

Students' Confession on the Use of Artificial Intelligence: An English Department Learners' Perceptions

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ABSTRACT: Artificial Intelligence (AI) has rapidly become an inseparable part of contemporary language learning, raising both pedagogical opportunities and ethical concerns. This article presents a conceptual review examining university students' confessions-voluntary disclosures and self-reported admissions-regarding their use of AI tools, particularly generative AI such as ChatGPT, in the context of English language learning. Drawing on a synthesis of recent empirical and theoretical literature, this study frames student "confession" as a discursive act situated at the intersection of academic honesty, learner autonomy, and digital literacy. The discussion centers on a cohort of 70 second-year (2024 intake) students from an English Language Education study program as an illustrative reference population frequently cited in comparable studies, used here to ground the conceptual analysis rather than as a basis for new empirical claims. Findings from the literature indicate that students' admissions of AI use commonly span three dimensions: instrumental reliance (using AI for grammar checking, translation, and idea generation), affective ambivalence (guilt, anxiety, and justification narratives), and pedagogical negotiation (students reconciling AI assistance with perceived academic integrity norms). The review further identifies that students tend to disclose AI use more openly in low-stakes tasks than in high-stakes assessments, suggesting a contextual and risk-sensitive pattern of confession. This article argues that educators should move beyond punitive responses to AI use and instead develop transparent disclosure frameworks, scaffolded AI literacy instruction, and assessment redesign that acknowledge AI as a legitimate component of the contemporary language-learning ecosystem. Implications for curriculum design, academic integrity policy, and future empirical research are discussed.

KEYWORDS: Artificial Intelligence, student confession, language learning, academic integrity, English language education, digital literacy

1. INTRODUCTION

The proliferation of generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools, particularly large language models such as ChatGPT, Google Gemini, and other AI-assisted writing platforms, has fundamentally altered the landscape of higher education, most visibly within language learning contexts (Kasneci et al., 2023). Within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings, students increasingly turn to AI not merely as a supplementary resource but as an active interlocutor in completing academic tasks ranging from essay drafting to grammar correction and idea generation (Warschauer et al., 2023). This shift has generated considerable scholarly attention regarding the pedagogical benefits of AI-assisted learning, alongside mounting concern over academic integrity, learner dependency, and the erosion of authentic language production (Chan & Hu, 2023).

A particularly underexplored dimension of this phenomenon concerns the act of student confession: the voluntary or semi-voluntary disclosure by students of their own AI usage, often accompanied by justification, rationalization, or expressions of guilt. Such confessions are rarely neutral statements of fact; rather, they are discursive performances shaped by students' perceptions of institutional norms, fear of sanction, and evolving notions of what constitutes legitimate academic assistance (Eaton, 2023). Understanding how students articulate, frame, and negotiate these admissions offers valuable insight into the broader psychological and pedagogical dynamics of AI integration in language classrooms.

This article focuses on English Language Education students, using as an illustrative reference a cohort of 70 second-year students (2024 intake) frequently invoked in comparable institutional discussions of AI use in language learning. Rather than presenting new empirical data collected from this cohort, the present study adopts a conceptual and literature-based approach, synthesizing existing theoretical and empirical findings to construct a coherent framework for understanding student confession

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regarding AI use. This approach is warranted given the still-emerging and rapidly evolving nature of AI-related research in language education, where conceptual synthesis can productively precede large-scale empirical investigation (Bearman & Luckin, 2020).

The urgency of this inquiry is underscored by several converging trends. First, language educators report a marked increase in AI-assisted submissions that are difficult to detect through conventional plagiarism-checking tools, since AI-generated text is often original in the technical sense yet inauthentic in terms of learner production (Perkins, 2023). Second, students themselves report significant ambivalence: many view AI as a legitimate learning aid akin to a dictionary or grammar-checking software, while simultaneously recognizing that excessive reliance may undermine their own language acquisition (Kim & Kim, 2024). Third, institutional policies on AI use remain inconsistent and often reactive, leaving students to navigate a normative gray area with little clear guidance (Sullivan et al., 2023). These conditions collectively produce a fertile context for the emergence of "confession" as a distinct discursive and pedagogical phenomenon worthy of dedicated scholarly attention.

Based on the background outlined above, this study seeks to address the following research questions: (1) What patterns characterize students' self-reported confessions regarding AI use in English language learning? (2) What underlying motivations and affective states accompany these confessions? (3) What pedagogical and policy implications emerge from understanding confession as a window into students' relationship with AI-assisted learning? By addressing these questions through a conceptual literature review, this article aims to contribute a theoretically grounded framework that can inform both future empirical research and immediate pedagogical practice in AI-saturated language learning environments.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a conceptual review design, also referred to as a narrative-conceptual literature synthesis, which is appropriate for emerging research domains where empirical literature is still accumulating and theoretical clarity is needed before large-scale primary data collection (Hulland, 2020; Snyder, 2019). Rather than collecting new primary data, this method systematically synthesizes existing scholarly literature to construct an integrative conceptual framework, while drawing on a real institutional context-70 second-year (2024 intake) students from the English Language Education study program-as an illustrative reference case that grounds the discussion in a concrete pedagogical setting.

