

ChatGPT in Academic Writing: Factors Shaping Vietnamese English Majors' Ethical Perceptions - A Sequential Explanatory Mixed-Methods Study

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ABSTRACT: *The rapid integration of ChatGPT into education has raised questions about students' perceptions of its ethical use, particularly in higher education. This study-grounded in the Theory of Planned Behaviour, Technology Acceptance Model and Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) investigated how English majors at a university in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam perceive the ethical use of ChatGPT in academic writing and the factors shaping these perceptions. A sequential explanatory mixed-methods design was employed, including a survey of 95 final-year English majors, followed by in-depth semi-structured interviews with three purposively selected participants. Three interviews were conducted to provide explanatory insights into the quantitative patterns. The results indicated that students held favourable perceptions of ethical ChatGPT use in academic writing. Quantitative results indicated that attitudes, perceived behavioural control and perceived risks significantly shaped students' ethical perceptions, while qualitative interviews were used to explain how these factors operated in students' actual learning practices. The findings were interpreted using constructs drawn from TPB, TAM and CHAT particularly attitudes, perceived behavioural control and perceived usefulness. They emphasized the importance of verifying outputs but also highlighted the absence of institutional training. The study contributes to ongoing discussions and helpful implications of ChatGPT in academic writing by highlighting the need for structured guidance to promote ethical and effective use of ChatGPT into university learning.*

KEYWORDS: ChatGPT, ethical use, perceptions, factors, academic writing.

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1. Introduction

In recent years, the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in education has sparked a paradigm shift in how students interact with information and develop academic skills (Zawacki-Richter *et al.*, 2019). One of the most prominent examples of this is ChatGPT, which is capable of generating human-like responses and assisting with a variety of writing tasks (Kasneci *et al.*, 2023). While ChatGPT can help students paraphrase, summarize, brainstorm ideas, and check grammar, there is a growing concern that it may also facilitate academic dishonesty, such as unauthorized content generation or plagiarism (Chan & Hu, 2023). At the same time, its use has sparked intense debate regarding plagiarism, critical thinking, assessment validity, and fairness (Cotton *et al.*, 2024). Questions about accuracy, bias, and the reliability

of generated content add further complications, as students may rely on information that is factually incorrect or misleading. These contrasting perspectives emphasize the need of examining how students perceive the ethical use of ChatGPT in academic settings.

Although international scholarship has explored opportunities and risks of generative AI in education, much of the research has focused on adoption, acceptance, and technological opportunities (Dwivedi *et al.*, 2023; Tlili *et al.*, 2023)) with limited evidence on students' perceptions of ethical use in a particular aspect, such as academic writing. In Vietnam, existing work has primarily investigated adoption and motivational factors (Duong, 2025). However, little attention has been paid to how students perceive the ethical dimensions of ChatGPT use.

Understanding students' perceptions of ethical ChatGPT use is crucial. Firstly, students' judgments about what they count as ethical use directly affect their academic practices, influencing whether they adopt the behaviours. Secondly, perceptions of ethical boundaries shape how students respond to institutional policies and teacher guidance. Last but not least, empirical evidence on students' ethical perceptions can support universities in designing training programs and policies that promote AI literacy and integrity.

This research focuses on examining the perceptions of ethical ChatGPT use in academic writing, factors influencing these perceptions and how they influence students' perceptions. It sought to answer the three following questions. Research question 2 identifies the influencing factors quantitatively, whereas research question 3 uses qualitative data to explain how these factors operate in practice.

1. What are English majors' perceptions of ethical ChatGPT use in Academic writing?
2. What factors influence English majors' perceptions of ethical ChatGPT use in Academic writing?
3. How do students explain the role of these factors in shaping their ethical perceptions?

2. Literature Review

2.1. ChatGPT Use in Academic Writing

2.1.1. Understandings of "What is ChatGPT?"

ChatGPT stands for Chat Generative Pre-Trained Transformer, an advanced AI chatbot created by OpenAI and was officially introduced in 2022 (cited in Ho, 2024, p. 56). According to Lo (2023), ChatGPT has gained widespread recognition for its sophisticated language capabilities and makes it easier to use AI in teaching and learning.

In this study, ChatGPT refers to a generative AI-based chatbot that serves as a tool for supporting writing. It can offer instant feedback, generate human-like text, facilitate tasks such as grammar checking, vocabulary expansion, and idea brainstorming.

2.1.2. Understandings of Academic Writing

Bailey (2015) stated that the most common forms of academic writing include notes, letters, resumes, summaries, annotated, bibliographies, paragraphs, reports, essays, research papers, and theses or dissertations. In higher education, four types of academic writing are commonly used, including descriptive writing, analytical writing, persuasive writing and critical writing; each defined by its specific language features and purposes (Chauhan, 2022).

In this research, the types of academic writing that students have to produce are often essays, reports, paragraphs, summaries and undergraduate theses. In addition, another form of academic writing which is a compulsory part included in the program is IELTS Academic writing.

