Teaching English as a Foreign Language Journal ISSN 2961-9963
Vol. 5, No. 1, March 2026, pp. 32-48

AI-assisted writing in EFL education: Students' experiences with Quillbot

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history
Received 20 March 2026
Revised 24 April 2026
Accepted 28 April 2026
Available Online 09 May 2026

Keywords
AI-assisted writing
QuillBot
EFL writing
Academic writing
AI literacy

ABSTRACT

This study investigates undergraduate EFL students' experiences using QuillBot in academic writing contexts. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, the researchers conducted in-depth interviews with six students who regularly integrated QuillBot into their writing practices. The findings revealed three major themes: strategic use of QuillBot throughout the writing process, challenges encountered during its use, and emerging pedagogical innovations related to AI-assisted writing. First, students used QuillBot strategically during planning, drafting, revising, and editing to paraphrase sentences, improve grammatical accuracy, enrich vocabulary, and enhance textual coherence. Second, despite its benefits, students experienced several challenges, including meaning distortion, overly formal expressions, overreliance on AI-generated suggestions, and reduced personal writing voice. Third, the findings highlighted pedagogical innovation in AI-assisted writing, as QuillBot contributed to increased writing confidence, improved linguistic accuracy, reduced writing anxiety, and greater writing efficiency. The study also emphasized the importance of AI literacy training, ethical guidelines, and lecturer support to promote critical, reflective, and responsible use of AI-assisted writing tools in EFL learning contexts.

How to Cite: Suryanto, S., Islami, N., Alsolami, M., and Shinjee, B. (2026). AI-assisted writing in EFL education: Students' experiences with Quillbot. *Teaching English as a Foreign Language Journal*, *5*(1), 32-48. https://doi.org/10.12928/tefl.v4i2.2120

1. Introduction

For students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), writing is widely recognized as one of the most complex skills to master. It involves not only a satisfactory mastery of grammar and an extensive vocabulary, but also the ability to generate ideas, construct logical arguments, and effectively address a target audience. However, many EFL learners struggle with key aspects of writing, particularly in generating ideas, paraphrasing information from source texts, and maintaining cohesion throughout their compositions. These difficulties often restrict their ability to produce well-developed academic texts. In response to these challenges, the integration of emerging digital technologies and intelligent writing assistants has obtained increasing attention as a form of learning assistance in language education. The use of such technologies has been widely reported to enhance

student engagement and foster greater learning autonomy(Friginal & Ho, 2025; Lee, 2025). In the context of Indonesian higher education, studies indicate that students generally demonstrate positive attitudes toward technology-enhanced learning environments. Technological tools, therefore, play a significant role in supporting language learning processes, including the development of academic writing skills (Lestari, 2021; Setiawan et al., 2023). Furthermore, technology-enriched learning environments have been shown to promote active participation and provide more flexible learning opportunities for EFL students. When effectively integrated into language instruction, digital technologies can create more dynamic and student-centered learning experiences (Lestari, 2025). In particular, prior studies highlight that AI-powered writing tools can support learners in generating ideas, improving linguistic accuracy, and enhancing translation quality, while also increasing their overall confidence in completing writing tasks (Malik et al., 2023). These benefits are exceptionally significant in higher education settings, where online and blended learning environments are increasingly widespread.

This study is of QuillBot, as it is one of the most common tools that boost AI-assisted writing (figuratively) in English as a Foreign Language (EFL). QuillBot is an AI-powered writing companion that assists students at every stage of the writing process. The ability to paraphrase, enhance fluency, make it more formal, or change the structure of sentences is among the key features that allow learners to polish their texts more precisely and flexibly. In this way, students can identify different lexical choices and syntactic forms that improve the formal quality of their writing. What is more, QuillBot not only helps students write smoother, more cohesive sentences but also inspires them to try different words, phrases, and sentence structures. The tool is particularly relevant to making it easier for students to use the paraphrase features to restate what they read in their own words without altering its context. In turn, this helps develop academic skills essential for learning, such as paraphrasing, drafting, and rewriting. Research has also suggested that using QuillBot in the classroom can help students paraphrase and encourage recursive writing, both of which are key to good academic writing (Mohammad et al., 2024). As a result, this gave rise to QuillBot—and, beyond that, to the pedagogical affordances of AI-enhanced writing technologies—which have been growing in popularity and attracting increasing interest from educators and researchers seeking to improve language learning outcomes.

Meanwhile, powerful educational tools being developed with artificial intelligence have also sparked ongoing debate about their impact on learning and testing methods, as well as academic integrity. While AI-assisted tools may be extremely useful for language learners, scholars say their use should also never go without sound pedagogical guidance. Without that guidance, though, students may rely too heavily on AI-generated suggestions and deny themselves the chance to develop crucial writing skills or the self-assurance that accompanies independent composition. To this end, educational researchers consider AI technologies as tools that amplify human cognition efforts (Balalle & Pannilage, 2025). Thus, to understand how such technologies can responsibly influence the landscape of language education, it is necessary to examine whether and how learners articulate their interactions with AI tools implemented in actual classroom contexts.

While there is increasing interest in AI technologies to assist writing, the literature remains limited, with several gaps. First, multiple studies look at AI writing tools as a general category that includes grammar checkers, large language model chatbots, and paraphrasing tools. This kind of generalist lens makes it difficult to be clear about how a specific tool may function within any given pedagogical context. The writing process for different AI applications varies by algorithm. For example, QuillBot focuses on AI paraphrasing and rephrasing as its core competency, while most other AI tools center on grammar correctors or text generators. While many studies exist on the utility of QuillBot in writing (Hwang et al., 2025), few focus specifically on what role this tool plays pedagogically as it has engaged EFL students in their own writing classrooms. An overview of the tool was explored to gain a broader perspective of when AI technologies support learners as they learn languages.

