sample consisted of students studying various subjects, grades, and their self-assessed level of knowledge in English writing. All the respondents said that they frequently used at least one AI-based paraphrasing or AI-aided writing aids when they had to do academic writing.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of participants (N = 12)

Participant	Gender	Age	Year of Study	Discipline	Self-rated Writing Level	AI Tools Used	Frequency of Use
P1	Male	20	Year 2	Business	Intermediate	QuillBot, Grammarly	Weekly
P2	Female	19	Year 1	English	Intermediate	Grammarly, ChatGPT	Weekly

P3	Female	22	Year 3	Sociology	Upper-intermediate	QuillBot	2–3×/week
P4	Male	21	Year 2	Computer Science	Intermediate	QuillBot, ChatGPT	Weekly
P5	Female	23	Year 4	Education	Upper-intermediate	QuillBot, Grammarly	2–3×/week
P6	Male	22	Year 3	Engineering	Intermediate	QuillBot	Weekly
P7	Female	20	Year 2	Pharmacy	Intermediate	Grammarly, QuillBot	2–3×/week
P8	Male	24	Year 4	Law	Upper-intermediate	QuillBot, ChatGPT	Weekly
P9	Female	21	Year 3	English	Advanced	Grammarly, ChatGPT	2–3×/week
P10	Male	19	Year 1	Business	Intermediate	QuillBot	Weekly
P11	Female	22	Year 3	Public Health	Upper-intermediate	QuillBot, Grammarly	Weekly
P12	Male	23	Year 4	Economics	Upper-intermediate	QuillBot, ChatGPT	2–3×/week

**Thematic Findings**

The phenomenological analysis led to the four interrelated themes or reflective elements of the lived experience of participants involved in using AI paraphrasing tools to write academic papers. Collectively, these themes depict how AI paraphrasing altered the drafting practices, writing growth attitudes as well as conceptions of authorship and academic dishonesty among students.

**Theme 1: AI paraphrasing as a mechanism for reducing linguistic anxiety**

Across interviews, participants described AI paraphrasing tools as providing immediate relief from linguistic pressure associated with academic writing in English. Many participants framed tool use as a response to anxiety about grammatical accuracy, lexical adequacy, and producing an “academic-sounding” text. The tools were perceived as offering reassurance that their writing met institutional language expectations.

One participant explained that paraphrasing tools functioned as a safety net, particularly when submitting assessed assignments:

“When I write on my own, I always worry my sentence is wrong or too simple. After paraphrasing, I feel more confident because it sounds academic.” (P5)

Another participant emphasized the emotional dimension of tool use, describing reduced fear during drafting:

“It removes my tension. I can focus on ideas first because I know later the tool will help me fix the language.” (P1)

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This theme highlights that AI paraphrasing tools were not used solely for linguistic enhancement but also as affective support during the writing process.

### **Theme 2: Drafting practices shifted from independent composing to tool-mediated rewriting**

Participants consistently reported that AI paraphrasing tools reshaped their drafting routines. Rather than composing and revising sentences independently, many students described a workflow in which initial drafts were intentionally written in simplified language, followed by repeated cycles of paraphrasing and selection among AI-generated alternatives. Revision, for many participants, became closely associated with rewording rather than conceptual reorganization.

As one participant explained:

“Before, revising meant I read again and tried to improve by myself. Now revising means I put my sentence into the tool and choose the best version.” (P3)

Another participant described a routinized, step-by-step drafting process:

“I don’t try to write perfect sentences anymore. I write basic ideas first, then paraphrase, then check again. That’s my normal process now.” (P7)

These accounts suggest that AI paraphrasing tools reorganized drafting habits, placing greater emphasis on surface-level transformation and iterative rewriting supported by technology.

### **Theme 3: Writing development was perceived as uneven and conditional**

Participants expressed mixed perceptions regarding the impact of AI paraphrasing tools on their long-term writing development. Some students reported that repeated exposure to paraphrased output helped them notice new vocabulary, sentence structures, and academic expressions, which they believed contributed to gradual learning. Others, however, expressed concern that frequent reliance on tools limited opportunities to practice paraphrasing independently.