2.1.3. The Potential Use of ChatGPT in Academic Writing

Dergaa *et al.* (2023) stated that students can utilize ChatGPT to seek answers, brainstorm and develop ideas, summarize academic papers, review and edit their assignments. Singh *et al.* (2024) concluded that ChatGPT can help writers brainstorm ideas and polish their drafts. In addition, a plethora of studies highlight the profound influence ChatGPT has had in developing and improving academic writing skills (Barrot, 2023; Yu, 2023). ChatGPT serves as a dynamic, generative tool that supports multiple stages of the writing process, from idea generation to content proofreading, ultimately contributing to more polished and effective academic writing.

2.2. Ethical ChatGPT Use in Academic Writing

2.2.1. Ethical Issues of ChatGPT in Academic Writing

Ateriya (2025) indicated that although ChatGPT can produce content that is coherent and contextually appropriate, there are concerns about who is responsible and how transparent the process really is. In addition, authorship attribution stands out as another key ethical issue. The reason is AI is trained on datasets created

by humans (Chetwynd, 2024). Biases can be introduced into the software not only through the datasets used but also by the people who select them.

In addition, one key ethical issue with using ChatGPT in academic settings is the risk of unintentional plagiarism. Since AI tools are trained on large datasets that may include copyrighted or previously published material, the content they generate can sometimes closely resemble existing work (Mondal & Mondal, 2023). Pasaribu (2025) pointed out that one ethical concern is that students tend to rely too much on ChatGPT when doing academic writing. ChatGPT can contribute to overreliance, where students depend too heavily on technology which can weaken their ability to independently structure ideas, think critically, and produce original content (Pasaribu, 2025).

In this study, the ethical concerns of ChatGPT use in academic writing include the research on right or wrong information and use of the tool, issues about honesty, copyright, plagiarism and authorship attribution.

2.2.2. The Importance of Ethical ChatGPT Use in Academic Writing

When addressing the issue of peer review of ChatGPT, Ong (2024) argued that human oversight remains essential because it is important to ensure fair and unbiased outcomes, as well as maintain transparency and accountability in the use of ChatGPT during the review process. Regarding the authorship attribution, it needs to take into account how much of the work was done by a human and how much was assisted by AI. To support academic honesty, it is crucial to have clear guidelines that help distinguish between AI-supported writing and work created entirely by a human author (Chetwynd, 2024; Ong, 2024).

According to Mondal and Mondal (2023), to minimize the risk of unintentional plagiarism, it is important to develop clear and consistent standards for evaluating AI-generated content. These standards can help ensure the originality of

the work and support proper attribution practices. Using content from ChatGPT without clearly stating it can lead to questions about honesty and authorship (Huallpa, 2023). To keep academic work trustworthy, students should give credit for any ideas or text that come from ChatGPT.

2.2.3. Students' Perceptions of Ethical ChatGPT Use in Academic Writing

Perception is the process by which individuals interpret and evaluate experiences (Lindsay & Norman, 2013; Odhiambo, 2015). In this study, students' perceptions refer to how they interpret and judge the ethical use of ChatGPT in academic writing.

Empirical studies reveal both positive and negative perceptions. Students often appreciate ChatGPT's ability to improve efficiency and writing quality (Cheng *et al.*, 2025), but they also express concern about plagiarism, dependence, and unclear ethical boundaries (Fajt & Schiller, 2025; Pasaribu *et al.*, 2025). These findings suggest that perceptions are shaped not only by the tool's functionality but also by the presence, or absence of institutional guidance.

2.3. Related Studies

Swidan *et al.* (2025) found that college students used AI tools because of their convenience and flexibility, though many were unfamiliar with their institution's guidelines on responsible use. Their study revealed that peer pressure and perceived usefulness played a major role in students' decision to adopt AI tools, indicating that these choices are shaped not just by practicality but also by social dynamics.

Similarly, Abbas *et al.* (2024) investigated factors influencing ChatGPT use and developed a tool to measure it. Their findings suggest that students under significant academic pressure or time constraints are more likely to rely on ChatGPT. However, this dependence came at a cost: those who used it frequently also experienced more procrastination, reduced memory retention, and a decline in academic performance.

Mohammadkarimi (2023) examined how EFL teachers perceive the rise of AI in student writing.

While some saw the potential for learning support, most expressed concern about academic honesty and admitted they found it difficult to detect AI-generated content, underscoring the need for clearer guidelines and teacher training.

Ravšelj *et al.* (2025) conducted a global study showing that students commonly use ChatGPT for summarizing texts, brainstorming, and simplifying complex material. Although many appreciated the tool's capabilities, they also voiced concerns about data privacy and ethical use, with perspectives varying by region and field of study.

In Vietnam, one study by Vo (2025) focused on TESOL graduate students at a university in the Mekong Delta, aiming to understand their views on how ChatGPT supports academic writing. Some students worried about becoming too dependent on the tool, losing their own voice or creativity in the process. Others pointed out risks such as plagiarism or unreliable information. Overall, the study emphasized that while ChatGPT can be a useful writing aid, students need guidance and ethical awareness to use it responsibly and develop their own writing skills. From the teachers' perspective, Yen and her colleagues (2024) explored how university lecturers in the Mekong Delta viewed the role of ChatGPT in language assessment. Many teachers expressed serious concerns about fairness, academic integrity, and the risk of students bypassing important learning processes by overly relying on AI.

