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DECOLONIZING ACADEMIC WRITING IN THE AGE OF AI: A PHOTOVOICE STUDY THROUGH A CRITICAL DIGITAL LITERACY LENS

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Abstract
This study explores how a decolonial, critical digital literacy (CDL) oriented writing pedagogy mediated pre-service English teachers' engagement with generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) in academic writing. Situated in a Global South context, we adopted a qualitative case study to examine how GenAI operated as both a pedagogical resource and a site of ideological tension in efforts to decolonize academic writing pedagogy. The study focused on one focal participant, Dava, a pre-service English teacher enrolled in an initial teacher education program at a private university in Indonesia. Data were collected from multiple sources, including semi-structured interviews, written responses, reflections, photovoice artefacts, AI interaction logs, and Zoom-mediated classroom interactions. The findings are organized around four interrelated dimensions: (1) Dava's investment in learning English and his strategic use of multiple AI tools, (2) his reflective engagement with learning to write using ChatGPT, (3) his development of critical interactions with AI-generated content, and (4) his need for additional pedagogical support. While GenAI supported idea development and engagement with academic discourse, it also reproduced Eurocentric norms that risked reinforcing algorithmic colonialingualism. The study underscores the importance of pedagogizing decoloniality through critical digital literacy (CDL) – oriented writing instruction to support learners in engaging with GenAI critically, ethically, and reflexively, while affirming multilingual voices and situated ways of knowing in AI-mediated writing contexts.

Keywords: academic writing, critical digital literacy, decolonial pedagogy, generative artificial intelligence, Global South

Introduction
In English as a foreign language (EFL) education, there has been a growing call to decolonize academic writing pedagogy, particularly as a means of challenging the dominance of Eurocentric norms and legitimizing diverse epistemologies and rhetorical traditions in EFL writing (e.g., Kubota, 2022). These calls further highlight the need to value local knowledge and multilingual resources,

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while simultaneously addressing persistent inequities in knowledge production in the Global South (e.g., Canagarajah, 2024; Christiansen et al., 2026; De Costa et al., 2024; Rabbi, 2023). For example, Canagarajah (2024) advocates for the decolonization of EFL writing pedagogy, particularly for multilingual students, by integrating literacy traditions from the Global South. Building on this perspective, teachers are encouraged to move beyond rigid grammatical norms and the view of writing as an autonomous text, and instead conceptualize writing as a collaborative process shaped by diverse semiotic resources and social interaction (Canagarajah, 2024). Such an approach invites students to negotiate dominant norms by drawing on their heritage literacies and material contexts, thereby challenging the notion of text as a disembodied and independent object (Canagarajah, 2020).

With the emergence of GenAI, academic writing pedagogy faces renewed challenges, particularly because GenAI-generated language, which is largely shaped by Western ideological discourses, may further reinforce dominant academic norms (Carbajal-Carrera, 2025; Darvin, 2025). In academic writing courses, both educators and second language learners may use GenAI in ways that inadvertently reinforce monolingual and native-speakerism orientations, positioning the technology as a form of *language policing* rather than as a resource for valuing multilingualism and diverse authorial voices (Wang & Tian, 2025). In this sense, the ready availability of GenAI may encourage the uncritical adoption of Eurocentric discourses at the expense of writers' own voices, a dynamic that Dovchin (2024) conceptualizes as *neo-colonization* and Meighan (2023) alternatively describes as *colonilingualism*.

At the same time, the integration of GenAI into writing instruction has prompted calls for more deliberate forms of GenAI literacy and critical digital literacy (Darvin, 2025; Warschauer et al., 2023). From this perspective, writing teachers are urged to critically reflect on how students can engage with GenAI in ways that address concerns related to academic integrity, equity, and overreliance on automated tools, while also aligning such practices with broader efforts to decolonize writing pedagogy (Dobinson et al., 2024; Warschauer et al., 2023). While a growing body of research (Darvin, 2025; Dobinson et al., 2024; Lim & Darvin, 2026; Liu et al., 2025.) has demonstrated that decolonizing writing pedagogy and fostering critical digital literacy require multilingual learners to critically engage with content, ideology, and power relations embedded in AI-generated texts, little is known about how pre-service English teachers experience and negotiate the use of GenAI in academic writing contexts in Indonesian context.

In Indonesia, English writing has long been taught in secondary schools and universities, and existing scholarship has examined a wide range of issues, including writing models, instructional strategies, feedback practices, learner factors, and the role of technology (Cahyono & Umamah, 2024). Much of this work suggests that writing instruction in Indonesia has been shaped by genre-oriented and text-based approaches, while more recent studies (e.g. Nugroho et al., 2025; Pratama et al., 2025) point to the growing presence of digital tools and AI in writing classrooms. To date, research on AI in writing within the Indonesian context has primarily focused on students' acceptance and use of AI writing tools (Salam, 2025), the affordances and prompt use of ChatGPT in supporting writing development (Arifin et al., 2025), students' experiences and appraisals of AI as a scaffolding tool (Nugroho et al., 2025), and the effects of human-AI collaborative

writing on writing skills and critical thinking (Pratama et al., 2025), while paying limited attention to how it is enacted in classroom practice or how learners negotiate its ideological and identity-related implications. This conspicuous gap is particularly important in the case of pre-service English teachers, who are learning both how to write in English and how to teach writing in increasingly AI-mediated contexts.