Second, much of the literature is focused almost exclusively on measurable outcomes, such as gains in grammatical accuracy or students' attitudes toward AI writing tools. These questions yield

fundamental insights into the (potential) benefits of AI technologies but largely ignore the process-oriented characteristics of writing. Writing is more than just scaffolding (writing the words), writing has cognitive and social facets which travel through the stages of ideation, composing, revising, and editing. Accordingly, to adequately assess the pedagogical effectiveness of these tools, it is essential to understand students' interactions with them through these stages. As a result, there have recently been calls for qualitative, process-oriented explorations of how learners incorporate AI technologies into existing writing routines and how these tools affect decision-making behaviors in specific writing contexts (Bond et al., 2024). Third, although the constructs of academic integrity and the ethical use of AI technologies have gained increasing attention (Hwang et al., 2025), classroom-based evidence regarding students' approaches to negotiating the boundary between beneficial assistance and overreliance on AI technologies remains limited.. Students may leverage AI-provided suggestions when they are paraphrasing or rearranging sentences, but whether that assistance advances learning or diminishes students' feelings of authorship has yet to be determined. As a result, scholars have highlighted the need to explore the relationship between how students negotiate their own engagement with being afforded AI-supported and peer feedback (Balalle & Pannilage, 2025).

And still, much less attention has been paid to the pedagogical opportunities that accompany embedding AI tools into joint and reflective writing activities. While fewer studies have investigated students lived experiences of these tools in writing contexts, others have explored teachers' views on integrating AI into the language classroom. Hence, exploring students' strategies and challenges during the implementation of AI-infused technologies in EFL writing instruction can help learners understand how they could be embraced effectively and responsibly. In response to these gaps, the present study explores students' experiences with integrating QuillBot within their EFL (English as a Foreign Language) writing practices. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate how EFL learners use QuillBot at various stages of the writing process and how it affects their strategies, obstacles, and collaborative learning.

The current study, using a qualitative descriptive research design, seeks to shed light on student use of an AI-assisted writing technology in authentic classroom contexts. In this analysis, three critical characteristics of EFL writing integrated with QuillBot are discussed. It first examines how students use QuillBot in the planning, drafting, revising, and editing stages of writing. Second, in this study, the researchers discuss the challenges learners face when integrating Quillbot into their writing processes, such as semantic inaccuracies, overreliance on AI suggestions, and originality issues. Third, it discusses pedagogical innovations that emerged in students' own writing attempts as they engaged collaboratively and heuristically with QuillBot. Such innovations might involve structured paraphrasing templates, reflective writing journals as a mechanism for prompting self-assessment, and hybrid feedback practices that introduce suggestions from the generators along with guidance offered by their instructors. To this end, this study aims to answer the following (research) questions:

1. What exact strategies do students use when developing their English writing, in terms of planning, drafting, revising, and editing with QuillBot?
2. What obstacles do EFL students encounter in the process of integrating QuillBot into their writing practices?
3. What pedagogical innovations emerge from students' collaborative or reflective use of QuillBot in writing lessons?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Artificial Intelligence in Language Learning

Artificial intelligence, in the form of OpenAI, has been part of contemporary language education as it moves from esoteric technology parlance to a practical academic tool employed by students and teachers alike. Artificial Intelligence is now a key element of any learning exercise, including the learning of languages, with apps and tools designed to assist in vocabulary learning, pronunciation

practice and correction, grammar correction/assistance, and translation, as well as writing assistance. Such a shift suggests wider educational reconfiguration, where digital technologies are not merely relegated to the edges of learning as supportive tools but become mediators for and contents of learning processes. Other studies conducted in higher education institutions in Indonesia also reveal the advantages of technology-enhanced learning for language classes. Lestari (2021) found that technology integration in EFL classes enhances university students' involvement and flexibility. This seismic shift is especially relevant to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, where most students require immediate, and often personalized, assistance that classroom contexts may not always provide.

Educationally, AI may be seen less as a replacement for teachers/students and more as an example of technological mediation. AI tools mediate the students' linguistic behavior, offering suggestive language and directing attention towards syntactic patterns and possibilities. But how valuable this mediation depends a lot on students' use of the tools and teachers' incorporation of those into instruction. If AI is introduced with critical reflection and intent, it can be a positive companion in language development; however, if the process of learning to speak/write devolves into passivity where suggestions are embraced uncritically, then this represents merely an evolutionary step toward laziness. It is this duality that accounts for both the optimism and the caution that run through much of the literature on language education and AI. Early drafts can now be submitted to one online tool or another without the specter of a grade looming over, and on the other side of AI access to feedback, and personalized support has widened, making re-editing less daunting. It could, on one hand, encourage overreliance, reduce critical thinking, and muddy questions of originality or authorship. Setiawan and Alkhowarizmi (2025) stated that pedagogical intervention is needed so students do not become addicted to AI-generated suggestions and forget about the linguistic and rhetorical choices of writing. Consequently, AI for language learning can be construed as a pedagogical innovation rather than a technological one, since it reimagines spaces for learner agency, writing assistance, and academic support.

2.2. AI-Assisted Writing in EFL Contexts

In the last few years, one of the most prominent forms of writing assistance has been AI-assisted writing tools. The literature refers to some main trends. AI tools build learners' confidence and make them write faster(Syafei & Nuraeningsih, 2025). They help in lower-order concerns (grammar, lexical choice, and clarity of sentences)(Syafei & Nuraeningsih, 2025; Tan, 2025) and the higher-order ones (argumentation, coherence, and ideas' reorganization)(Tekir, 2026). Additionally, their effectiveness rests considerably on quality engagement with students rather than on an inherently sophisticated tool. AI works best when learners work together with it actively and critically, not mechanically. The literature raises important objections, too. As students rely more and more on AI, they may come to view it less as a growth stimulus and more as a substitute for learning. Therefore, utilising AI-generated suggestions is not necessarily contextually relevant or semantically correct in some situations, which can lead to more mistakes in EFL writing instead of removing them. These tensions are especially pronounced for paraphrasing tools like QuillBot, as paraphrasing lives in a frugal part of the academic writing ecosystem (particularly in source–based tasks).