One participant reflected on perceived learning gains:

“Sometimes I compare my sentence and the AI sentence, and I learn new ways to say things. I think it helps my vocabulary.” (P11)

In contrast, another participant articulated concern about growing dependence:

“If I don’t use the paraphrasing tool now, I feel stuck. I think my ability to rephrase by myself is getting weaker.” (P4)

This theme indicates that students’ perceptions of development were not uniform and were shaped by how deliberately they engaged with AI output rather than by tool use alone.

### **Theme 4: Authorial agency and academic integrity were actively negotiated**

Participants demonstrated awareness that AI paraphrasing tools raised questions about authorship, ownership, and ethical writing. Rather than using AI output unquestioningly, many students described strategies aimed at reclaiming authorial agency, such as modifying paraphrased sentences, combining multiple outputs, or rechecking meaning against original sources. These practices were often justified as ways to ensure that the final text still felt “their own.”

One participant explained:

“If I copy it directly, I don’t feel it’s my writing. I always change something after paraphrasing so I can say it’s my work.” (P2)

At the same time, participants expressed uncertainty about the boundaries between acceptable assistance and academic misconduct, particularly in source-based writing:

“When it paraphrases the source, it looks original, but I’m not fully sure it’s ethical. I feel confused about where the line is.” (P8)

This theme reveals that AI paraphrasing tools prompted ongoing ethical reflection and self-justification, rather than passive acceptance, as students navigated institutional expectations and personal responsibility.

### Summary of Findings

Collectively, the findings indicate that AI paraphrasing tools played a multifaceted role in participants’ academic writing experiences. The tools functioned as affective and linguistic scaffolds, reshaped drafting habits toward tool-mediated rewriting, produced uneven perceptions of writing development, and triggered active negotiation of authorial agency and academic integrity. These experiential dimensions form the foundation for the interpretive discussion that follows.

## DISCUSSION

The phenomenological research was aimed at investigating the experiences of EFL university students when using AI paraphrasing tools in academic writing, how the tools reorganize drafting practices and perceived writing growth, and how students manage the problem of authorial agency and academic honesty. The results have shown that AI paraphrasing tools take an uncertain and confusing position in the writing life of students as they are both linguistic scaffolds, affective regulators, and change agents in drafting processes. In this part, the results are discussed concerning previous studies and theoretical views presented in the Introduction.

The main conclusion the research made is that AI paraphrasing tools were perceived by the participants as a potent tool in alleviating linguistic anxiety in writing of academic texts. The students always indicated that paraphrasing tools helped them overcome the feeling that they were worried about grammatical correctness, lexical fluency, and academic tone and thus felt more confident about their writing assignments. The result is in line with the prior studies on automated writing support and AI-based writing assistants, which have reported positive changes in writing anxiety and growth in learner confidence in cases when the students get immediate, technology-mediated linguistic assistance (Dizon et al., 2023; Nazari et al., 2021). Socioculturally, this affective relief can be explained as a mediation that reduces the mental barrier to the involvement in academic writing where learners are able to venture with tasks they would not have ventured into (Vygotsky, 1978). Yet, according to the current results, the mechanism of affective support is not independent of the cognitive outcome, and the decreased level of anxiety may be achieved at the price of decreased involvement in the writing activity.

Specifically, the research shows that AI paraphrasing applications drastically altered the drafting patterns of participants. Instead of being involved in independent sentence building and revision, most students reported a system of drafting that relied on the basic first-write and the re-write of sentences using tools, which occurred repeatedly. To such students, revision came to be tightly linked with the process of picking or slightly changing AI-generated options instead of rearranging ideas, or polishing argumentation. This transition resonates with the previous studies regarding automated writing assessment and feedback that identified that technology is capable of prompting superficial revision when learners emphasis on making corrections or improving the form rather than focusing on making meaning (Li et al., 2015; Stevenson and Phakiti, 2014). The current results carry on the research finding that AI paraphrasing tools do not only complement the current drafting practices, but they restructure them and move the cognitive load off the sentence-formulating and on the evaluative-selection of machine-generated alternatives.

