

EXPLORING EFL UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF USING QUILLBOT AI IN ACADEMIC WRITING: AN INTERPRETIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT This study explored undergraduate EFL students' experiences of using QuillBot AI in academic writing. Although QuillBot has been widely discussed as a paraphrasing and grammar-support tool, limited attention has been given to how students interpret AI-generated revisions while negotiating meaning, authorship, and responsibility. Guided by Heideggerian interpretive phenomenology and sociocultural mediation, this study examined how seven English Education students made sense of QuillBot-assisted revision in academic writing. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analysed using phenomenologically informed thematic analysis. The findings revealed three interconnected experiential themes: QuillBot as a revision mediator, negotiating meaning and authorship, and developing critical AI literacy. Participants generally used QuillBot after independently drafting their ideas, yet they did not accept AI-generated suggestions automatically. They compared original and revised sentences, modified suggestions, and occasionally rejected outputs that altered the intended meaning or weakened the personal voice. The findings suggest that students experienced QuillBot as a supportive mediational tool rather than a replacement for their thinking. The study provides phenomenological insights into the tension between revision efficiency and authorship preservation, highlighting the importance of critical, reflective, and responsible AI use in EFL academic writing pedagogy. These insights imply that writing instruction should guide students to justify revision decisions and evaluate AI output ethically.

Keywords: authorship, EFL writing, interpretive phenomenology, mediation, QuillBot AI

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of artificial intelligence has significantly influenced higher education, particularly how students complete academic tasks and engage in language learning. In English language education, writing remains one of the most demanding skills because students are expected to organize ideas coherently, apply appropriate vocabulary, and maintain grammatical accuracy simultaneously. For English Education students, academic writing competence is important not only for course achievement but also for their future professional roles as prospective English teachers (Ginting et al., 2023; Marzuki et al., 2023). However, writing should not be viewed merely as a technical activity focused on language accuracy. It is also a reflective and meaning-making process through which learners formulate ideas, negotiate linguistic choices, and construct an authorial position within academic discourse.

One AI-assisted writing tool that has gained popularity among EFL students is QuillBot. QuillBot provides paraphrasing, grammar checking, and vocabulary variation features that are frequently used to support academic writing tasks (Amyatun & Kholis, 2023; Duncanson, 2024). Unlike generative AI platforms that can produce extended texts from prompts, QuillBot mainly functions as a revision-oriented tool. Students generally use it to revise sentence structure, vocabulary, and clarity in texts they have already written. This distinction is important because interaction with QuillBot commonly occurs during revision, where students must decide whether AI-generated alternatives still represent their intended meanings.

Previous studies on QuillBot and AI-assisted writing in EFL contexts generally fall into three areas. First, outcome-based studies examine whether AI tools improve grammatical accuracy, paraphrasing quality, vocabulary variation, and writing performance (El-Garawany, 2024; Mohammad et al., 2023; Nurmayanti & Suryadi, 2023). Second, perception-based studies explore students' attitudes toward QuillBot and commonly report positive responses because the tool provides immediate revision support (Bakri et al., 2024; Nuraeni & Rustandi, 2025; Syahnaz & Fithriani, 2023). Third, recent experiential studies suggest that students do

not always accept AI-generated revisions passively but may reconsider, modify, or reject them based on context and purpose (Asmara & Kastuhandani, 2024; Wang et al., 2024).

Although these studies provide valuable insights, many still emphasize outcomes, perceptions, or general tool use. Less attention has been given to how students experience AI-assisted revision as a lived and interpretive process. In particular, issues of meaning negotiation, authorship preservation, and responsibility remain insufficiently explored in Indonesian EFL higher education contexts. This gap is important because AI-assisted revision is not simply a matter of correcting language; it also involves students' judgment about whether an AI-generated sentence still belongs to them and still communicates what they intend to say.

To address this gap, the present study explores undergraduate EFL students' experiences of using QuillBot AI in academic writing through an interpretive phenomenological lens. The study does not claim to develop a new theory of AI-assisted writing. Rather, it aims to provide a deeper understanding of how students make sense of QuillBot-assisted revision, particularly how they negotiate meaning, maintain authorship, and develop critical awareness while interacting with AI-generated suggestions. The guiding research question is: How do undergraduate EFL students experience and negotiate the use of QuillBot AI during academic writing activities?