2.3. QuillBot as an AI-Powered Writing Tool

One of the most widely used tools, QuillBot has also been popular among EFL learners since its release. It has become popular for its simplicity, easy access, and rich support features. Although most recognized for its paraphrasing, Quillbot provides grammar check, summarization, vocabulary replacement, and shuffling of sentences. That makes it attractive to students who need fast assistance with their academic writing. QuillBot's primary advantage is its paraphraser. Users can then type a sentence or paragraph and receive alternatives with different wording, structure, and/or tone. But, for those who are already known in EFL learners – English as a foreign/first language, whose knowledge is so exact but not always expressed through natural-sounding English, this function is a godsend. Amanda et al. (2023) demonstrate how Quillbot helps students rephrase ill-formed ideas and reorganize awkward new phrases into coherent, grammatically correct writing. In this regard,

QuillBot does not just correct mistakes; it generates several different options that students can compare and possibly learn from.

The literature also notes some important caveats. At times, QuillBot can create subtler paraphrases, although these have the tendency to alter the greater meaning of substance (Gürbüz, 2024). Learners with higher proficiency detect such shifts of meaning and avoid them, while low proficient learners overlook these shifts ending up their text to look free from mistakes, when actually if you take a closer look it's not the same. Another problem, though, is that QuillBot offers pre-interrogations; students could easily have such suggestions at their fingertips and never think of how well they align with their meaning, the genre in which they're writing or disciplinary standards. Additionally, as students continue to use QuillBot over time, the distinct divide between their written work and that produced by a machine may dissolve. This has pedagogical and ethical implications for notions of writer identity, originality and responsible use.

2.4. Writing Process in EFL Contexts

In EFL settings, writing is generally perceived as an iterative process comprising a set of interrelated components that include planning, drafting, revising, and editing. This model prioritizes the cognitive and linguistic demands required for each stage. In fact, new research indicates AI tools are beginning to affect all four phases of the writing process: When preparing, learners may turn to AI for paraphrasing a prompt or finding different wording on how an instructor's topic was framed; Drafting (AI may help clarify doubts about word- and sentence-building); While revising if you don't have another person with whom to internalize and rethink conveyance; And editing, receiving immediate feedback on grammar and mechanics through AI.

A growing body of research shows that EFL students employ QuillBot in a strategic and creative way in practice, as opposed to mechanically. Maghfirah et al. (2025) identified that QuillBot enhanced clarity of paraphrasing by overcoming syntax and lexical issues in writing. During revision, for example, students could compare and contrast their original sentences with AI-generated alternatives, selecting and refining (or rejecting) suggestions according to meaning, coherence, and tone a process known as reflective use signifying that at least in part they were dealing more metacognitively with evaluating rather than simply using what machines had produced. These studies find that QuillBot can assist many student strategies during all stages of writing, but the literature hasn't yet clarified how these strategies are influenced by students' proficiency and task types/classroom context

2.5. Challenges EFL Students Face When Integrating QuillBot into Writing Practices

The abstracts themselves cite (in this study or elsewhere) indicate — quite correctly — that QuillBot is enormously helpful, but the tool comes with its own costs in terms of use. One major concern that has been widely debated is overreliance. Tuong and Tran (2025) found that students who "over myopically relied on AI-generated suggestions were less likely to invoke criticality over their writing, taking for granted machine output." It has been raised (Zahra & Fithriani, 2025) about a further decline in student writing when relying too much on AI tools. It has been recently stated (Sarıca & Gençoğlu, 2025) that students who are not familiar with AI writing tools have challenges in interpreting their features and a tendency to use them sporadically or incorrectly. This reinforces the idea that simply having technical access is not enough, and this paper argues that students need both adequate procedural knowledge and also critical evaluative ability to integrate these tools into their writing process appropriately. Meaning shift is a different serious matter. Maghfirah et al. (2025) state that QuillBot can sometimes alter the meaning of sentences in more obscure ways, and again in ways lower-proficiency learners do not recognize." No wonder academic writing often ends up distorted or erroneous without the author even being aware of it. Contextual misalignment is also noticeable in the literature. In terms of rhetorical or disciplinary practices for specific writing tasks, AI-generated phrasing does not mean by default what is needed (Tuong & Tran, 2025). It can also produce something linguistically coherent but toneless, out of genre-appropriate or unvoiced.

According to Sarıca and Gençoğlu (2025), rather than viewing paraphrasing tools as consumables, students should critically assess their functionality; relying on these sources too heavily can impact a student's understanding of original work and authorship, which causes confusion around whether such usage is appropriate scaffolding or negative dependency. These questions illustrate that QuillBot and similar tools are not neutral or innocuous tools. Its value as a learning tool hinges on students' ability to use it critically, reflectively and ethically. Hence, this body of work brings forward the second RQ of interest for this study: what issues EFL students might face when integrating QuillBot into their writing process?

2.6. Pedagogical Innovations Emerging from Students' Use of QuillBot

As writing classrooms adopt more AI, teachers have gone beyond describing the tools to outlining pedagogies that may yield productive use of AI-enabled writing. Why does this shift matter? Whether tools like QuillBot are effective depends more on how they are framed, monitored, and talked about than on their affordances. AI tools merely serve as supports for idea generation, vocabulary growth and revision, according to Pawestri and Pratolo (2024) when the use of said tools aligns with whatever instructional goals they are pursuing. This new reality positions AI. as a critical support, even not just an answer-generating machine.