Another study by Pham and Mai (2024) looked at the experiences of English-major students at a university. Similar to the other studies, there are concerns emerged about overreliance, potential plagiarism, and the accuracy of the content ChatGPT provides. The study suggested that for ChatGPT to be used effectively, students need training, not just on how to use the tool, but how to use it wisely and ethically.

Based on the reviewed studies, students' ethical perceptions of ChatGPT use appear to be shaped by both individual cognitive factors (e.g., attitudes, perceived usefulness, self-regulation and risk awareness) and contextual influences (e.g., peers, teachers and institutional expectations). However, previous studies have

rarely integrated established behavioural and technology acceptance theories to explain ethical perceptions, nor have they examined how such factors operate in students' actual learning practices. To address this gap, the present study adopts an integrated theoretical framework drawing on the Theory of Planned Behaviour, the Technology Acceptance Model, and Cultural-Historical Activity Theory.

2.4. Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by an integrated theoretical framework drawing on the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), and Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT). TPB and TAM were used to inform the design of the quantitative instrument and the identification of key factors influencing students' ethical perceptions of ChatGPT use in academic writing, while CHAT was employed as an analytical lens to interpret the qualitative findings and to explain how these factors operate within students' real learning contexts.

2.4.1. Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB): Icek Ajzen (1991)

This theory explains behaviour through three factors: attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. Attitudes reflect whether individuals view a behaviour as beneficial or harmful; subjective norms capture perceived social pressure; and perceived behavioural control concerns confidence and access to resources, which can determine whether intentions lead into action.

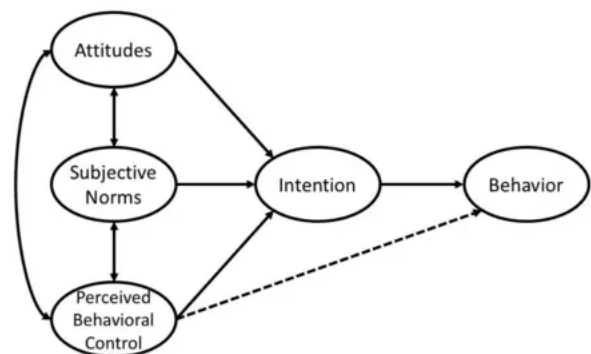


Figure 1. Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991).

In the present study, TPB was applied to operationalise students' attitudes toward ethical ChatGPT use, perceived behavioural control in regulating their use of ChatGPT, and subjective norms represented by peer, teacher and institutional influence. In addition, perceived risks were incorporated as an extended TPB construct to capture students' ethical concerns related to plagiarism, misinformation and overreliance. These constructs were measured in the questionnaire and were used to address Research Questions 1 and 2.

2.4.2. Technology Acceptance Model (TAM): Fred Davis (1989)

The Technology acceptance model (TAM) highlights two key constructs: perceived usefulness (the extent to which a technology enhances performance) and perceived ease of use (the effort required to use it). For this study, ease of use relates to students' confidence in navigating ChatGPT, while usefulness reflects its role in supporting academic writing. Together, these perceptions influence attitudes and intentions to use ChatGPT ethically.

Furthermore, attitudes towards ethical ChatGPT use in academic contexts are critical in determining whether students will choose to engage with the tool in acceptable ways. Perceived risks, such as fears of academic misconduct, plagiarism detection, or reputational consequences, may act as barriers that negatively influence both perceived usefulness and ease of use. In addition, the influence of peer norms, teacher expectations, and institutional guidelines may also play role in shaping students' perceptions of ChatGPT's value.

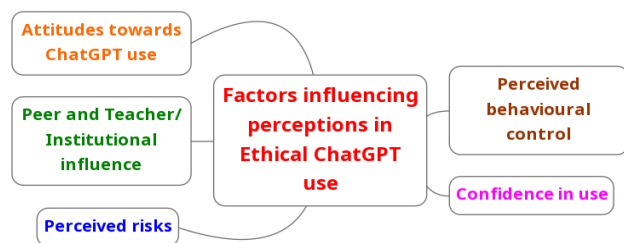


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework Underpinning the Study.

In this study, TAM was used to conceptualise students' perceived usefulness of ChatGPT for academic writing and their perceived ease of use of the tool. These two constructs were incorporated into the questionnaire to complement TPB by explaining how technological perceptions contribute to students' ethical judgments and attitudes toward ChatGPT use. The TAM-based constructs supported the examination of Research Questions 1 and 2.

2.4.3. Cultural- Historical Activity Theory (CHAT)

Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) was adopted to support the interpretation of the qualitative findings in the explanatory phase of the study. CHAT provides a useful framework for understanding how human actions are shaped by the interaction between individuals, tools, and the wider social environment (Engestrom, 1987).

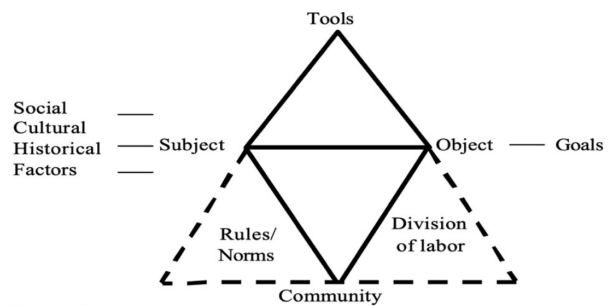


Figure 3. CHAT Framework

According to CHAT, human activity is mediated by six interconnected components: the subject (the individual or group engaged in the activity), the object (the goal or purpose of the activity), mediating tools (instruments such as language, technologies, or concepts), the community (the wider social group sharing the object), rules (formal or informal norms that regulate behaviour), and the division of labour (the distribution of roles and responsibilities among participants) (Engestrom, 1987; Kuttii, 1996). In the present research, ChatGPT functions as a mediating tool in students' academic writing activity, while institutional policies and teacher expectations represent rules, and peers and lecturers constitute the learning community.