LITERATURE REVIEW

EFL Academic Writing and Writing Challenges

Academic writing remains challenging for many EFL learners because it requires them to manage linguistic accuracy, coherence, idea organization, and academic conventions at the same time. Students are expected to express complex ideas in English while maintaining clarity and formality. These demands often create uncertainty, especially when learners are unsure whether their sentences sound academically appropriate.

For English Education students, writing difficulties are not only linguistic but also affective and reflective. Many learners struggle with paraphrasing, sentence construction, vocabulary variation, coherence, and clarity of meaning (Pratama, 2025; Setiawan & Alkhowarizmi, 2025). Consequently, students increasingly seek external support, including AI-assisted writing tools, to help them revise texts more efficiently. However, the use of such tools raises questions about how students remain responsible for meaning, originality, and authorship in their final academic texts.

AI-Assisted Writing in EFL Contexts

The integration of AI into language learning has changed how students interact with feedback and writing support. AI-assisted writing tools can help learners revise grammar, improve sentence structure, vary vocabulary, and enhance clarity (Crompton & Burke, 2023; Kohnke et al., 2023; Marzuki et al., 2023). In writing classrooms, these tools may reduce revision burden and provide immediate linguistic alternatives. Nevertheless, scholars have also emphasized that AI use in education requires critical judgment because automated output may not always be contextually appropriate or ethically unproblematic (Kasneci et al., 2023; Perkins, 2023).

In EFL academic writing, AI literacy involves more than the ability to operate a tool. It includes students' capacity to evaluate AI-generated suggestions, recognize contextual mismatches, and decide whether revisions still represent their intended meanings. Therefore, the educational value of AI-assisted writing depends not only on the sophistication of the technology but also on learners' reflective engagement with the output. Recent studies and reviews also emphasize that AI use in language education should be examined through students' experiences, ethical awareness, and reflective decision-making, not only through technical tool use (Syafei et al., 2025; Zhu & Wang, 2025).

QuillBot as a Revision-Oriented AI Tool

QuillBot has become increasingly popular among EFL students because of its paraphrasing and revision features. It assists users in restructuring sentences, improving vocabulary choices, and refining linguistic clarity in academic texts (Amyatun & Kholis, 2023; Duncanson, 2024). Unlike tools that generate complete texts, QuillBot primarily modifies existing text. As a result, students remain involved in reviewing and selecting revisions.

Previous studies report that QuillBot can support paraphrasing quality, grammatical accuracy, and students' confidence in writing (El-Garawany, 2024; Mohammad et al., 2023). However, concerns regarding overreliance remain important. Some learners may accept suggestions without fully understanding the changes, while others may find that AI-generated revisions alter intended meanings (Bakri et al., 2024; Nuraeni & Rustandi, 2025). These concerns indicate that QuillBot use involves not only language correction but also reflective decision-making related to meaning, authorship, and academic responsibility.

Students' Lived Experiences and Reflective Engagement in AI-Assisted Writing

This study is informed by Heideggerian interpretive phenomenology, which views human experience as situated, interpretive, and embedded in everyday involvement with the world (Heidegger, 1962). Rather than treating experience as an object that can be described neutrally, interpretive phenomenology seeks to understand how individuals make sense of their experiences within particular contexts. Phenomenological inquiry focuses on the meaning structures of lived experience and the significance participants assign to everyday practices (van Manen, 1990).

In this study, students' use of QuillBot is approached as a lived meaning-making experience rather than as a purely technical action. The focus is not only on what students do with QuillBot, but also on how they interpret AI-generated revisions, how they experience tensions between efficiency and authorship, and how they assign responsibility to themselves as writers. Heideggerian phenomenology is used to interpret these lived meanings, while sociocultural mediation helps explain how a digital writing tool becomes part of students' revision activity. This orientation directly supports the study's focus on meaning negotiation and authorship during AI-assisted academic writing.

The notion of mediation is grounded in sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978). Mediation refers to the process through which human activity and cognition are shaped by cultural tools, signs, and symbolic resources. In language learning, tools do not simply assist performance; they may also shape how learners think, evaluate, and act. Mediational means become part of learners' activity when they are used to regulate, transform, and accomplish tasks (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). From this perspective, QuillBot can be understood as a mediational writing resource that supports revision while still requiring students' active interpretation, evaluation, and decision-making. In this sense, QuillBot does not determine students' writing decisions; it becomes pedagogically meaningful only through students' judgment in accepting, adapting, or rejecting its suggestions. Within this framework, learner agency is understood as students' capacity to regulate tool-mediated activity according to their writing goals, intended meanings, and sense of responsibility as academic writers.