A second stream of innovation, which Ismailia and Novawan (2025) named as a hybrid feedback model, had students use QuillBot to surface revise prior to getting the teacher's feedback on content, argumentation, and coherence. This order honors teachers' expertise while allowing AI to do the language-level work. And there was rich pedagogy, too: reflective practices. Others ask students to explain why they accepted, rejected, or adapted a response from an AI tool, cultivating metacognitive awareness that reduces mindless reliance. And support is growing for ethics-oriented instruction to help students wrestle with issues of authorship, originality, and voice in regard to using AI tools. And if the AI will not challenge writing development, but even support it (Zahra & Fithriani, 2025), traditional discussion should be in need.

These innovations suggest that QuillBot can enhance writing instruction when positioned as an additional, dialogic tool for composing rather than a substitute for composition. Nevertheless, there is still quite limited empirical evidence in the literature on how such pedagogies (i.e., collaborative learning or reflective practice) are enacted during students' actual collaborative or reflective experiences. Such limitations are directly addressed by the third research question that guides the current study: What pedagogical innovations emerge through students' collaborative or reflective use of QuillBot during writing lessons?

2.7. Synthesis and Research Focus

As argued in the literature, AI-based writing is a fundamental and complex issue for EFL education. QuillBot and similar services can help build confidence, aid in revision, provide linguistic alternatives, and supplement the support and mediation needs in the recursive stages of writing. They simultaneously raise concerns of overreliance, meaning shift, contextual appropriateness, and academic integrity. QuillBot is particularly interesting because its design focused on and highly adept at paraphrasing offers both pedagogical potential and ethical complications. Previous studies indicate that students increasingly use QuillBot strategically across various stages of writing, including planning, drafting, revising, and editing; however, limited attention has been given to how these strategies function within situated contexts. Likewise, despite ongoing concerns regarding dependency and semantic inaccuracy, further investigation is still needed to understand how students navigate these issues within authentic writing practices. Last but not least, while certain pedagogical innovations have been described by literature that relates to QuillBot use, such claims are largely underpinned without evidence of how students collaboratively and reflectively engage with QuillBot leading to the writing process innovation.

3. Method

A descriptive qualitative research design was employed in this study to explore students' experiences of using QuillBot as a computer-assisted writing tool in EFL contexts. Qualitative research is appropriate when understanding the meanings, perspectives and lived experiences of participants are important, particularly for emerging technologies that affect learning behaviours. Qualitative research is an approach used to explore and interpret how individuals or groups perceive and give meaning to social or human issues. (Creswell & Carnegie, 2023).Thus, the current study aimed at investigating and explaining EFL students' use of QuillBot throughout their writing process phases (i.e. planning, drafting, revising and editing). A qualitative descriptive design was used, as it provides an opportunity for researchers to gain insight into students' perceptions in a natural classroom environment without the potential consequences of experimental manipulation. This goal was achieved by exploring students' strategies for employing QuillBot, the challenges they encountered when integrating those types of tools into their writing practices, and the pedagogical innovations that stem from discussing or reflective dialogue with others regarding AI-assisted practice.

3.1. Research Setting

The study was carried out in the English Language Education Department at a private university located in Yogyakarta, Indonesia that has the provision of an English-as-a-foreign-language course. This choice of setting is because tools such as QuillBot which indeed can help enrich writing, as an AI powered academic institutional practice addendum for students' when embedded into their work or lessons, specifically around Upper Division writing have already been informally incorporated. Participants who enrolled in a Writing III course focused on writing paragraphs and essays, coherence, organization of ideas, and academic language input. This course encourages students to reflect on how their writing behaviors and learning experiences are influenced by various tools (e.g., AI-based writing support tools). Between November and December 2025, an array of writing tasks, including drafting and revising essays, were assigned to the students involved. This time also offered the researchers an opportunity to see how students were using QuillBot for original writing tasks and incorporated the tool into their revision practices.

3.2. Participants

The subjects of the study were 6 students from the English Language Education Department who are taking Writing III course for their namely Alexia, Shira, Resya, Neva, Rayi, and Sherly (pseudonym). Prospective participants were selected using purposive sampling, a qualitative method of identifying individuals who have personal experience closely related to the phenomenon being studied. They were chosen because of their use of QuillBot to help them with writing tasks, as well as their agreement to participate in interviews and reflections, as well their level of English proficiency. That was not just top-performing within these and so they could detail even non-English speakers. The analysis did not limit itself to just the highly proficient, enabling it to include insights from those at varying levels of English ability. The participants were drawn from student cohorts in 2022 and 2023, this allowed for the research to capture experiences from students at different stages of writing academically. Although the number of participants is quite small, samples like these are appropriate for qualitative research and this type of sample size facilitates descriptive rich detail about students' experiences rather than statistical generalization.

3.3. Data Collection Method

Data for this study was collected via semi-structured interviews and document analysis of students' written drafts. The main method of data collection was semi-structured interview, a type of interview that enables researchers to explore participants' experiences intensively but still follows structure related to the research questions. Students were selected for the case study by virtue of their use of QuillBot to address writing tasks, whether they consented to be interviewed or engage in reflective conversations and their English proficiency levels. Indeed, it was top-performing, but not

restricted to only top-performing within these so able to document even non-English speaking individuals.

In an interview, students were asked when they used QuillBot in their writing process, what strategies they implemented to better their writing and if they encountered any challenges while using the tool. The interviews also invited participants to reflect on the role AI-assisted writing tools had in their growth as writers and approaches to learning. Participants were interviewed face-to-face or through an online communication platform, based on their accessibility at a given time; interviews took about 10 to 25 minutes each. All interviews were audio-recorded and verbatim transcribed with participants' consent to ensure the accuracy of data.