How the participants view the development of their writing also demonstrates the ambivalent pedagogical effect of AI paraphrasing tools. Although there were students who said that exposure to paraphrased output enabled them to learn new vocabulary and sentence structure, there were others who were of the opinion that regular use of the tools undermined their autonomy in paraphrasing and rephrasing ideas and sentence structure. This biased view of development reflects the results of previous studies that show that AI-based writing assistance may lead to inconsistent learning results based on the intention with which learners interact with the feedback of the tools (Dizon and Gayed, 2024; Fleckenstein et al., 2023). Self-regulated learning The differences, in turn, imply that AI paraphrasing tools can facilitate, or hinder, the processes of regulation, including monitoring, strategy use, and reflection (Zimmerman, 2002; Teng and Zhang, 2016, 2020). The students who compared the product of AI with their independent writing and contemplated about differences seemed to think that they gained more from learning, but the ones who were dependent on tools as an alternative to paraphrasing said that they felt increasingly dependent. This result highlights why it is crucial to consider the use of AI tools as an entirely developmental phenomenon but dependent on the regulatory activity of learners.

The results also add valuable knowledge to the existing body of literature concerning paraphrasing, textual borrowing, and academic dishonesty in L2 writing. Pieces of past studies have highlighted the fact that patchwriting and near-copying are usually signs of developmental challenges as opposed to planned plagiarism especially when EFL writers do not have adequate language resources (Keck, 2006, 2014; Pecorari, 2003). The current paper indicates that AI paraphrasing systems make this developmental process more difficult by generating language-acceptable reformulations that could negate the true participation of source meaning by learners. The responses of the participants indicate that although AI paraphrasing decreased the surface level similarity with the sources, it also gave rise to the doubtfulness of whether paraphrasing competence is actually being trained. This result is consistent with the ideas expressed by Pecorari and Petric (2014) and Prentice and Kinden (2018) that the use of paraphrasing tools can conceal source reliance instead of addressing underlying academic literacy issues.

Intimately connected to these issues is that the study found the authorial power to and the academic integrity to be negotiated and not passively accepted. Participants showed that they were conscious that AI paraphrasing tools are associated with ethical issues regarding ownership and responsibility, especially in source-based writing. Post-editing approaches, which included editing AI output or splicing multiple versions had been described by many as a means of reasserting authorship and justifying the validity of their writing. This is in line with the conceptualization of authorial identity as negotiated by Hyland (2002) as a result of textual decisions and not necessarily stipulated by authorship as a whole. Simultaneously, the uncertainty expressed by various participants regarding the boundaries of what can be considered acceptable assistance and when it turns into misconduct indicates the wider ambiguity of AI use in the educational field, which was reported by Warschauer et al. (2023). Its results indicate that students do not treat issues of integrity lightly; instead they are going through blurry institutional and pedagogical boundaries with few mentors.

Collectively, the results suggest a sociocultural explanation of AI paraphrasing tools as the mediational processes that not only redefine linguistic output but also the course of writing, learning, and ethical thinking. AI paraphrasing tools seem to be a two-sided resource in that they facilitate engagement in academic writing by lessening anxiety and linguistic load but also threaten to eliminate productive struggle, undermine self-regulation, and complicate the acquisition of paraphrasing competence and authorial agency. This conflict resembles more general positions on the topic in the literature that AI-generated text creates contradictions instead of direct benefits to second language writers (Warschauer et al., 2023).

Notably, the research has an extended depth to the prior research since it also preempts the experiences of students instead of prioritizing the performance outcomes of the tools or their effectiveness. The findings can be incorporated into the development of a process-based point of view, as it adds to the current body of quantitative and intervention-driven research and reveals how AI paraphrasing aids make their way into the daily routine of drafting (El-Garawany, 2024; Nazari et al., 2021). According to this view, the pedagogical reaction to AI paraphrasing should go beyond prohibition or blind use and rather emphasize on helping to encourage reflective, self-controlled, and ethically sound use of such means in EFL academic writing.

