



The Dilemma of Using ChatGPT in Academic Writing: Balancing Efficiency and Students' Historical Thinking Skills

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Abstract. Advances in artificial intelligence (AI) technology, particularly ChatGPT, have transformed students' scientific writing practices, including those in the History Education Program at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Gorontalo State University. Although it facilitates access to information and the drafting of academic papers, its use has also raised concerns about the quality of students' historical thinking. This study aims to analyze the efficiency of using ChatGPT in academic writing and its impact on the depth of students' historical thinking. The study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design. The research participants consist of 8 students and 2 faculty members selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation, and were subsequently analyzed using thematic analysis. The research findings indicate that (1) ChatGPT enhances the efficiency of academic writing by accelerating information retrieval, idea development, outline creation, and time management, while still requiring students to engage in verification, paraphrasing, and the use of scholarly sources. (2) The use of ChatGPT has a dualistic impact on the depth of historical thinking: it supports initial exploration and the construction of academic narratives, but has the potential to weaken students' ability to critically evaluate sources, interpret information, and construct evidence-based arguments if used without reflection and independent analysis. Therefore, ChatGPT should be positioned as a learning tool that supports efficiency without replacing students' historical thinking skills.

Keywords: Academic Writing; ChatGPT; Efficiency; Historical Thinking; History Education.

1. INTRODUCTION

Advances in artificial intelligence (AI) technology over the past few years have brought about significant changes in various aspects of life, including higher education. One of the most notable innovations is the emergence of ChatGPT, a system capable of generating text quickly, systematically, and in a manner that closely resembles human writing (Desriadi et al., 2026); Rahmah & Ramli, 2025). This capability has made ChatGPT an increasingly popular tool among students, particularly in supporting academic activities such as searching for initial references, drafting an outline, and helping to refine the language structure in academic papers (Lubis et al., 2026); Putri et al., 2025). In this context, students in the History Education Program at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Gorontalo State University, have also begun to utilize ChatGPT in the preparation of scholarly papers. The presence of this technology has indirectly transformed students' academic work patterns shifting from a reliance on manual searches and step-by-step thinking processes to a faster, more instantaneous approach facilitated by digital technology. These changes are fundamentally inseparable from the demands of the times, which emphasize efficiency and ease of access to information. However, in the context of higher education, efficiency is not the sole primary objective. The learning process must continue to prioritize the development of critical, analytical, and reflective thinking skills as part of students' core competencies (Rahim, 2023; Yhani et al., 2024). This

becomes even more important in history education, where students are not only required to understand facts and the chronology of events but must also be able to analyze sources, interpret them, and construct logical, evidence-based arguments. Therefore, the use of ChatGPT in the preparation of academic papers cannot be viewed merely as a technical tool; rather, it needs to be examined more deeply in relation to the thought processes occurring in students (Suhendi, 2025; Tompunu et al., 2025). In other words, the convenience offered by this technology must be balanced with academic awareness so as not to compromise the quality of the learning process. This situation then raises a fundamental question about how students utilize ChatGPT in their daily academic practices, particularly in academic writing. On the one hand, ChatGPT offers significant convenience in helping students overcome various challenges, such as generating research ideas, developing an outline, and improving academic grammar (Nursalam et al., 2025; Tompunu et al., 2025). However, on the other hand, uncontrolled use has the potential to foster dependence, which can undermine students' independent thinking (Andini et al., 2026; Figunanting et al., 2026); U & Aras, 2026). When students rely too heavily on the results provided by ChatGPT without conducting adequate verification and analysis, their understanding of the material being studied becomes less thorough.