CHAT was not used to design the questionnaire but was employed to explain how

Table 1. Mapping of Theoretical Frameworks, Research Questions and Data Sources

Research questions	Theoretical framework	Main constructs	Data source
RQ1, RQ2	TPB	Attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, perceived risks	Questionnaire
RQ1, RQ2	TAM	Perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use	Questionnaire
R3	CHAT	Tools, rules, community, contradictions	Interviews

individual factors identified in the quantitative phase (such as attitudes, perceived behavioural control and perceived risks) interact with social and institutional contexts during students’ real practices of ethical ChatGPT use. This theoretical perspective was therefore used to address Research Question 3.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, in which quantitative data were collected first, followed by qualitative interviews (Ivankova, Creswell and Stick, 2006). A sequential explanatory mixed-methods design was adopted because the quantitative phase was

intended to identify patterns in students’ ethical perceptions and influencing factors, while the qualitative phase was designed to provide explanatory insights into how these factors were experienced and negotiated by students in practice. The qualitative component was therefore not intended to produce generalisable findings, but to support the interpretation of the quantitative results.

3.2. Sampling Techniques and Participants

Convenience sampling was used to distribute an online questionnaire via Google Forms and through direct on-campus invitations. Ninety-five final-year English majors participated. Internal consistency reliability was examined

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics and ChatGPT Use of Questionnaire Participants.

Variables	Category	Number
Major	English Language Teaching	46 (48.4%)
	English Language	49 (51.6%)
Experience with ChatGPT	Used ChatGPT	95 (100%)
	Never used ChatGPT	0 (0%)
Frequency of use	Never	0 (0%)
	Rarely (once or twice a semester)	0 (0%)
	Sometimes (a few times a semester)	36 (37.9%)
	Often (several times a month)	42 (44.2%)
	Very often (every week or more)	17 (17.9%)
Purposes of use	Generate ideas	91 (95.8%)
	Create an outline	46 (48.4%)
	Check grammar and vocabulary	65 (68.4%)
	Rewrite or paraphrase text	41 (43.2%)
	Write full sentences or paragraphs	30 (31.6%)
	Translate between Vietnamese and English	52 (54.7%)
	Find references or research sources	48 (50.5%)
Institutional training or rules	Received training/guidelines	44 (46.3%)
	No training/guidelines provided	51 (53.7%)

Table 3. Interview Participants' Demographic Features.

Participant (P)	Academic major	Prior ChatGPT training	Frequency of ChatGPT use in academic writing
P1	English Language Teaching	Yes	Often
P2	English Language Teaching	No	Very often
P3	English Language	Yes	Sometimes

using Cronbach's alpha coefficients to evaluate the coherence of each scale.

Regarding the semi-structured interviews, purposive sampling was employed based on three criteria: (1) academic major, (2) prior ChatGPT training, and (3) frequency of using ChatGPT for academic writing (see Table 2). The qualitative phase involved three interview participants. The purpose of this phase was to provide explanatory insights into the quantitative findings rather than to achieve representativeness or theoretical saturation. Data saturation was therefore not claimed. The interview data were used to illustrate and clarify how students perceived and managed ethical ChatGPT use in their actual academic writing practices.

3.3. Research Instruments

3.3.1. Questionnaire

The questionnaire was developed based on constructs derived from the Theory of Planned Behaviour and the Technology Acceptance Model, and adapted to the context of ethical

ChatGPT use in academic writing. Items measuring attitudes, perceived behavioural control and subjective norms were adapted from previous TPB-based studies, while perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use were informed by TAM-related instruments. It consists of 55 items across three sections: (A) background information on ChatGPT use (4 items), (B) perceptions of ethical ChatGPT use in academic writing (24 items, five clusters: right-wrong use, honesty, copyright, plagiarism, and authorship), and (C) factors influencing these perceptions (27 items, five clusters: attitudes, behavioural control, peer/teacher influence, perceived risks, and confidence).