Positioning the Current Study

Although prior research has examined QuillBot's effectiveness and students' perceptions, relatively few studies have examined how students phenomenologically interpret and negotiate AI-generated revisions. Existing studies have often described QuillBot as a writing-support tool, but less attention has been paid to the lived meanings students attach to using it during revision. The present study, therefore, focuses on how undergraduate EFL students experience QuillBot-assisted revision as a process involving mediation, meaning negotiation, authorship preservation, and critical AI literacy. This positioning keeps the

contribution focused on students' interpretive revision decisions rather than on proposing a new theory.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach using interpretive phenomenology to explore undergraduate EFL students' experiences of using QuillBot AI during academic writing activities. The study adopted Heideggerian interpretive phenomenology as its philosophical orientation because it sought to understand how participants interpreted and assigned meaning to their engagement with AI-assisted revision. The analysis focused on participants' interpretations, tensions, and meaning-making processes rather than only listing repeated topics, following the phenomenological perspective proposed by (van Manen, 1990).

Phenomenologically informed thematic analysis was used as the analytic procedure. In this study, thematic analysis was not applied as a conventional process of listing repeated categories; rather, it functioned as a way to organize significant statements while preserving the interpretive focus on lived meaning. The analysis began with close attention to each participant's account before moving toward cross-participant patterns. The researcher moved between participants' accounts, meaning units, emerging themes, and the whole phenomenon of QuillBot-assisted revision in a hermeneutic process. This movement helped maintain coherence between the interpretive phenomenological orientation and the practical need to present organized themes clearly.

Population and Sample

This study employed purposive sampling to recruit participants who had direct experience using QuillBot in academic writing and were able to provide meaningful descriptions of the phenomenon under investigation. Consistent with the interpretive phenomenological approach, participants were selected based on the relevance and depth of their experiences rather than statistical representation.

An initial screening was conducted using a Google Form to identify students who had experience using QuillBot for academic writing. The screening gathered information about participants' experience with QuillBot, frequency of use, main purposes of use, and willingness to participate in an interview. Based on these criteria, seven undergraduate students from the English Education Department were purposively selected. All participants had used QuillBot in completing academic writing assignments and voluntarily agreed to participate in the study.

The number of participants was considered appropriate because the aim of the study was to obtain rich and detailed accounts of students' lived experiences, not to generalize the findings to a wider population. Data collection was concluded when the interviews had provided sufficient depth and recurring experiential meanings related to QuillBot-assisted revision, meaning negotiation, authorship, and students' responsibility in academic writing.

Table 1: Participants' Demographic Profile

Participant	Semester	Gender	Frequency of Use	Main Purpose of Use
P1	8th Semester	Female	Regularly	Academic paraphrasing and revision
P2	8th Semester	Female	Frequently	Grammar checking and sentence improvement
P3	6th Semester	Female	Regularly	Vocabulary variation and paraphrasing
P4	8th Semester	Male	Frequently	Sentence restructuring and clarity improvement
P5	6th Semester	Female	Frequently	Academic writing revision
P6	8th Semester	Female	Regularly	Grammar correction and text refinement
P7	6th Semester	Male	Frequently	Draft revision and paraphrasing

Data Collection and Research Instrument

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted in Indonesian, the participants' first language, so they could describe their experiences comfortably and reflectively. This technique was chosen because it allowed participants to describe their experiences openly while enabling the researcher to explore issues relevant to the research objective. The interviews lasted approximately 20-40 minutes and included opening, main, and follow-up questions. The interview responses were transcribed before analysis so that participants' accounts could be examined repeatedly and carefully. The interview guide was developed based on the focus of the study and previous research on AI-assisted writing and EFL writing experiences. Quotations presented in English were translated from the Indonesian transcripts for reporting, and the translated meanings were checked against the original statements during analysis.

Table 2: Sample Interview Questions

Research Focus	Sample Interview Question
Exploring students' experiences using QuillBot	"Can you describe your experience using QuillBot in academic writing activities?"
Identifying perceived benefits and challenges	"What benefits or difficulties do you experience when using QuillBot?"
Exploring reflective engagement	"How do you usually respond to suggestions generated by QuillBot?"
Exploring authorship negotiation	"Have you ever disagreed with QuillBot's revisions? Why?"