2.1 Literature Search and Selection Procedure

The literature search was conducted through Google Scholar, Scopus, and ERIC databases, focusing on publications from 2020 to 2024 to ensure relevance to the post-ChatGPT (November 2022) educational landscape, while also including foundational works on academic integrity and learner autonomy published prior to this period. Search terms included combinations of "artificial intelligence," "generative AI," "ChatGPT," "student disclosure," "academic integrity," "language learning," and "EFL." Inclusion criteria comprised: (a) peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, or reputable conference proceedings; (b) direct relevance to AI use in educational or language-learning contexts; (c) availability in full text. Articles unrelated to education, those focused solely on technical AI development without pedagogical relevance, and non-peer-reviewed sources were excluded.

2.2 Analytical Framework

The selected literature was analyzed using thematic synthesis (Thomas & Harden, 2008), in which recurring concepts, findings, and theoretical constructs across sources were coded into overarching themes. Three primary analytical lenses were applied: (1) the instrumental dimension, concerning how and why students use AI in language tasks; (2) the affective-ethical dimension, concerning the emotional and moral framing of students' self-disclosure; and (3) the pedagogical-institutional dimension, concerning how educators and institutions respond to or shape patterns of disclosure. These three lenses were selected because they collectively capture the cognitive, emotional, and structural dimensions through which student confession is enacted and interpreted within higher education contexts (Eaton, 2023; Perkins, 2023).

2.3 Illustrative Reference Context

To anchor the conceptual discussion in a tangible pedagogical setting, this review references the case of 70 second-year students (2024 intake) enrolled in an English Language Education study program at an Indonesian higher education institution. This cohort is used illustratively-reflecting common patterns reported across similar EFL learner populations in the reviewed literature-rather than as a source of newly collected empirical data. Where relevant, the discussion draws parallels between patterns documented in international literature and the contextual realities likely faced by such a cohort, including the dual pressures of English proficiency development and increasing access to multilingual AI tools.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Patterns of Student Confession Regarding AI Use

Synthesis of the reviewed literature reveals that student confessions regarding AI use are rarely simple admissions of fact; instead, they are layered statements combining disclosure, justification, and self-positioning. Three recurring patterns emerge consistently across studies on AI use among language learners, summarized in Table 1 and elaborated thereafter.

Table 1. Patterns of Student Confession Regarding AI Use in Language Learning

Confession Pattern	Description	Representative Sources
Instrumental disclosure	Students openly admit using AI for mechanical tasks (grammar checking, translation, vocabulary lookup), framing these uses as analogous to dictionaries or spell-checkers.	Kim & Kim (2024); Warschauer et al. (2023)
Conditional admission	Students disclose AI use selectively, distinguishing between "acceptable" low-stakes tasks (drafts, brainstorming) and "risky" high-stakes tasks (exams, final essays), revealing a risk-calibrated honesty.	Perkins (2023); Sullivan et al. (2023)
Guilt-laden confession	Disclosure accompanied by explicit guilt, anxiety, or pre-emptive justification (e.g., "I know it's wrong, but..."), reflecting internalized academic integrity norms in tension with practical necessity.	Eaton (2023); Chan & Hu (2023)

Instrumental disclosure represents the most frequently reported pattern, wherein students readily acknowledge using AI tools for what they perceive as low-risk, skill-supportive functions. Kim and Kim (2024) found that EFL learners overwhelmingly normalized AI use for grammar checking and vocabulary clarification, often comparing such tools explicitly to legitimate aids such as bilingual dictionaries. This normalization suggests that for many students, the boundary between "using a tool" and "cheating" is drawn not by the tool itself but by the perceived authorship of the final output.

Conditional admission, the second pattern, reflects a more strategic form of disclosure in which students calibrate their honesty according to perceived stakes. Sullivan et al. (2023) observed that students were considerably more forthcoming about AI use in formative or low-stakes assignments than in summative assessments, where fear of academic sanction suppressed disclosure. This pattern indicates that confession is not a stable trait but a context-dependent behavior shaped by institutional risk architecture.

Guilt-laden confession, the third pattern, reveals the affective complexity underlying student disclosure. Eaton (2023) documented narratives in which students explicitly framed their AI use within moral language, expressing discomfort even while defending their practices as necessary or unavoidable given time constraints, language anxiety, or perceived unfair grading standards. This pattern suggests that confession often functions simultaneously as admission and self-defense, a dual move that complicates any simplistic binary of honest versus dishonest students.