In addition, items relating to ethical dimensions specific to ChatGPT use, including authorship attribution, copyright awareness and ethical boundaries, were developed by the researcher based on prior literature on academic integrity and generative AI. All items were reviewed by two experts in applied linguistics and educational technology to ensure content

Table 4. Summary of the Questionnaire

Clusters	Questionnaire items
1. Understanding background information on ChatGPT use in academic writing	1, 2, 3, 4
2. Students' perceptions of ethical ChatGPT use in academic writing	2.1. About right-wrong use and information: 5, 6, 7, 8 2.2. About honesty: 9, 10, 11, 12, 13 2.3. About copyright: 14, 15, 16, 17, 18 2.4. About plagiarism: 19, 20, 21, 22, 23 2.5. About authorship attribution: 24, 25, 26, 27, 28
3. Factors influencing students' perceptions of ethical ChatGPT use in academic writing	3.1. Attitudes toward using ChatGPT: 29, 30, 31, 32, 33 3.2. Perceived behavioural control: 34, 35, 36, 37, 38 3.3. Peer and teacher- institutional influence: 39, 40, 41, 42, 43 3.4. Perceived risks of using ChatGPT: 44, 45, 46, 47, 48 3.5. Confidence in Ethical use: 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55

Table 5. Summary of Interview Questions

Interview focus	Main questions
Attitudes and beliefs	1. Why do you choose to use ChatGPT in your academic writing? 2. In what ways has ChatGPT helped or hindered your writing?
Peer and institutional influence	1. When deciding to use ChatGPT in Academic writing, what influences affect your decision to use it ethically? 2. How has guidance from your teachers or university shaped the way you use ChatGPT ethically?
Behavioural control and confidence	1. To what extent are you confident that you can use ChatGPT ethically? What factors contribute to this confidence? 2. What percentage of your academic writing relies on ChatGPT? How do you manage or limit this reliance?
Risk awareness	1. What potential risks do you see in using ChatGPT for academic writing? 2. How do these perceived risks influence the way you use ChatGPT?

relevance and clarity. The questionnaire was bilingual (English-Vietnamese) and employed a five-point Likert scale.

3.3.2. Semi-structured Interviews

An interview protocol with five parts was developed to explore in depth how predetermined and emerging factors shaped students' perceptions of ethical ChatGPT use in academic writing. While guided by themes, the semi-structured format allowed flexibility for follow-up prompts and unexpected insights. Questions were organized by thematic focus.

3.4. Data Analysis Method

This study used SPSS software version 27 to analyse the data regarding students' perceptions and factors influencing these perceptions of Ethical ChatGPT use. Firstly, all 95 responses in the questionnaire were checked to ensure they were complete and accurate, with no missing information. Following this, the reliability of the questionnaires was assessed by calculating Cronbach's alpha coefficient. After that, the descriptive statistic tests, paired-sample t-test, independent-sample t-test and one-way ANOVA were computed to analyse the data.

For the interview data, the researcher began transcribing all the audio recordings for the data analysis. Thematic analysis was used

to analyse the qualitative data. This process involved reading the transcripts many times, then transcripts were coded, organized into themes (both predetermined and emergent), checked with the expert, and interpreted comparatively across participants.

The qualitative analysis focused on identifying patterns that could explain or elaborate the quantitative results, particularly with regard to students' attitudes, perceived behavioural control, perceived risks and social influences. The themes were subsequently interpreted using Cultural-Historical Activity Theory to examine how individual and contextual factors interacted in students' learning activities.

3.5. Reliability, Validity, Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

To ensure reliability and validity, member checking was conducted by returning interview transcripts to participants for confirmation and clarification. The researcher also acknowledged her positionality to minimize bias and ensure findings reflected participants' views rather than assumptions.

Trustworthiness was further enhanced by applying four criteria (Shenton, 2004). Credibility was supported through purposive sampling, transferability through detailed participant descriptions, dependability via transparent

documentation of procedures, and confirmability through the use of direct quotations. During participant selection, individuals whose responses showed inconsistency or extreme bias were not included in interviews to maintain data credibility.

Participants were informed of the study’s aims, procedures, potential benefits, use of audio recordings, confidentiality measures, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Pseudonyms were used to ensure anonymity. Institutional approval was obtained from the Faculty of Foreign Languages and lecturers before recruitment, ensuring transparency and respect for participants’ rights.

4. Results

4.1. English Majors’ Perceptions of Ethical ChatGPT Use in Academic Writing

After collecting the data from 95 questionnaires, a reliability analysis was run by using SPSS. The result revealed that the internal consistency of the questionnaire was $\alpha=0.784$, and it was higher than 0.70 (the required coefficient), which indicates appropriate reliability, according to Nunnally and Bernstein (1994). This suggested that the questionnaire items effectively captured students’ perceptions of ethical ChatGPT use. Descriptive statistic tests were run to identify the means of participants’ perceptions of ethical ChatGPT use.

Descriptive statistics show that English majors generally hold favourable perceptions of ethical ChatGPT use ($M = 3.86$, $SD = 0.36$).

Among the dimensions, Plagiarism received the highest score ($M = 4.22$, $SD = 0.51$), reflecting strong awareness of plagiarism-related issues, followed by Copyright ($M = 3.99$, $SD = 0.54$) and Authorship Attribution ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 0.54$). Right–Wrong Use ($M = 3.72$, $SD = 0.68$) and Honesty ($M = 3.54$, $SD = 0.46$) were rated slightly lower, though still positive.

Paired-sample t-tests revealed significant differences between Right–Wrong Use and Honesty ($t = 2.60$, $p = .011$), with students more confident in identifying right–wrong usage than honesty-related concerns. A significant difference also emerged between Plagiarism and Copyright ($t = -3.84$, $p < .001$), indicating greater sensitivity to plagiarism. In contrast, no significant difference was found between Right–Wrong Use and Authorship Attribution ($t = -1.02$, $p = .313$).