Operational Definition

In this study, QuillBot AI refers to an AI-assisted writing tool used to support paraphrasing, grammar correction, sentence revision, and vocabulary improvement. Students' experiences refer to participants' reflections, responses, judgments, and meanings when interacting with QuillBot during academic writing. Mediation refers to the role of QuillBot as a cultural and digital writing resource that supports revision while requiring students' active evaluation. Authorship refers to students' sense of ownership, responsibility, and control over the meaning of their final written texts.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using phenomenologically informed thematic analysis. The process began with repeated reading of interview transcripts to become familiar with participants' accounts. Each participant's account was first examined individually to identify significant statements related to QuillBot use, revision decisions, meaning changes, authorship, dependence, and critical evaluation. These statements were then transformed into meaning units that represented how participants made sense of their experiences, rather than merely what topics they mentioned.

The next stage involved grouping related meaning units into patterns of experience. Throughout this process, the researcher moved back and forth between individual accounts, meaning units, emerging themes, and the whole phenomenon of QuillBot-assisted revision to maintain a hermeneutic orientation. This movement helped ensure that themes were not treated merely as topics but as interpretive representations of lived meanings. Particular attention was given to the tensions between revision efficiency and dependence, linguistic accuracy and intended meaning, and AI support and authorial responsibility. Initial codes, such as sentence improvement, concern about changed meaning, authorial responsibility, and selective acceptance, were refined into three broader themes: QuillBot as a revision mediator, negotiating meaning and authorship, and developing critical AI literacy.

Trustworthiness was supported through careful documentation of the analysis process, repeated engagement with the Indonesian transcripts, comparison of translated excerpts with the original statements, and reflexive notes. These steps strengthened credibility, dependability,

and confirmability by helping preserve participants' intended meanings and reducing the risk of imposing unsupported interpretations on their accounts.

During analysis, the researcher avoided treating every repeated response as a separate theme. Instead, overlapping codes were merged when they represented the same experiential structure. For example, codes related to checking AI output, preserving meaning, and feeling responsible for the final text were not separated into unrelated themes; they were interpreted as part of a broader experience of negotiating meaning and authorship. This refinement was important to reduce conceptual overlap and improve analytical clarity.

The use of seven participants was considered appropriate for an interpretive phenomenological study because the purpose was not statistical generalization but rich exploration of meaning. The participants shared a common phenomenon, namely the use of QuillBot during academic writing revision, while still providing varied experiences regarding confidence, dependence, meaning change, and responsibility. The focus on a small group allowed the researcher to examine participants' accounts in depth and to preserve the interpretive quality of the data.

The research procedure was organized to ensure that the interpretive orientation of the study remained consistent from participant selection to data interpretation. First, the screening questionnaire was used only to identify participants with relevant experience, not as a source of statistical analysis. Second, the interviews were used to elicit reflective accounts of how participants encountered, evaluated, and assigned meaning to QuillBot-generated revisions. Third, the interpretation was conducted by focusing on experiential tensions, such as support versus dependence and linguistic improvement versus authorial ownership.

Table 3: Research procedure and interpretive focus

Stage	Procedure	Interpretive Purpose
Screening	Identifying students who had used QuillBot in academic writing	Ensuring participants shared the phenomenon under study
Interviewing	Eliciting reflective accounts through semi-structured questions	Understanding how students assigned meaning to AI-assisted revision
Meaning-unit analysis	Identifying significant statements and experiential meanings	Moving beyond descriptive coding toward lived meanings
Theme refinement	Merging overlapping codes into three themes	Improving coherence and reducing conceptual overlap

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The findings are presented in three interconnected themes. The restructuring of themes was made to avoid conceptual overlap and to show clearer boundaries among participants' experiences. The themes are presented not only as repeated categories, but also as lived meanings and tensions that appeared in participants' accounts of QuillBot-assisted revision. Each theme, therefore, combines selected participant quotations with an interpretive explanation of how students experienced revision support, meaning negotiation, and responsibility. Table 4 summarizes the final themes and their experiential meanings.