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## CONCLUSION

The phenomenological research was conducted to examine how EFL higher education students feel using AI paraphrasing tools in writing academic papers, especially focusing on drafting practices, perceived writing growth, and authorial agency and academic integrity negotiation. The results indicate that AI paraphrasing assistive tools are now in the context of students daily composing routines, which has not only transformed the manner in which texts are formed, but also the way in which the students perceive writing, learning, and accountability in the teaching of the English language in higher education.

The paper indicates that AI paraphrasing devices act as effective linguistic and emotional aids, which help students handle anxiety associated with grammatical precision, scholarly level, and language sufficiency. These tools can place a lot of writing tasks previously unreachable by many EFL learners since they alleviate the immediate linguistic load of writing by enabling them to feel more comfortable with the writing process. Nonetheless, this assistance is followed by significant alterations in scribbling patterns. Writing changed, in the mind of many participants, not so much in terms of the revision on an independent sentence, but on the basis of a tool-mediated rewriting routine, in which revision came to be more and more linked to rewording, not conceptual development. These changes define how AI paraphrasing tools are not only helpful supplements to the current process of writing, but also remodel the writing process itself.

Simultaneously, the research demonstrates an unequal and conditional perception of the development of writing among students. Whereas other learners have found more language awareness in being exposed to those alternatives generated by AI, many of them expressed their fear of developing dependence and less confidence in paraphrasing by themselves. The findings highlight the importance of the fact that AI paraphrasing tools are not necessarily developmental, but the effect of their use depends on the interaction between the learners and the tool, especially, whether the use of tools is supported by their reflection, comparison, and self-regulation.

The ethical and identity-related aspects of the AI-mediated writing are also predicted in the findings. Participants did not make AI paraphrasing a neutral or neutral practice. Rather, they proactively bargained authorial control through post-editing of AI output, rereading meaning and trying to fit tool use to their own and institutional concept of acceptable academic practice. However, ongoing ambiguity regarding the lines between acceptable support and malpractice imply the existence of a disconnect between learning processes and daily writing activities of students, on the one hand, and the instructions that the institutions offer, on the other hand. This confusion leads to the indication that more pedagogical and policy specifics are required that would not only discuss AI paraphrasing as a threat to academic integrity, but also as a literacy practice that needs to be explicitly taught and ethically bargained over.

In general, the study can be applied in the research on second language writing and educational technology because it offers an experiential process-based description of the use of AI paraphrasing tools in EFL higher education. Through foregrounding the lived experiences of students, the paper cuts across binary accounts of AI as both good and bad and adds to the tensions, contradictions, and negotiations that define AI-mediated writing. The implications of the findings in the pedagogical domain are that direct ban or blind reliance on AI paraphrasing tools will not help to develop writing in a sustainable way. Rather, the effective teacher might have to include some direct training about the strategic, reflective, and ethically responsible use of tools, and the importance of paraphrasing as a meaning-making activity and not just a linguistic act.

There are a number of shortcomings that ought to be noted. The participants involved in the study were also quite few and the results are not supposed to be statistically generalized as well since the study was carried out in one institutional setting. There is also the fact that the data was based on the self-reported experiences as opposed to actual observation of the writing process. Future studies may build upon these results by investigating the use of AI paraphrasing longitudinally, by comparing interview data to writing drafts or screen-capture data, or by comparing experiences in various instructional and policy settings.

To sum up, since AI paraphrasing tools are still influencing academic writing practices, it is necessary to comprehend the experiences of EFL students, how they perceive and negotiate these tools. The development of

writing in the AI era cannot be narrowed to the issue of the effectiveness of the tools per se, but rather it should take into consideration how learning, agency, and ethical accountability are being created in changing technology sceneries.

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