Additional tests showed no significant differences in perceptions between students who had received ChatGPT training and those who had not ($t = 0.44$, $p = .665$). Similarly, a one-way ANOVA found no significant differences across frequency-of-use groups ($p = .925$). These findings suggest that students’ perceptions of ethical ChatGPT use are generally consistent, regardless of training or usage frequency.

4.2. Factors Influencing English Majors’ Perceptions of Ethical ChatGPT Use in Academic Writing

To address Research Question 2, descriptive statistics and paired-sample t-tests were used to identify the relative strength of the factors

Table 6. Descriptive Statistics of English Majors’ Perceptions ($N=95$)

Variables	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Overall perceptions	3.00	4.54	3.86	0.36
Perceptions about wight-wrong use and information	2.00	5.00	3.72	0.68
Perceptions about honesty	2.00	4.40	3.55	0.46
Perceptions about copyright	2.80	5.00	3.99	0.54
Perceptions about plagiarism	2.60	5.00	4.22	0.51
Perceptions about authorship attribution	2.20	4.80	3.81	0.51

Table 7. Descriptive Statistics of Factors Influencing Perceptions (N=95)

Variables	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Overall factors	3.26	4.59	3.91	0.29
Attitudes towards using ChatGPT	3.40	5.00	4.17	0.39
Perceived behavioural control	2.80	5.00	4.09	0.54
Peer and teacher/ institutional influence	1.60	5.00	3.35	0.71
Perceived risks of using ChatGPT	1.00	5.00	3.99	0.68
Confidence in ethical use	2.86	5.00	3.94	0.47

influencing students’ ethical perceptions of ChatGPT use in academic writing. A reliability analysis was also run by using SPSS to check the reliability of the inventory. The result revealed that the internal consistency of the questionnaire was $\alpha=0.720$, and it was higher than 0.70 (the required coefficient). Following that, a descriptive statistics test was run to investigate the means of influencing factors.

Descriptive statistics show that factors influencing English majors’ perceptions of ethical ChatGPT use are generally positive (M = 3.91, SD = 0.29). Attitudes toward using ChatGPT (M = 4.17, SD = 0.40) and Perceived Behavioural Control (M = 4.09, SD = 0.54) scored the highest, reflecting strong confidence and favourable orientations toward ethical use. Perceived Risks (M = 4.00, SD = 0.68) and Confidence in ethical use (M = 3.94, SD = 0.47) were also rated positively, while Peer and institutional influence was the lowest (M = 3.35, SD = 0.71), indicating weaker external influence.

Paired-sample t-tests revealed no significant difference between Attitudes and Perceived behavioural control ($t = 1.30, p = .196$), suggesting both play an equally important role. In contrast, significant differences were found between Perceived Behavioural control and Peer/institutional influence ($t = 7.42, p < .001$), and between Attitudes and Confidence in Use ($t = 4.56, p < .001$). These results indicate that students reported stronger attitudes, perceived behavioural control and confidence than peer and institutional influence when evaluating ethical ChatGPT use.

4.3. Students’ Explanations of How Influencing Factors Relate to Their Ethical Perceptions

To address Research Question 3, qualitative interview data were used to explain how students perceived and experienced the role of the influencing factors identified in the quantitative phase. The findings in this section therefore illustrate students’ own explanations of how attitudes, perceived behavioural control, social influences and perceived risks were related to their ethical judgments in practice.

Overall, interview participants described how attitudes, perceived behavioural control, perceived risks, confidence, and peer and teacher influence were related to their ethical judgments when using ChatGPT in academic writing.

Attitudes. Students’ attitudes and beliefs towards ChatGPT strongly shaped how they perceived its ethical use. Data shows that ChatGPT was seen as a tool to generate ideas, enhance academic vocabulary, checking for grammar, which framed it positively in relation to ethical learning. Many described the tool as a helpful assistant that supports, rather than replaces, their own thinking. As P1 explained, “ChatGPT helps me generate ideas and check grammar, but I still write the essay myself, so I consider that ethical.” This shows that participants still felt responsible for writing the essay on their own. At the same time, they believe using ChatGPT responsibly contributes to ethical use. But they also acknowledged that sometimes they did not use it ethically. P3 admitted, “Sometimes I copy a paragraph when I’m stuck, even though I know that isn’t ethical.”

Students' positive attitudes led them to view supportive uses of ChatGPT as ethical. However, these same attitudes sometimes encouraged them to use ChatGPT unethically, especially when they found tasks too challenging. This means that attitudes influenced both responsible use in many cases and less ethical choices when students were under pressure.

Perceived behavioural control. The way students perceived their ability to control their use of ChatGPT directly influenced their judgments of ethical use. When students felt that they were able to limit their dependence on ChatGPT, they reported stronger confidence in acting ethically. They knew to set the boundary by putting the use of ChatGPT within what they perceived as ethical limits. P3 shared, "I try to draft first and only consult ChatGPT if I can't think of anything else," whereas P2 confessed, "I depend on it a lot, maybe 100 %, but I always rewrite everything in my own words." These comments reveal a tension between intention and practice. Moreover, participants revealed various degrees of dependency, P1 estimated about 70%, P2 about 100%, and P3 roughly 50%, which complicated their ethical perceptions and underscored their awareness that full dependence would cross an ethical line. Especially, all participants emphasized that ChatGPT should be used as a supportive tool rather than a complete substitute for thinking. They also highlighted the importance of verifying the information provided by ChatGPT to ensure that it originates from authoritative sources.

