Companion or Crutch? Generative AI in the Academic Writing of Business Students, and What It Means for Language Teaching and Assessment

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Abstract

For students who write academic English as an additional language, generative artificial intelligence (AI) has become, above all, a language tool. This study examined how Business Administration (BSBA) students at a Philippine state university use generative AI for writing and language tasks, how acceptable they judge those uses, and whether heavier use is tied to a felt loss of their own writing ability. A researcher-adapted survey was completed by 417 students. AI writing support was the dominant mode of use ($M = 2.83$, $SD = 0.64$), well above use that replaces the student's own work ($M = 2.36$); improving grammar and wording was the single most frequent task ($M = 2.95$), and about a third of students used dedicated language tools such as Grammarly or QuillBot. Acceptability fell along a clear gradient — grammar-checking was broadly accepted ($M = 2.89$), paraphrasing sat in a gray zone ($M = 2.57$), and submitting AI-written text was rejected ($M = 1.89$). Students saw genuine benefit (AI "helps me learn," $M = 3.18$) but also felt their writing and thinking had weakened ($M = 2.81$). Heavier AI writing use was positively associated with perceived skill erosion ($r = 0.31$, $p < .001$): crossing use with erosion, most heavy users fell into a "crutch" rather than a "companion" profile. The findings point to concrete work for language teaching — making paraphrase and citation norms explicit, and redesigning writing assessment around process and disclosure rather than prohibition.

Keywords

Generative AI, academic writing, second-language writing, writing assessment, academic integrity, business education.