3.4. Instrument

The primary data collection instrument used in this research was an interview guide designed to extract rich descriptions of students' engagement with QuillBot. Interview questions were formulated to illuminate three research questions informing the study and build on existing literature of AI-assisted writing tools or debates on in-use digital learning technologies for language education. The guide included questions central to understanding (1) what prompted students to use QuillBot, (2) the strategies they employed at various stages in the writing process, (3) how they struggled with learning how to effectively use the tool, and their impression of whether—however slightly the employment of an AI assistant resulted in improvements in their writing skills and experiences as learners. Follow-up questions encouraged participants to reflect on their responses from other perspectives and offer grounded narratives about their writing practices. To further enhance the specificity of each question, two experts in qualitative research and language education examined the interview guide; based on feedback from that review, revisions were made (changes in wording or focus) to some items. While each participant was asked the same core questions, a semi-structured format permitted flexibility to iteratively probe themes as they arose and capture nuances specific to each participant's experience.

3.5. The data collection procedure

The data collection process followed a sequential and systematic approach. To begin with, the researchers had obtained written informed consent from all subjects providing them information about the study purpose and assuring voluntary participation along with complete confidentiality. Each interview session was scheduled according to the convenience of participants upon obtaining their consents. The semi-structured interview guide enabled the researchers to direct discussion yet also allowed the participants to communicate their own thoughts and experiences with QuillBot in their writing tasks. Interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' consent and later transcribed verbatim. The writing drafts composed by students were also obtained and sorted according to phase of the writing process. Prior to analysis, all data were pseudonymized to generally protect participants' identities.

3.6. Data Analysis

Qualitative data were analyzed using the interactive model of qualitative analysis which conceptualizes qualitative analysis as a cyclical process comprising data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification (Miles et al., 2014). First, the researchers read the interview transcripts several times to become familiar with the data, then coded relevant text segments according to the research questions in a process termed high-level coding. These coded excerpts emphasized students' strategies for using QuillBot, the difficulties they encountered in incorporating the tool into their writing practices, and instructional implications based on their experiences. Arranging these categories into thematic matrix displays to enable the comparison by participants. This gave researchers their pattern recognition back, so they could identify trends in similarities and differences between students' QuillBot usage across each stage of writing.

The data visualization also enabled the researchers to investigate relationships between students' perceived strategies and benefits, as well as the challenges they faced when using the AI tool. In the last phase, the researchers interpreted salient themes emerging from the data and confirmed their

validity by considering individual transcripts and coded segments. This process meant that the conclusions drawn were closely based on participants' accounts. Analyses were descriptive, and representative quotations from participants were included to facilitate a general understanding of the infusion of QuillBot in the instruction of EFL writing. This led to a nuanced comprehension of the usage of AI-assisted writing tools (e.g., Grammarly), EFL students' use of diverse strategies for writing, and their learning experiences, as well as how such programs can optimize pedagogical opportunities when going through this systematic analytical process.

4. Findings and Discussion

This section describes the results from the interviews with six undergraduate EFL students: Alexia, Shira, Resya, Neva, Rayi, and Sherly, who made regular use of QuillBot in their academic writing. Using open coding, the researchers sorted data into three interrelated themes: (1) strategies students use when embedding QuillBot in the writing process; (2) difficulties they experience using it; and (3) pedagogical innovations that result from or must be created to engage with the tool. The researchers discuss each theme in the context of relevant theoretical and empirical literature, while keeping participants' voices to highlight what is learned about QuillBot as experienced in authentic EFL writing contexts.

4.1. Strategies students employ when using QuillBot in the writing process

The first theme to emerge suggests that participants adopted a conscious, context-sensitive approach to using QuillBot. Rather than employing it as a shortcut, they integrated its features into planning, writing, drafting, revising, and editing. This pattern is in line with Putri et al. (2025), who argue that EFL learners go through a recursive process (i.e., brainstorm, paraphrase, make clear meaning, and polish vocabulary) in every writing stage by means of AI-based writing tools

a) Paraphrasing as a tool for lexical development and grammatical refinement

One of the most commonly reported strategies was using QuillBot's paraphrasing feature to refine word choice, sentence structure, and writing fluency. "Paraphrasing enables correction of accurate word arrangement and grammar," said Alexia, "Making it able to edit per paragraph makes the grammar more structured and academic." In like manner, Neva wrote "Paraphrasing is used to add value to writing style, and also people like to seek the synonyms or other alternative words," while Sherly said "Paraphrasing helps in making more humanized, academic, and formal but fit into the language style.

Such accounts are consistent with Maghfirah et al. (2025), who pinpoint QuillBot's capacity to create clearer paraphrases, enhance structural coherence, and broaden passive vocabulary as one of its main affordances for EFL learners. Amanda et al. (2023) argue that this tool allows learners to compare variations in tone and complexity in their writing before trying out the version they feel best communicates their intended message. With this point in mind, Resya said, "I get to learn new vocabulary from the paraphrase feature," and Shira said, "Look for synonyms that are suitable for the sentences I use." In combination, these comments indicate that students aren't just accepting QuillBot's output blindly; they're engaging in lexical exploration. Such observation maintains that vocabulary development occurs through multiple readings and reflection on AI-generated alternatives, rather than through passive adoption (Amanda et al., 2023).

b) Grammar checker as a mechanism for writing accuracy

Respondents also described the strategic use of QuillBot's grammar checker as optimized for later writing stages. "The grammar checker feature makes it easier to write and makes the grammatical structure of the writing smoother and more accurate," Shira said, while Neva used it "for a final review of my writing." Sherly also said: "When I revise, I use the grammar checker so that my sentences don't go flat.

These results are aligned with the results of Maghfirah et al. (2025), who conclude that consistent use of QuillBot aids students' grammar, sentence construction, and lexical diversity when the

students know how and when to use the tool. This overview provides an overview of essential research on the topic. One of the most powerful things about QuillBot is how integrated Shira's workflow is around QuillBot: "I first use QuillBot during my drafting stage when I'm typing and brainstorming directly, then I'll pull up the paraphrase feature to modify vocabulary during my revising stage, and finally I'll throw in a grammar checker feature to verify that my sentences are accurate." This sequence-sensitive stage is similar to the recursive process-writing model described by Putri et al. (2025), in which planning, drafting, revising, and editing overlap rather than unfold as discrete stages.

c) Selective acceptance of QuillBot's suggestions

A common strategy among participants was selective acceptance, or the critical assessment of QuillBot's suggestions prior to integrating them into a text. Shira says, "I am somewhat selective about which of QuillBot's suggestions I accept." Likewise, Resya trained this way: "I do not automatically accept QuillBot's output; I get picky with it," and added, "Before accepting any suggestion, I have self-checking behavior." Neva also commented, "I am selective in accepting the output that QuillBot gives," while Rayi remarked, "I'm selective in which of the sentences I want to choose from suggested by Quillbot in the paraphrase feature."