This situation can ultimately result in lower-quality academic work, particularly in terms of argumentation and the depth of analysis. This phenomenon aligns with various findings from previous studies examining the use of ChatGPT in learning. Prambudi & Sinaga (2025) state that ChatGPT has great potential to support the learning process, particularly in providing rapid feedback and helping students understand complex concepts. These findings indicate that ChatGPT can serve as an effective tool for enhancing learning efficiency. Not only that, but the use of ChatGPT can help students develop ideas and organize the structure of their academic writing more systematically (Nurbaiti et al., 2026; Pianti et al., 2025; Rosadi & Afrinal, 2025). Thus, it is clear that ChatGPT makes a positive contribution to supporting students' academic writing process, particularly in the early stages of drafting. Nevertheless, these positive findings do not fully reflect the actual conditions on the ground. A number of other studies indicate that the use of ChatGPT also carries potential negative impacts that cannot be ignored. Firdaus et al. (2025) assert that reliance on digital technology can diminish students' ability to think independently, particularly when students fail to verify the information they obtain. This is reinforced by Djaga (2026), who states that excessive use of AI can hinder the process of knowledge internalization and reduce the depth of analysis. Furthermore, Ariqo et al. (2025) highlight that the use of ChatGPT has the potential to raise academic ethical issues, such as plagiarism and the blurring of boundaries between original

work and technology-assisted output. Thus, the use of ChatGPT presents a dilemma between the convenience it offers and the risks it poses to the quality of learning. Upon further examination, there are fairly clear similarities and differences between previous research and the study to be conducted. The main similarity lies in the shared focus of the study: the use of ChatGPT in students' academic learning and writing. In addition, most studies also highlight the impact of this technology on students' critical thinking skills and the quality of their writing. However, the difference with this study lies in its focus on the use of ChatGPT within the context of specific academic disciplines, such as history education. This is important given that each discipline has distinct characteristics, particularly regarding approaches to thinking and methods of analysis. According to SurianiAbbas & Bahri (2024), in history education, students are expected to possess historical thinking skills that include source analysis, interpretation of events, and the construction of evidence-based arguments.

Therefore, the use of ChatGPT in this context needs to be examined more specifically to see how this technology influences students' historical thinking processes. Consequently, research focused on the context of history education is essential for providing a deeper and more contextual understanding. Furthermore, most previous studies have not comprehensively integrated the instructors' perspective in understanding students' use of ChatGPT. In fact, instructors play a strategic role in guiding and regulating the use of technology in the learning process. Without clear guidance, students tend to use ChatGPT freely without considering ethical and academic integrity issues. Therefore, this study also incorporates the instructors' perspective to gain a more complete picture of ChatGPT usage practices in an academic setting, specifically in the History Education Program at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Gorontalo State University. Based on the above discussion, this study is important for providing a scientific foundation for formulating learning policies and strategies that are adaptable to technological advancements. This study is expected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the use of ChatGPT in students' academic writing, thereby supporting the creation of a learning environment that is not only efficient but also upholds critical thinking and academic integrity.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study design to examine the dilemma of using ChatGPT in students' academic writing, specifically the tension between efficiency and the depth of historical thinking. This approach was chosen because it provides an in-depth, contextual, and interpretive understanding of the experiences and practices

surrounding the use of technology in an academic setting. The research was conducted in the History Education Program, Faculty of Social Sciences, Gorontalo State University. The research subjects consisted of 10 participants selected through purposive sampling: 2 faculty members and 8 students. The faculty members involved taught courses on research methodology and academic writing, while the students were currently enrolled students who had written academic papers and had experience using ChatGPT. This number of participants was deemed sufficient for a qualitative study to obtain in-depth and diverse data. Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, observation, and a review of documents. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all participants to explore their experiences, perceptions, and views regarding the use of ChatGPT in academic writing.

Non-participant observation was used to observe students' academic activities and learning interactions. Meanwhile, documentation in the form of an analysis of students' written work was used to examine writing structure and the depth of historical analysis. Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis techniques through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. Data from interviews, observations, and documentation were categorized into main themes such as the efficiency of ChatGPT use and its impact on students' historical thinking processes. Data validity was ensured through triangulation of sources and methods, as well as participant verification. Research ethics were also upheld by providing explanations to participants and maintaining the confidentiality of their identities. This method was designed systematically and concisely to produce comprehensive findings regarding the dilemmas surrounding the use of ChatGPT in students' academic writing, as well as its contribution to the development of critical and adaptive history education.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Efficiency of Using ChatGPT in Students' Academic Writing