Table 4: Final themes from participants' experiences

Theme	Focus	Experiential Meaning
QuillBot as a Revision Mediator	Revision support after drafting	Students experienced QuillBot as a resource for refining expression rather than generating ideas.
Negotiating Meaning and Authorship	Evaluation of AI-generated revisions	Students balanced linguistic improvement with intended meaning, voice, and responsibility.
Developing Critical AI Literacy	Selective and ethical AI use	Students became more aware that AI output requires contextual judgment.

QuillBot as a Revision Mediator

Participants commonly experienced QuillBot as a revision resource used after they had independently developed their ideas. They did not describe QuillBot as a source of original content. Instead, they used it to reorganize sentences, improve vocabulary, and make their writing sound more academic. This pattern indicates that QuillBot was positioned within the revision stage rather than the idea-generation stage.

"Usually, I write the ideas first by myself because I want the content to come from my own understanding. After the draft is finished, I use QuillBot to help improve the sentences so the writing sounds clearer and more academic. I still check the result carefully because sometimes the sentence changes too much. (P1)"

"The ideas are still mine, but QuillBot helps me reorganize the sentences when I feel confused about how to express them properly in academic English. (P6)"

These statements show that students experienced QuillBot as a mediational support for expressing ideas that were already theirs. The tool helped them transform personal understanding into more acceptable academic language, but it did not remove their sense of involvement in the writing process. At the same time, some participants experienced tension because the same tool that supported efficiency also created concern about dependence.

"I feel helped because revision becomes faster and easier, but honestly, I also worry that if I use QuillBot too often, maybe later I will depend on it and become less confident writing by myself. (P3)"

"If students always rely on QuillBot, they might stop trying to improve their own writing skills independently because everything feels easier with AI. (P7)"

The lived meaning of QuillBot use, therefore, involved both support and caution. Participants valued the tool because it reduced revision difficulty, yet they also recognized that excessive reliance could weaken their confidence as independent writers. This theme reveals the first experiential tension: QuillBot was helpful because it mediated revision, but it became risky when mediation shifted into dependence. For participants, the tool was meaningful only when it supported their own thinking rather than replacing it.

Negotiating Meaning and Authorship

The second theme concerns how participants evaluated AI-generated revisions in relation to intended meaning and authorship. Participants did not experience revision as automatic acceptance. Instead, they compared original and revised sentences, examined whether the meaning remained accurate, and modified suggestions when necessary.

"Sometimes the sentence from QuillBot looks more formal and grammatically correct, but after I read it again carefully, the meaning changes slightly from what I originally wanted to explain. (P4)"

"I usually compare the original sentence and the revised version first because not every suggestion matches the context of my writing. (P1)"

These accounts show that participants' evaluation of QuillBot output went beyond grammar. A sentence could appear more formal but still fail to represent the writer's intention. In such moments, students experienced revision as a negotiation between linguistic improvement and meaning preservation. The concern was not merely whether QuillBot produced correct English, but whether the revised sentence still belonged to the writer's communicative intention and academic voice.

"Sometimes the sentence sounds academically better, but honestly, it no longer feels natural or sounds like my own writing anymore. (P5)"

"Using QuillBot is acceptable for me as long as the ideas still come from ourselves. AI should only help improve the language, not replace our thinking. (P2)"

"Even though QuillBot helps revise the writing, I still feel responsible for everything written in my paper because my name is the one written there. (P1)"

These statements reveal a deeper authorship tension. Participants wanted their writing to sound academic, but they did not want it to lose their personal voice. They also understood that responsibility remained with the writer even when AI assisted the revision. Authorship was therefore experienced not simply as producing original ideas, but as maintaining accountability for meaning, style, and final textual decisions. This shows that AI-assisted writing requires students to remain present as decision-makers in their own texts.

Developing Critical AI Literacy

The third theme shows that repeated interaction with QuillBot helped participants become more selective and critical. Several participants explained that they initially trusted QuillBot's revisions, but later realized that AI-generated suggestions were not always contextually accurate. This experience gradually shaped more cautious and reflective AI-use practices.

"At first, I thought QuillBot always gave better sentences, but after using it more often, I realized that some revisions actually changed the meaning of my writing. (P3)"

"Now I always check every revision carefully because AI is not always accurate, and sometimes the context becomes different. (P4)"

"AI can support writing, but students still need to think critically. If we directly accept everything from AI, sometimes the writing becomes inaccurate. (P7)"

For participants, critical AI literacy is developed through experience rather than only instruction. Their awareness emerged when they noticed mismatches between AI-generated output and their intended meaning. As a result, they learned to compare alternatives, judge contextual appropriateness, and decide when to accept, modify, or reject suggestions. This theme indicates that AI literacy in academic writing is not merely a technical ability; it is a reflective capacity to use AI responsibly while preserving meaning, authorship, and ethical accountability.