Theoretical arguments proposed by Kurniati and Fithriani (2022) are concerned that students uncritically accept paraphrased output. Instead, participants reflected in the manner described by Maghfirah et al. (2025), in which students adjudicate among multiple paraphrased versions to determine which best maintain meaning, coherence, and writing voice. In response, Tuong and Tran (2025) caution against critical engagement with AI, which can reduce learners' sensitivity to language form; yet the selective practices above point to a more agentive relationship with AI. Neva, for example, said "Using the paraphrase feature sentence by sentence reduces errors and outputs that do not fit contextually" and also "I utilize other alternatives to determine whether the paraphrased sentences are correct." Such conventions signal metacognitive awareness and sustained authorial control.

d) Stage-integrated use across the writing process

Multiple respondents characterized QuillBot use as adjusted for different phases of writing. "I use the paraphrase feature in my drafting stage, and then during revision I check my writing with the AI detector," Resya reported Neva also noted a three-stage process: "I use the paraphrase feature during the drafting stage, the plagiarism checker during revision and then the grammar checker during editing to make sure that I have correctly put the sentences I used."

Rayi had an especially purposeful routine. "I use QuillBot because it's a paraphrasing tool," she told me. The draft is written first, independently," before she deployed the translate feature during drafting, engaged in serious paraphrasing through the revision process, and ran it through an AI detector and plagiarism checker in editing. Sherly also said, "I use the paraphrase and translation features when writing." Such utilization, integrated with the stage, has been shown to be consistent with Putri et al. (2025) contend that AI tools can help meet various cognitive demands at specific points of the recursive writing process. It also fits Ismailia and Novawan (2025) hybrid feedback model in which students utilize AI to focus on low-order concerns while using teacher feedback to develop higher-order skills like organization and argumentation. The use of plagiarism checkers and AI detectors at the editing stage also implies an increasing awareness among students regarding issues of academic integrity, paralleling Sarıca and Gençoğlu (2025) concern that frequent paraphrasing threatened to complicate relationships with authorship and originality.

e) Using QuillBot to support writing efficiency

To improve writing efficiency, it was a big practice to use QuillBot. "QuillBot assists to improve time efficiency throughout the writing process," Alexia said, while Neva stated "QuillBot helps improve time efficiency in the entire writing process." As Shira also highlighted, "The grammar checker feature is really useful because it can make the sentences more effective and save a lot of time," so here he explained how QuillBot makes his writing neater while enriching his vocabulary,

as well as boosting the time efficiency. For instance, one of the knowledge-based advantages that learners liked is the time-saving feature of the tool in pre-write and revise stages (Nurjanah & Rafida, 2024). In an EFL context for academic writing on the other hand, where students produce ideas and language simultaneously in a second language (L2), such support may reduce some of the pressure on sentence-level composition, allocating cognitive resources for global issues like argumentation and organization (Nesi & Gardner, 2012).

4.2. Challenges students encounter when integrating QuillBot into writing practice

While there are such benefits, users also mentioned several challenges from using QuillBot. These challenges fit into five categories: language register mismatch, meaning distortion, AI dependency, loss of personal voice and technical limitations.

a) Language register mismatch

The main issue is that QuillBot very often produces language that sounds awkward, too formal or impossible to read. The output was just too "elevated and rigid," Alexia said, adding: "When I click on the paraphrase feature, I'm getting language that is too formal or highbrow to the point where I don't know how to capture meaning behind that sentence." Shira also noted that "QuillBot generates text that is too highly elevated to be copied and pasted verbatim," adding, "The language is too stilted and too high formality." Resya also noticed that "The paraphraser always produces a rigid and robotic-sounding sentence. This problem is well known in the literature. QuillBot's paraphrasing can alter meaning by ever so slightly a shade of a nuance that may be missed to learners whose understandings are imperfect (Gürbüz, 2024). Tuong and Tran (2025) also argue that the phraseology generated by AI may not be consistent with specific rhetorical- or discipline-related norms based on particular writing contexts which would mean adjustments of this may need to take place for which learners themselves do not necessarily have the skill set required.

b) Meaning distortion and contextual inaccuracy

The second challenge was semantic distortion. Shira said the paraphrasing feature provided "vague or incorrect" suggestions, and generated inaccurate sentences after multiple refreshes when someone attempted to use it, calling this a "meaning distortion." Resya said, "We were giving more than one paragraph at a time in the paraphrase feature and it was giving wrong meanings," and "When very long text is given in the input box of the paraphrase feature such sentences are produced which are invalid." Neva also compared "The paraphrased output is still not matching the intended meaning/context," whereas Rayi said simply, "Paraphrasing can change the original meaning. In this case, Gürbüz (2024) warns that this semantic slippage can go unnoticed where learners doubt their ability to evaluate AI output. These results also underscore the virtues of selective acceptance: learners who compare AI suggestions to their original text are more likely to catch and correct distortions of meaning.

c) AI dependency and reduced writing autonomy

Maybe the most consequential challenge was dependency on AI tools. Shira was dependent on "AI detection tools to do the job," she said. "I have built an addiction to the AI tools," Resya plainly admitted. Neva gave a more detailed reflection, saying, "An effective impact of AI use is that I become dependent on QuillBot when feeling demotivated." And added, "I feel like using QuillBot has affected my thinking structure and impacted the dependency on which I rely on its suggestions." She went on to acknowledge that this dependence had "curtailed my ability to write independently." "I have become dependent on AI in my writing practice," Rayi similarly admitted.