The use of artificial intelligence technology, particularly ChatGPT, has brought about significant changes in academic writing practices among students, including those in the History Education Program at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Gorontalo State University. This technology not only offers easy access to information but also enhances efficiency in the process of writing academic papers. In the context of history education, this efficiency is crucial because students are required to process complex historical sources, conduct critical analysis, and present evidence-based arguments. Therefore, the use of ChatGPT can be understood as a form of adaptation to the development of digital technology in the academic world. However, the efficiency it offers still needs to be critically examined so that it does not undermine the

quality of historical thinking, which is the cornerstone of history education (Syah, 2026). Furthermore, the efficiency of using ChatGPT is evident in its ability to help students formulate initial ideas, develop an outline, and provide alternative phrasing for academic sentences. Based on interviews with students cited in Tungallo (2026) and Rubai (2026), they reported that ChatGPT was very helpful in overcoming writer's block when beginning to write academic papers. This indicates that ChatGPT functions as a cognitive aid that can accelerate the process of exploring initial ideas. This finding aligns with research by Fauziah & Surana (2026), which states that generative AI can enhance students' academic productivity, particularly in the early stages of writing. However, this efficiency does not replace the student's role as the primary agent in thinking and writing, as the generated output still requires a process of selection, interpretation, and adaptation to the research context. On the other hand, the efficient use of ChatGPT is also linked to students' ability to manage their time more effectively. Students are often faced with various academic demands that must be completed within a limited timeframe, so this technology helps speed up the initial information-searching process. Students named Hamid (2026) and Paudi (2026) stated that they use ChatGPT to gain a general overview of a topic before conducting more in-depth literature reviews.

This indicates that ChatGPT serves as an entry point in the research process. However, this time efficiency must still be balanced with depth of analysis to avoid producing superficial academic work. In this regard, Nabila et al. (2026) emphasize that technological efficiency must be accompanied by critical thinking skills to prevent a decline in the quality of learning. Furthermore, the interview results showed that students did not fully accept ChatGPT's answers at face value but instead paraphrased them and integrated them with their own thoughts. Rasyid (2026) and Todilo, (2026) as students, stated that ChatGPT's answers cannot be used directly but must be rewritten in their own words to comply with academic standards and avoid plagiarism. This indicates a fairly strong sense of academic integrity among students in maintaining the originality of their scholarly work. This finding aligns with the views of Panggayuh et al. (2026), who emphasize the importance of the ethical use of AI in higher education. Thus, the efficiency provided by ChatGPT is not instantaneous but still involves an intellectual process that actively engages students. Furthermore, the efficient use of ChatGPT is also reflected in the practice of verifying information. Doda (2026) explains that students do not immediately trust the results from ChatGPT but compare them with other sources, such as books and scientific journals. This practice demonstrates that students continue to prioritize the validity and reliability of information in academic writing. In the context of historiography, source verification is a crucial step that cannot be overlooked. Therefore, although ChatGPT

provides efficiency in supplying initial information, the process of source criticism must still be carried out rigorously. This is in line with the principles of historical methodology, which emphasize the importance of external and internal criticism of sources (Ismaun, 2005). Furthermore, the efficiency of ChatGPT's use is also influenced by students' ability to formulate the right keywords. Huraira (2026) noted that difficulties in understanding ChatGPT's responses are often caused by inaccuracies in phrasing questions, making it necessary to refine keywords to obtain relevant results. This indicates that the efficiency of technology heavily depends on users' digital literacy. The better students' ability to operate the technology, the more optimal the results obtained. In this regard, digital literacy is a crucial competency that students must possess in the era of technology-based learning (Putra et al., 2025). However, the efficiency of using ChatGPT is not without potential risks, particularly regarding dependence on technology. Rubai (2026) emphasizes that ChatGPT should only be used as a tool, while the learning process remains self-directed.