3.2 Motivations and Affective Dimensions Underlying Confession

Beyond identifying patterns, it is essential to examine the motivations driving students toward disclosure or concealment. The literature converges on several interrelated motivational factors, which can be organized into three broad categories: linguistic-pedagogical motivations, psychosocial motivations, and institutional-normative motivations.

- 1) Linguistic-pedagogical motivations: Many EFL students report turning to AI specifically to compensate for perceived gaps in English proficiency, using AI as a scaffold for grammar accuracy and lexical range that they have not yet internalized (Warschauer et al., 2023). For learners situated in non-English-dominant contexts, such as Indonesian EFL classrooms, this motivation is particularly salient given the cognitive load of producing academic English alongside disciplinary content.
- 2) Psychosocial motivations: Confession is frequently motivated by a desire to alleviate cognitive dissonance between students' self-image as capable learners and their reliance on external tools. Chan and Hu (2023) argue that disclosure can serve a quasi-therapeutic function, allowing students to externalize anxiety about authenticity and competence.
- 3) Institutional-normative motivations: The clarity (or ambiguity) of institutional AI policy significantly shapes disclosure behavior. Where policies are vague or inconsistently enforced, students report relying on peer norms and instructor reputation to gauge how much disclosure is "safe," producing highly localized and unpredictable confession behavior (Perkins, 2023).

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Taken together, these motivational categories suggest that student confession functions less as a fixed ethical disposition and more as a dynamic negotiation between linguistic need, emotional self-regulation, and perceived institutional risk. This finding carries important implications for how educators interpret-and respond to-student admissions of AI use.

3.3 Pedagogical and Institutional Implications

The patterns and motivations identified above suggest that punitive, detection-based responses to AI use are likely to suppress honest disclosure rather than eliminate AI use itself, as students simply migrate toward concealment strategies rather than abandoning the tools (Perkins, 2023). This review instead supports an emerging consensus in the literature favoring transparency-oriented pedagogical responses, comprising three interlocking strategies.

First, the development of explicit disclosure frameworks-structured opportunities (such as AI-use statements or annotated submissions) for students to declare how and why AI was used in a given task-has been shown to reduce the guilt-defense dynamic identified in Section 3.1, replacing it with a more constructive, metacognitive reporting practice (Sullivan et al., 2023). Second, scaffolded AI literacy instruction, in which students are explicitly taught to critically evaluate AI output rather than treating it as authoritative, addresses the linguistic-pedagogical motivations underlying overreliance, fostering more discerning and self-aware use (Kasneci et al., 2023). Third, assessment redesign-shifting some evaluative weight toward process-oriented tasks (drafts, reflections, oral defenses of written work) rather than relying solely on final-product assessment-reduces the high-stakes pressure that drives concealment, as identified in the conditional admission pattern (Bearman & Luckin, 2020).

Applied to the illustrative context of the 70 second-year English Language Education students referenced in this review, these implications suggest that institutional policy should move beyond a binary permitted/prohibited framing of AI use. Instead, English language programs would benefit from co-constructing, with students, explicit norms regarding which tasks are intended to develop unassisted language production and which may legitimately incorporate AI support-thereby aligning assessment design with the realistic, AI-saturated learning environment students currently inhabit (Chan & Hu, 2023; Eaton, 2023).

4. CONCLUSION

This conceptual review has examined student confession regarding AI use in English language learning as a multidimensional discursive phenomenon, shaped by instrumental needs, affective tensions, and institutional norms. Three recurring confession patterns-instrumental disclosure, conditional admission, and guilt-laden confession-illustrate that students' relationship with AI is neither uniformly dishonest nor uniformly transparent, but rather context-sensitive and risk-calibrated. Drawing on the illustrative context of 70 second-year English Language Education students, this review argues that language education institutions should reconceptualize their response to AI use, shifting from detection-and-punishment models toward transparency-oriented frameworks that include explicit disclosure mechanisms, structured AI literacy instruction, and process-oriented assessment redesign.

These findings carry direct implications for curriculum developers, language instructors, and academic integrity policymakers seeking to construct sustainable, ethically coherent responses to generative AI in higher education. At the same time, this study acknowledges its limitations as a conceptual review grounded in secondary literature rather than newly collected primary data from the referenced student cohort. Future research should pursue empirical investigation-through structured surveys, in-depth interviews, or discourse analysis of actual student disclosures-within English Language Education programs such as the one referenced here, in order to validate, refine, or challenge the conceptual framework proposed in this article. Longitudinal studies tracking how confession patterns evolve as institutional AI policies mature would further enrich understanding of this rapidly developing area of language education research.

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