These three responses parallel what Tuong and Tran (2025) point out as a potential concern: using AI extensively cuts down on students' critical interaction with their own writing. Zahra & Fithriani (2025) also emphasize that with students potentially being overdependent on AI, their independent writing skills may be affected in the long term. Though participants were able to articulate this reliance critically, awareness was not enough; need intentionally pedagogical intervention.

d) Loss of personal voice and writing inconsistency

Some participants were also worried that QuillBot would dilute personal voice and demote consistency in text. "My writing becomes less personal because the output provided is very formal, which removes the personality traits of my writing style," Neva observed and added, "My writing becomes inconsistent with what was written previously sentences lose consistency. Echoing this, Rayi said that "After using QuillBot, my writing seems to have no tone and sometimes does not resemble my personal writing style," adding also that "Not only the order of the ideas but also the sentences themselves, which are changed after being paraphrased, disturb the flow."

This speaker was in line with earlier research. Zahra and Fithriani (2025) contend that excessive use of AI could degrade the authorial voice by stifling critical engagement with drafts. Sarıca and Gençoğlu (2025) relate this problem to larger issues of authorship and academic integrity, whereas Maghfirah et al. (2025) argue that students who can compare their drafts directly to AI output will better maintain a desired meaning and 'writing identity. But doing so assumes a level of critical literacy that cannot be taken for granted.

e) Access restrictions and technical limitations

A smaller but, whatever the size of what you consider to be important, certainly not less significant set of challenges involved access and technical problems. Alexia wrote, "QuillBot has usage limits, and the premium account tends to throw up errors when you try using it with multiple logins." Shira also noted, "If you are not using a premium QuillBot account, there are usage restrictions." Sherly wrote, "Data loss: If you don't save sentences at this moment. Shira also noted a motivational effect of overreliance, saying, "I put in less effort during the revision stage because I rely on the tool," and "I feel instant gratification after using QuillBot, which makes me less inclined to engage deeper with the text."

These issues, while less prominent in theoretical terms, have practical implications for making sure that the use of AI seems consistent and fair across people. As Nurjanah and Rafida (2024) pointed out, access to QuillBot is a core value proposition for the web app, but less so when accessibility is restricted or lacks reliability. It is applicable for the features of QuillBot, and probably one of the most important factors that makes the functional assessment turn into a barrier (Kurniati and Fithriani, 2022) or creates an even more relevant barrier in terms of technical constraints.

4.3 Pedagogical innovations emerging from students' engagement with QuillBot

The third theme concerns pedagogical implications and emerging innovations associated with students' use of QuillBot. These findings point not only to students' experiences but also to what they believe should be done differently to support more responsible and productive AI-assisted writing.

a) The need for lecturer guidance and pedagogical scaffolding

The strongest pedagogical finding across all our focus groups was the need for explicit guidance from lecturers. There was "very much of a need for guidance on how to appropriately integrate AI tools," Alexia said, adding, "I want instructions or tutorials on how I can use AI tools properly." Just like Shira's comment of "there is a need for the lecturer to show how the AI tools can be used in academic writing." Resya went on to elaborate that "The lecturer should play a role in guiding the use of AI tools," while Neva agreed, saying both that "Lecturer guidance is needed especially as facilitator" but also voicing concern about "academic ethics related to AI use." Rayi also emphasised "the importance of ethical guidelines of lecturers on the usage of AI in academic writing."

Such findings strongly corroborate Pawestri and Pratolo (2024), who contend that AI tools only gain pedagogical value when teachers make their use explicit, and students' goals are aligned with it. Maghfirah et al. (2025) also note that students need help with understanding what each QuillBot feature does and when to use it. The apparent consistency of this theme across all participants' responses suggests a significant need for non-discrete pedagogical frameworks beyond permission or prohibition to facilitate reflexive, ethical, and contextualized AI use. As a model in this sense,

Ismailia and Novawan (2025) study works well: students initially respond to surface-level problems using QuillBot, followed by teacher input on deeper rhetorical issues such as organization, clarity of argument, and coherence.

b) Building confidence and self-efficacy through QuillBot use

Multiple participants also noted that QuillBot improved their confidence as writers. Building my confidence through QuillBot use is because I feel like my writing reaches another level and improves a lot," Shira said. "I have benefitted from increases in both confidence and writing efficiency as a result of the use of QuillBot," Resya also said, adding, "I feel more confident, and I can express and write sentences well and accurately." "Because I get better writing results, QuillBot can improve my feeling of confidence this is an improvement of self-efficacy," Neva also said. Sherly also said, "My confidence increased when I used the paraphrase feature because it makes my writing neater and more refined."

This also supports the study conducted by Safitri and Fithriani (2024), stating that AI writing tools can help boost learners' confidence with hands-on support available when teacher feedback may not be immediate. Maghfirah et al. (2025) also mention that QuillBot can improve learners' confidence with their writing by providing alternative ways to convey their ideas when they are struggling. Pedagogically, this implies that confidence gains should not be penalized, in and of themselves, but be harnessed toward reflective engagement such that tool-assisted writing becomes an object of learning as opposed to text production

c) Perceived improvements in writing quality and academic register

Participants also associated QuillBot with improved writing quality. "The changes I notice after using QuillBot are that my sentence structure tends to become more complex and more academic," Neva observed. Sherly also opined, "My writing gets neater and more formal following the use of QuillBot this indicates an improved form of writing. Shira said that "QuillBot makes my writing more concise, increases my vocabulary and saves me time," while Raymond reported "an improvement" in the overall quality of his writing.