This statement reflects an awareness of the need to maintain a balance between technology use and the development of critical thinking skills. If not properly controlled, excessive use of ChatGPT can diminish students' analytical abilities, particularly in terms of gaining a deep understanding of historical context (Dewi et al., 2024). Therefore, the efficiency gained must remain within reasonable limits so as not to hinder the learning process. In this context, the role of instructors becomes crucial in guiding the wise use of ChatGPT. Based on an interview with Mondong (2026) emphasizes that ChatGPT can be used as a learning aid, but should not replace students' thinking processes. Lecturers also play a role in fostering an understanding of the ethics of technology use, including the importance of citation and academic integrity. This aligns with the perspective of Fatmadiwi et al. (2025), who state that the integration of AI in higher education must be accompanied by a strengthening of pedagogy and academic ethics. Thus, it can be concluded that the efficiency of using ChatGPT in students' academic writing is complex and multidimensional. This efficiency includes faster access to information, ease in organizing ideas, and more effective time management. However, this efficiency must be balanced with critical thinking skills, awareness of academic ethics, and adequate digital literacy skills. Without this balance, the resulting efficiency could actually lower the quality of learning. Therefore, the use of ChatGPT should be positioned as a tool that supports rather than replaces students' historical thinking processes in producing high-quality, integrity-driven academic work.

The Impact of ChatGPT Use on Students' Depth of Historical Thinking

The depth of historical thinking is one of the key competencies that history education students must possess (Syahputra et al., 2024). Historical thinking not only requires the ability to understand facts from the past but also involves the process of identifying sources, critically evaluating historical evidence, establishing cause-and-effect relationships, understanding spatial and temporal contexts, and constructing interpretations based on verifiable evidence. In this context, the use of ChatGPT introduces a new dynamic to students' historical thinking process. While this technology can indeed accelerate access to information, it simultaneously has the potential to compromise the depth of analysis if used without adequate reflection and verification (Hanifah et al., 2025). The research findings indicate that most students use ChatGPT as a tool to gain an initial overview of historical research topics, rather than as a primary source for developing arguments. Todilo (2026) notes that ChatGPT is used to identify initial sources such as books and journals; this information is then reanalyzed before being incorporated into thesis writing. When the answers provided are deemed inaccurate, students validate them through Google Scholar or other scholarly sources to ensure that the information used maintains a strong academic foundation.

These findings indicate that students still engage in heuristic processes in historical research, meaning that ChatGPT has not yet replaced the activities of scholarly source search and exploration. Similar findings were observed in Paudi (2026), who explained that the results obtained from ChatGPT are always analyzed first by comparing them to existing sources. Even when ChatGPT generates research instruments or additional paragraphs, the student still makes adjustments to ensure they align with the research data collected in the field. Furthermore, references generated by AI are always double-checked via Google Scholar, as not all of them are actually available or valid. This situation demonstrates that students continue to apply the principle of source criticism as part of the historical research method that is, verifying the authenticity and credibility of information before using it as the basis for constructing a historical narrative. Nevertheless, the study's findings also indicate that the use of ChatGPT can affect the depth of historical thinking when students rely too heavily on AI-generated narratives (Vornika et al., 2026). Tapoto (2026) acknowledges that ChatGPT is often used to help identify research novelty and draft paragraphs. However, he realizes that all such results must be reread, paraphrased, and compared with various references to ensure they remain relevant to the research focus. This statement indicates that students understand the importance of personal interpretation. However, if this process is neglected, the ability to construct historical arguments may be weakened because students simply accept the narrative constructs provided by the AI. In the discipline of history, interpretation is an intellectual activity that

cannot be replaced by machines. Every historical event has a social, political, economic, and cultural context that requires in-depth analysis based on empirical evidence. ChatGPT is indeed capable of producing coherent and systematic narratives, but the model operates based on language patterns, not through a process of critical evaluation of primary sources as historians do. Interpretation aims not only to explain facts but also to assess the credibility of sources, understand the context of the era, identify the author's biases, and reconcile often conflicting evidence before producing a historically accountable reconstruction (Ismaun, 2005). Therefore, the output generated by ChatGPT should be viewed as supporting material or a starting point for exploration, not as an authoritative source in historical writing. This situation has significant implications for the development of students' critical thinking skills, particularly among History Education students. Critical thinking requires students to be able to identify problems, evaluate the quality of information, compare various perspectives, construct arguments based on evidence, and draw logical and justifiable conclusions (Facione, 1990).