Discussion

The findings indicate that participants experienced QuillBot as a mediational resource within the revision stage rather than as a substitute author. This interpretation is consistent with the concept of mediation (Vygotsky, 1978), in which tools shape human activity by helping individuals regulate and transform their actions. QuillBot offered alternative wording, grammar corrections, and sentence structures, but these affordances became meaningful only when students interpreted them in relation to their own ideas. In line with the sociocultural perspective (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006), the tool did not remove human agency; it created a space in which agency had to be exercised through evaluation, selection, and revision.

Negotiating Support: Between Linguistic Assistance and Dependence

The first major meaning emerging from participants' accounts was the tension between assistance and dependence. Students valued QuillBot because it reduced linguistic difficulty and helped them produce more academic-sounding sentences. However, they also expressed concern that frequent use could weaken their confidence as independent writers. This tension is important because it shows that AI-assisted writing was not experienced as a straightforward benefit. The participants' accounts revealed an ambivalent experience: QuillBot was helpful, but its usefulness depended on whether students remained actively involved in the revision process.

From an interpretive phenomenological perspective, the most important issue was not simply that students used QuillBot, but how they made sense of its role in their writing. Heideggerian phenomenology emphasizes that experience is situated and interpreted through individuals' involvement in the world (Heidegger, 1962). In this study, students' involvement with QuillBot was shaped by their concern for meaning, academic identity, and responsibility. The tool became most visible to students when its revisions disrupted their intended meaning

or made the text feel less like their own. They did not evaluate revisions only by asking whether the sentences were grammatically correct. They also asked whether the revised sentences still expressed what they intended to say and whether the final text still felt like their own academic work.

This finding extends previous studies that report positive perceptions or measurable benefits of QuillBot and other AI-assisted writing tools (Amyatun & Kholis, 2023; El-Garawany, 2024; Mohammad et al., 2023). Those studies show that AI tools can support writing quality, confidence, and efficiency. The present study adds that usefulness is experienced through negotiation. Participants appreciated improved grammar and vocabulary, but they were also alert to situations in which AI-generated revisions changed emphasis, altered context, or weakened personal voice. Therefore, AI-assisted writing should be understood not only as a product improvement but also as an interpretive process in which students decide whether technological suggestions remain meaningful.

Negotiating Authorship: Agency, Voice, and Academic Responsibility

The second major meaning was the negotiation of authorship. Participants repeatedly emphasized that their ideas should come from themselves and that responsibility for the final text remained with the writer. This sense of responsibility was not limited to plagiarism avoidance. It included accountability for the accuracy of meaning, the appropriateness of language, and the relationship between the student's intention and the sentence produced after revision. Authorship, in this sense, was experienced as an ongoing responsibility rather than mere ownership of an original draft.

The negotiation of authorship became especially visible when participants described revised sentences that sounded more formal but less natural. These moments disrupted linguistic correctness and personal voice. A sentence could be grammatically acceptable while still feeling distant from the writer's intended meaning. Such experiences show why QuillBot-assisted revision cannot be evaluated only through surface-level accuracy. For participants, a good revision improved academic expression while preserving the meaning and voice they wanted to communicate.

The findings also clarify the role of agency in AI-assisted writing. The agency did not mean writing without technological support. Rather, it appeared when students decided when to use QuillBot, which suggestions to accept, which to modify, and which to reject. The participants were not passive recipients of AI-generated output. They held the output at a critical distance and compared it with their original intention. This form of partial trust is pedagogically significant because it shows that responsible AI use depends on the ability to treat AI suggestions as possibilities, not as final answers.

Negotiating Critical AI Literacy Through Reflective Revision

The third major meaning concerned the development of critical AI literacy. Participants' awareness developed through repeated encounters with AI-generated revisions that were useful in some cases but problematic in others. They learned that automated feedback could improve sentence structure while also producing contextual mismatch. This finding supports recent discussions that AI use in education requires evaluative judgment, ethical awareness, and contextual interpretation (Kasneci et al., 2023; Perkins, 2023). In the context of EFL writing, AI literacy is therefore not simply the ability to operate QuillBot; it is the ability to justify why a revision should be accepted, modified, or rejected.