This perception is in accordance with Maghfirah et al. (2025) observation, explain how students who use QuillBot on a regular basis form grammatical rule, sentence structures, as well as elements of word choice more accurately. Amara et al. (2025) found that students also perceived improvements in coherence and sentence organization. As Nugroho et al. Nugroho et al. cited in Amanda et al. (2023) indicate, such a positive outcome is only likely to occur when students re-read and consider AI suggestions rather than follow them uncritically.

d) Reflective and selective engagement as an emerging pedagogical practice

Another, broader insight into your pedagogical attention is the urge for a reflective and selective intro as part of early AI literacy. Shira explained that she was using the paraphrase function "one paragraph at a time, carefully checking and tweaking the synonyms for every single word until the sentences are nice and precise." Neva likewise reported that "Writing the paraphrase feature sentence by sentence improves errors and outputs not approaching context." Rayi explicitly identified "the need for reflection after using QuillBot's features to make sure the output indeed improves the writing." Sherly mentioned, "I am selective in picking which suggestions of paraphrase feature is still actively engaging users while working on their own document," and added that it provides meaningful help for EFL learners.

These practices were very similar to Maghfirah et al. (2025) notion of "sophisticated reflective practice," in which students identify which version of a paraphrase best captures meaning, coherence, and voice. Indeed, Zahra and Fithriani (2025) also make the case that if you have students explain which suggestions ranked by AI they keep and discard, this deepens their metacognitive engagement — making irresponsible use of AI political in another way. Such practices, despite the lack of formal instruction, suggest that young people might already possess a basic level of AI literacy on which cradle pedagogy could be built.

e) AI literacy and institutional integration as a systemic necessity

Finally, some participants framed QuillBot use as part of a larger institutional issue that needs to be addressed with structured support. Rayi stressed that "there is a necessity for pedagogical integration of AI tools in the learning process" and "There should be defined limitations for using AI tools. At the same time, Sherly highlighted "the necessity of AI literacy for using AI responsibly and effectively," noting also that "AI should be integrated into the learning process in a structured and goal-oriented manner" (and may serve as "a supplementary academic resource"). This alluded to the institutional support, which Shira commented on too, "I use a premium account provided by the institution at campus," however, stated with this caveat "QuillBot use requires clear boundaries to be set i.e., responsible academic practice"

These findings indicate that AI integration cannot be merely an individual student practice but also needs to address issues of curricular and institutional responsibility. At what point would the application of AI yield benefits when incorporated into a pedagogical strategy that ultimately promotes ideation and discussion (Pawestri and Pratolo, 2024). Ismailia and Novawan (2025) agree, demonstrating how structured AI integration will lead to its being treated simply as one of many tools in the academic toolbelt, not instead of learning. As such, the participants' requests for institutional support speak to an urgency for AI literacy frameworks that attend to technical, ethical, reflexive, and critical dimensions of writing through AI-assisted technologies. Overall, the results indicate that students' use of QuillBot is much more complex than a simple narrative of tech-enabled support. Participants were not simply passive consumers of AI output, nor uniformly strategic users. Rather, they were in a fluid setting full of potential and friction. Identifying reflective practices, on one hand, selective acceptance, functionally integrated usage behaviours, and self-checking.

They also faced challenges such as meaning distortion, over-formality in language, increased dependency, and erosion of personal voice. The discussion also implies that these outcomes are determined less by the technology than by pedagogical conditions of usage. When explicit guidance, planned scaffolding, and reflective tasks were in play, students seemed better positioned to leverage QuillBot's affordances while minimizing its risks. Without such support, though, the risks of overreliance and uncritical acceptance become more acute. The near-universal demand for lecturer guidance, therefore, is the most notable outcome of the study: students themselves acknowledge the limitations of unmediated AI use and desire principled pedagogical support towards responsible and productive QuillBot integration in EFL academic writing

5. Conclusion

This study sheds light on the recursive stages of writing in which EFL students incorporated QuillBot, as well as the strategies, challenges, and pedagogical implications associated with its use. Students strategically use QuillBot at the drafting, revisiting, and editing stages of writing to enhance vocabulary variation, grammatical correctness, and text organization. Though the vast majority of participants didn't resemble a machine in how they used the tool, having filtered AI suggestions through discriminating evaluations, indicating developing metacognitive awareness and early instances of what could be called writing with AI literacy. The study also reveals deeper-seated tensions in AI-assisted writing, like semantic distortion, register mismatch, overreliance, and erosion of authorial voice. These challenges highlight a more general point: that the effectiveness of AI tools will not so much be determined by whether they work or not but rather how critically- and pedagogically-mediated these tools are. Without correct scaffolding, AI also does more harm than good in developing independent writing capacity. The findings highlight the importance of structured pedagogical integration with explicit lecturer guidance, ethical framing and reflective practices that promote AI as an auxiliary resource rather than one replacing the need for authentic learning opportunities. Within such frameworks, AI-supported tools can contribute to writing confidence and linguistic growth along with critical reflection on the process of writing. This study thus offers process-oriented insights into the nature of learner–AI interaction in EFL contexts, highlighting the role of technological affordances, learner agency, and instructional design. Future research may wish

to study long-term effects, diverse learner populations, and pedagogical design patterns that balance AI-related support with autonomy, academic integrity, and authorial voice.

Acknowledgment

The authors gratefully acknowledge the contribution of the six English Education Department students in Yogyakarta who participated in this study. Their willingness to share their time, experiences, and perspectives made this research possible.

Declarations

Author contribution	:	The authors declare that all authors contributed equally to the preparation, development, writing, and revision of this manuscript. All authors have read and approved the final version of the article.
Funding statement	:	The research and publication of this article were fully supported by the authors' personal funding.
Conflict of interest	:	The authors declare no conflict of interest.
Ethics Declaration	:	We, as authors, acknowledge that this work is based on ethical research in accordance with our university's regulations and that we have obtained permission from the relevant institutes when collecting data. We support TEFL Journal in maintaining high standards of personal conduct and practicing honesty in all our professional practices and endeavors.
Additional information	:	No additional information is available for this paper.

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