When students use ChatGPT passively merely to obtain instant answers, there is a risk of a decline in higher-order cognitive activities because the processes of analyzing, evaluating, and synthesizing information tend to be delegated to technology. As a result, students may become less skilled at critically evaluating sources, testing the validity of information, or constructing historical arguments independently. Interviews with faculty members also revealed concerns about students' tendency to rely too heavily on AI. Mondong (2026), a faculty member in the History Education program, explained that student papers generated with the help of ChatGPT are relatively easy to identify because they have a very neat and systematic language structure. According to him, the main issue lies not in the use of ChatGPT itself, but in the decline of students' ability to construct arguments independently when the entire writing process is delegated to AI. Therefore, faculty members consistently reassess students' understanding of their thesis content through the guidance process and academic discussions. A more comprehensive perspective was presented by another lecturer, Tasnur (2026). According to him, the quality of historical analysis produced by students is largely determined by their ability to process research data, not by the sophistication of ChatGPT. He identified several common issues, such as the use of invalid references, overly general narratives, data fabrication, and the tendency for students to simply copy and paste without critically evaluating the content of their writing. In fact, the lecturer emphasized that students who do not understand the content of their own writing demonstrate that their historical thinking process has not yet developed optimally because analysis has been replaced by AI-generated results. These findings reinforce the results of the study by Lase et al. (2026), which states that generative AI

can enhance learning productivity but may simultaneously diminish critical thinking skills if students passively accept AI-generated outputs. In the context of history education, this risk is greater because the learning process aims not only to produce well-written texts but also to develop the ability to interpret historical facts objectively and argumentatively. In line with this, Maulianti et al. (2026) emphasize that the use of AI in higher education should be positioned as an “intellectual partner,” not as a substitute for human analytical activities.

Another aspect that demonstrates the depth of historical thinking is students’ ability to connect field data with historical concepts. Some students explained that the results of observations, interviews, and historical documents remain the primary foundation for writing their theses, while ChatGPT is used only to help structure the narrative or clarify sentence wording. For example, Tunggalio (2026) states that field data remains the primary foundation, while ChatGPT only provides an initial outline on how to structure the analysis, so that the final results still stem from the researcher’s own interpretation. This statement indicates that some students still maintain intellectual independence in the historical research process. Based on these overall findings, it can be understood that the impact of ChatGPT’s use on the depth of historical thinking is dualistic. On the one hand, ChatGPT offers benefits in broadening initial perspectives, helping students understand historical concepts, and facilitating the development of academic narratives. On the other hand, its use without source criticism, independent interpretation, and historical reflection has the potential to diminish students’ ability to construct evidence-based arguments. Therefore, the depth of historical thinking is not determined by the existence of ChatGPT, but rather by students’ ability to use this technology reflectively, critically, and responsibly. From a history education perspective, ChatGPT should be positioned as a tool to support the thinking process, while heuristic activities, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography remain the core competencies that must be developed through authentic research experiences.

4. CONCLUSION

The use of ChatGPT in academic writing by students in the History Education Program at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Gorontalo State University, has made a positive contribution to the efficiency of academic processes. ChatGPT is used to help generate initial research ideas, develop an outline, gain a general overview of a topic, improve academic writing, and speed up information searches. However, this efficiency should not be interpreted as a substitute for students’ intellectual abilities. The research findings indicate that students still paraphrase content, verify information through books and scientific journals, and adapt ChatGPT’s output

to the context of their research. Furthermore, faculty members play a crucial role in guiding the ethical use of ChatGPT by reinforcing digital literacy, academic integrity, and critical thinking skills. Thus, ChatGPT is best positioned as a supporting tool that enhances scientific writing productivity without undermining students' academic responsibilities.

This efficiency ultimately impacts the depth of students' historical thinking; thus, the use of ChatGPT cannot be separated from the quality of the accompanying thought process. This study shows that ChatGPT does not directly reduce historical thinking skills as long as students continue to engage in heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and verification of the information they obtain. Conversely, if the results generated by AI are passively accepted without critical analysis, there is a risk that students' ability to construct evidence-based historical arguments, understand historical context, and formulate interpretations independently will decline. Therefore, the depth of historical thinking is not determined by the existence of ChatGPT as a technology, but rather by students' ability to utilize this technology reflectively, critically, and responsibly. In other words, the integration of ChatGPT into history education should be directed toward using it as a supportive tool that strengthens the process of historical thinking, rather than replacing the intellectual activities that define a historian.

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