The three themes are connected by one central interpretation: participants experienced AI-assisted revision as a negotiated practice. QuillBot mediated linguistic improvement, but students negotiated whether the mediated output still matched their intended meaning. They negotiated whether improved academic expression still sounded like their own writing. They also negotiated how much trust should be given to AI-generated suggestions. These negotiations demonstrate that students' engagement with QuillBot involved judgment and

responsibility rather than automatic dependence. Together, these themes answer the research question by showing not only what students did with QuillBot, but why revision became meaningful as a negotiation of support, voice, authorship, and responsibility.

Implications for AI-Assisted EFL Writing Pedagogy and Institutional Policy

This interpretation responds directly to concerns about overreliance on AI writing tools. The issue is not merely whether students use QuillBot, but how they use it. QuillBot became pedagogically valuable when students treated it as a resource for reflection and revision. It became risky when students accepted revisions without understanding the changes. This distinction is important for EFL writing instruction because it shifts the focus from simply prohibiting AI use to developing students' evaluative capacity.

The findings also suggest that AI-assisted revision can become a learning opportunity when students compare original and revised sentences. Through comparison, participants noticed repeated grammar problems, limited vocabulary choices, and weaknesses in sentence structure. However, this learning potential depended on active engagement. When students copied AI-generated text without reflection, the tool functioned only as a shortcut. When they questioned and adapted the output, QuillBot became part of a reflective writing process.

For writing pedagogy, the practical implication is that lecturers should make AI evaluation visible. Students can be asked to submit original sentences, QuillBot-generated alternatives, and brief explanations of why particular suggestions were accepted, modified, or rejected. Such activities would help students develop AI literacy while strengthening their awareness of meaning, authorship, and academic integrity. This approach also allows lecturers to distinguish responsible AI-supported revision from uncritical dependence.

For English Education students, this implication is particularly relevant because they are prospective teachers. Their current experiences with AI-assisted writing may influence how they later guide their own students in technology-supported learning. Therefore, AI-assisted writing pedagogy should connect technical tool use with teacher identity, ethical responsibility, and reflective practice. Students need to understand not only how AI can improve language form, but also how it can affect meaning, voice, and academic accountability.

The findings also have implications for institutional policy. Rather than treating every use of AI-assisted revision as misconduct, institutions may distinguish between AI use that replaces student thinking and AI use that supports reflective revision. Clear guidance is needed so that students understand the boundary between using QuillBot as a revision aid and allowing it to take over authorship. Such guidance should emphasize that students remain responsible for the ideas, meaning, and final wording of their academic texts.

Overall, this study offers a balanced understanding of QuillBot in EFL academic writing. The tool can support students who struggle to express ideas in academic English, but it can also produce revisions that alter meaning or weaken voice. Its educational value, therefore, depends on the quality of students' interpretive engagement. By highlighting the lived tensions between support and dependence, accuracy and meaning, and efficiency and authorship, this study contributes a phenomenological understanding of AI-assisted writing as a reflective, negotiated, and responsible revision practice.

CONCLUSION

This study explored undergraduate EFL students' experiences of using QuillBot AI in academic writing through an interpretive phenomenological lens. The findings show that students primarily used QuillBot during revision after independently drafting their ideas. They experienced QuillBot as a supportive mediational resource that helped refine sentence structure, vocabulary, grammar, and clarity. However, this support was accompanied by tensions related to dependence, changed meaning, and the preservation of personal voice. Students negotiated AI-generated revisions by comparing, modifying, and sometimes rejecting suggestions that did not align with their intended meanings.

Rather than viewing AI-assisted revision only as a mechanism for improving linguistic accuracy, this study highlights how students interpret, negotiate, and regulate AI-generated revisions in ways that preserve authorship and support responsible academic writing. Rather than proposing a new theoretical model, this study contributes an interpretive account of how EFL students experience AI-assisted revision as a negotiated practice involving mediation, agency, and responsibility. Practically, writing instructors should guide students to use AI tools reflectively by emphasizing meaning accuracy, authorial responsibility, and ethical decision-making. This study was limited to seven English Education students from one Indonesian university, so transferability should be considered cautiously. Future studies may include classroom observation, analysis of students' actual drafts and revisions, or comparative studies across different AI-assisted writing tools.

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