Peer and teacher influence. Peer and teachers play a mixed role in shaping students' views of ethical ChatGPT use. To many participants, peers are those who give them initial introduction to ChatGPT use, presenting it as a supportive tool for learning, not leading to academic misconduct. This suggests that peer influence ChatGPT use without giving any initial hesitation about its appropriateness. Moreover, they show that their friends encouraged them to use ChatGPT ethically. P1 noted, "When the teacher gave us a difficult assignment and I saw my friends use it to write very good essays, so I began exploring it too." On the other hand, teachers shared mixed

suggestions. Some teachers encouraged partial use, others make strict warnings while another banned the use of ChatGPT. P2 confessed, "One teacher told us to use ChatGPT to check our essays; another banned it completely."

Perceived risks. The data indicated that students consistently connected the risks of ChatGPT with their perceptions of ethical use. P2 worried that "ChatGPT might copy someone's work," prompting her to double-check sources, while P3 reflected, "Using it too much makes me lazy. I start asking ChatGPT before I even think." P1 recounted finding "a false reference," which led her to verify every citation. Perceived risks of using ChatGPT makes students become more cautious on ethical use. Fear of plagiarism made them avoid copying; awareness of dependence encouraged them to balance ChatGPT with their own effort; and recognition of inaccuracy made them pick up information checking habits. Therefore, these risks acted as important factors that guided students' perceptions of what it meant to use ChatGPT ethically.

Confidence in ethical use. Data revealed that students felt confident about using ChatGPT in an ethical way, but they were not completely sure of themselves. Each student gave their own percentage to describe how confident they felt. "I'm about 85 % confident I use it ethically because I never copy entire texts," said P1, and P2 estimated, "About 80 %. I only ask for outlines and vocabulary expansion, not finished essays." What stands out is that students defined their confidence directly to their own ethical standards. Confidence came from believing they had set clear personal rules, such as not copying whole texts or restricting ChatGPT to supportive functions. In short, confidence acted as a factor that supported ethical use but also highlighted uncertainty. Specifically, students felt capable of acting responsibly but aware that their actions were not always perfectly aligned with ethical standards.

Absence of structured guidance. An important theme that emerged from the interviews was the lack of formal instruction on how to use ChatGPT ethically. All participants expressed a desire for training and workshops, emphasizing

that clear guidance on the tool's strengths, limitations, and ethical considerations could help prevent overreliance or misuse. "There should be workshops or training so that students understand the advantages, limitations, and ethical aspects of ChatGPT," explained P1. Participant 2 added, "Learn how to create suitable prompts and select reliable outputs in order to adjust errors and achieve the desired product." Without such institutional support, students were left to set their own boundaries, leading to inconsistency in how they defined and practiced ethical use.

5. Discussions

5.1. Students' Perceptions of Ethical ChatGPT in Academic Writing

The data indicated that students showed strong awareness of plagiarism, while aspects such as honesty, authorship attribution, and reliance on ChatGPT were perceived less clearly. International studies similarly confirm plagiarism as a widely recognized risk (Pasaribu *et al.*, 2025; Ravšelj *et al.*, 2025). These findings are consistent with Vo (2025) and Pham and Mai (2024), who also reported that Vietnamese students expressed the strongest awareness of plagiarism but showed more uncertainty about other ethical dimensions.

From the perspective of the Theory of Planned Behaviour proposed by Icek Ajzen, students' strong awareness of plagiarism and copyright reflects favourable attitudes toward ethical academic conduct, which contribute to the formation of ethical judgments regarding ChatGPT use.

However, while Pham and Mai (2024) emphasized fears of diminished creativity and Vo (2025) highlighted learner passivity, participants in this study stressed the importance on self-regulation and clearer institutional guidance. This means that undergraduates tend to think about using ChatGPT ethically in terms of clear rules and limits, while graduates are more concerned about how it might reduce creativity.

5.2. Factors Influencing Ethical Perceptions in Academic Writing

Attitudes and perceived behavioural control

emerged as the most salient factors associated with students' ethical perceptions of ChatGPT use in academic writing. From the perspective of the Theory of Planned Behaviour proposed by Icek Ajzen, favourable attitudes toward a behaviour and a strong sense of perceived control are central in shaping individuals' evaluative judgments. In the present study, students who viewed ChatGPT as a helpful learning support tool and who believed that they were able to regulate their own use (for example, limiting ChatGPT to idea generation, grammar checking or outlining) reported clearer personal boundaries regarding what they considered ethical use. Interview data further illustrated how students associated ethical use with maintaining authorship and intellectual responsibility, such as drafting independently before consulting ChatGPT or rewriting outputs in their own words.

At the same time, perceived risks-particularly plagiarism, overreliance and inaccurate information- were repeatedly described by participants as important considerations that encouraged more cautious and reflective use. These qualitative explanations suggest that students' ethical perceptions were closely related to how they balanced perceived benefits and perceived risks during actual writing practices. In addition, students' positive views of ChatGPT as a tool for supporting idea generation, vocabulary development and language accuracy can be interpreted through the Technology Acceptance Model developed by Fred Davis, in which perceived usefulness contributes to favourable attitudes toward a technology. In this study, however, perceived usefulness did not override ethical concerns; rather, students appeared to integrate usefulness with self-regulation and risk awareness when forming their ethical judgments about ChatGPT use in academic writing.

By contrast, peer and teacher influence was weaker. While peers saw ChatGPT as supportive, teachers gave mixed signals ranging from encouragement to prohibition. This inconsistency, also reported in Vietnamese studies (Vo, 2025; Pham & Mai, 2024), reflects the lack of institutional policies, leaving students to rely mainly on personal attitudes and risk awareness.

Similar international findings (Swidan *et al.*, 2025; Mohammadkarimi, 2023) confirm that in contexts without clear rules, individual beliefs become decisive.

An emerging theme was the absence of formal training. Students consistently expressed the need for workshops and structured guidance to help define ethical boundaries. Without such support, perceptions remain inconsistent, underscoring the urgency for institutions to integrate AI literacy into academic programs.

5.3. Understanding Perceptions through Cultural-Historical Activity Theory

While the previous sections examined quantitative patterns and students' qualitative explanations, the present section uses Cultural-Historical Activity Theory as an analytical lens to further interpret how individual and contextual elements interacted in students' ethical perceptions. In this study, CHAT was not used to test hypotheses but to interpret how students' ethical judgments emerged from the interaction between personal beliefs, institutional

expectations and the mediating role of ChatGPT as a technological tool.

Through the lens of Cultural-Historical Activity Theory, there are clear conflicts within the system that shaped students' perceptions. On the one hand, students appreciated ChatGPT for making their writing process more effectively; on the other hand, they worried about plagiarism and inaccurate information. They also faced mixed influences from their community. While friends often encouraged them to see ChatGPT as a helpful study tool, some teachers strictly banned it. In addition, although many students wanted to stay in control of their own work, they admitted that they relied too heavily on ChatGPT when tasks became overwhelming. These conflicts help explain why students' views of ethical use were not always consistent. Most of the time they tried to act responsibly, by paraphrasing or double-checking information, but under pressure, some copied directly. From CHAT perspective, this shows that students' ethical perceptions did not come from individual choice alone but from constantly negotiating

Table 8. Summary of Main Findings

Research questions (RQs)	Main findings
RQ1: What are English majors' perceptions of ethical ChatGPT use in academic writing?	Students generally held favourable perceptions. They showed the strongest awareness of plagiarism and copyright, with slightly lower but still positive ratings for authorship attribution, right- wrong use, and honesty. Training or frequency of use did not significantly affect these perceptions.
RQ2: What factors influence English majors' perceptions of ethical ChatGPT use in academic writing?	Five main factors emerged, all rated positively. Attitudes and perceived behavioural control were the strongest, followed by perceived risks and confidence in ethical use. Peer and teacher influence was the weakest.
RQ3: How do these factors influence perceptions?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Attitudes shaped both responsible and occasionally unethical use. Students valued ChatGPT as a supportive tool yet sometimes over relied under pressure. - Perceived behavioural control determined confidence in acting ethically; students set personal boundaries but varied in actual dependence. - Perceived risks (plagiarism, misinformation, overreliance) acted as safeguards, prompting paraphrasing, fact-checking, and balanced use. - Confidence supported ethical practice but did not eliminate uncertainty about hidden plagiarism. - Peer and teacher influence was mixed: peers normalized use while teachers sent inconsistent signals. - Absence of structured guidance emerged as a new factor: all participants called for workshops or formal training to clarify ethical standards.

between what the technology offered, what the institution demanded, and what their social environment encouraged.

6. Conclusions and Implications

This study contributes empirical evidence on Vietnamese English majors' perceptions of ethical ChatGPT use in academic writing, a topic with growing global relevance but limited local investigation. The findings indicate that students generally hold positive perceptions, with strong awareness of plagiarism but less clarity about honesty and authorship. Their ethical judgments are mostly shaped by personal attitudes, perceived risks, and confidence, while peer and teacher influence is comparatively weaker. Importantly, the absence of structured guidance emerged as a significant factor, which leads students to set their own boundaries with various degrees of consistency. In summary, Table 7 presents an overview of key findings addressing each three RQs.

Within the scope of the present study, the findings suggest several implications for universities, teachers and students. For

universities, the evidence suggests that leaving students to decide their own ethical boundaries creates uncertainty and inconsistency. Therefore, institutions need to establish clear, accessible policies and incorporate AI literacy into existing curriculum so that expectations for ethical use are transparent and consistent across programs. For teachers, the results emphasize the value of proactive guidance. Discussions about appropriate versus inappropriate uses of ChatGPT with real examples can help students see the difference between using ChatGPT for support and practices that undermine academic integrity. Finally, for students, the study strengthens the importance of self-regulation. While ChatGPT can be a useful assistant, students should remain the primary authors of their work by verifying AI-generated information, giving credit when appropriate, and setting personal limits to avoid overreliance.

The findings should be interpreted in light of several limitations, including the reliance on self-reported data, the single-institution context, and the small qualitative sample used for explanatory purposes.

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