Focusing on pre-service teachers is particularly crucial because they are in a formative stage of professional and writer identity development, during which their beliefs about language, pedagogy, and authorship are actively being shaped (e.g., Supasiraprapa & De Costa, 2017; Trent, 2010; Yuan & Lee, 2015) by and through their teaching experiences. As novice educators, they are simultaneously learning to write academic for academic purposes and to teach writing to their own students, thereby positioning them as both learners and instructors. This transitional positioning thus makes pre-service teachers a critical site for examining how agency, voice, and ideological tensions are negotiated, especially in the context of emerging technologies such as GenAI. In particular, existing research has paid limited attention to how such engagement intersects with issues of identity, ideology, and pedagogical practice. Drawing on Darvin's (2025) concept of critical digital literacy (see also Kim et al., 2026) and Canagarajah's (2024) work on decolonizing pedagogies, the present study incorporates photovoice (Kingery et al., 2016) as a participatory, visual methodology that enables learners to represent and critically reflect on their experiences with AI-mediated writing. In doing so, photovoice serves as a means to foreground pre-service teacher agency, voice, and embodied meaning-making, aligning with calls for more inclusive and decolonial approaches to knowledge production.

The present study contributes to this emerging body of scholarship by examining how pre-service teachers and learners collaboratively co-constructed pedagogical strategies to enhance critical digital literacies and negotiate writer identity in AI-mediated writing practices. Our study was guided by the following two questions:

1. How did a decolonial, critical digital literacy-oriented writing pedagogy mediate a pre-service English teacher's negotiation of agency, voice, and writer identity in AI-mediated academic writing?
2. What tensions did pre-service English teachers encounter when engaging with GenAI as a resource in academic writing, particularly in relation to agency, dependency, and resistance within decolonial writing pedagogy?

Literature Review

Critical digital literacy development and decolonizing writing pedagogy in the GenAI era

L2 writing and English language education have long been shaped by ideologies that privilege native-speaker norms, monolingual English use, and Western-centered epistemologies (Canagarajah, 2020; Canagarajah, 2024). These orientations have often positioned multilingual learners as deficient in relation to idealized native-speaker standards, while valuing correctness, conformity, and standardized forms of expression over voice, linguistic diversity, and locally grounded meaning-making practices. As a result, the teaching and assessment of writing have not been neutral pedagogical acts; rather, they have been implicated

in broader relations of power that elevate particular linguistic forms, identities, and epistemologies while marginalizing others. Recent scholarship has increasingly challenged these assumptions by calling attention to the colonial logics embedded in language education and by arguing for more plural, socially situated, and justice-oriented approaches to literacy and writing (e.g., Canagarajah, 2022; Rabbi, 2023; Yang, 2023; Yang 2025).

Within this broader shift, decolonizing writing pedagogy has emerged as an important response to the persistence of linguistic hierarchy and epistemic inequality, particularly in Global South contexts where English is often learned through asymmetrical relations of power. Rather than treating writing as the reproduction of decontextualized norms, decolonizing perspectives emphasize the legitimacy of multilingual repertoires, local knowledge, and learners' identity work in the production of texts. From this perspective, writing is not only a linguistic practice but also a site where ideological struggles over voice, authority, and representation take place. This shift is especially significant in contexts such as Indonesia, where English writing instruction has historically been influenced by standardized, genre-based, and often monolingual expectations, even as learners bring diverse linguistic resources and sociocultural experiences to the classroom.

These concerns have become even more urgent in the GenAI era. Recent scholarship suggests that AI has the potential both to expand access to language learning and to reproduce older inequalities in new digital forms. Dobinson et al. (2024), for example, argue that AI can function as both a decolonizing and recolonizing force in language education. Similarly, Dovchin (2024) characterizes AI as a double-edged sword: while it may democratize access to learning and provide more personalized support for marginalized learners, it may also reproduce linguistic hierarchies and colonial power relations through dominant, Western-centered data and models. Without sustained critical and ethical engagement from educators and students, AI may therefore operate less as a liberatory pedagogical resource than as a mechanism of algorithmic colonialingualism, reinforcing native-speakerism, privileging English, and marginalizing local languages, dialects, and translanguaging practices (see also Kim et al., 2025).

Building on this line of work, recent scholarship has begun to argue that learners need more than functional AI skills; they need critical resources for interrogating how AI mediates meaning, identity, and power. This is where critical digital literacy (hereafter CDL) becomes especially important. Darvin (2025) foregrounds CDL as a key lens for understanding how GenAI reconfigures agency, ideology, and identity in L2 writing. He argues that GenAI systems 'encode material, indexical, and ideological dimensions' that shape how learners write, represent themselves, and engage with dominant forms of knowledge. From this perspective, AI-generated outputs cannot be separated from the sociotechnical infrastructures that produce them. Darvin's (2025) work thus extends discussion beyond instrumental notions of AI literacy by emphasizing learners' need to critically examine the political economies, biases, and inequalities embedded in AI-mediated writing practices. Therefore, in this study we employed CDL because they offer a more comprehensive lens by foregrounding the sociopolitical dimensions of digital technologies, including how they shape learners' agency, identity, and access to knowledge. As Darvin (2025) argues, critical digital literacies are particularly well suited for examining how GenAI reconfigures power, agency, and

identity in L2 writing, as they move beyond instrumental perspectives to interrogate the ideological and structural conditions underlying AI-generated texts.

Following this emerging direction, and drawing on Gerlach et al. (2025), who examined CDL in English language classrooms, this study adopted Schildhauer et al.'s (2023) integrated CDL framework to examine how a pre-service English teacher engaged with AI-generated content in the context of academic writing. In AI-mediated interaction, learners need to understand how linguistic knowledge, platform design, interface logics, and broader ideological formations shape the ways they interpret and respond to AI outputs (Darvin, 2025; Lim & Darvin, 2026). From a critical perspective, this involves not only evaluating AI-generated texts, but also developing the capacity for critical analysis, creative meaning-making, and sustained reflection on discourse and power. CDL is therefore particularly suitable for the present study because it enables an analysis of how GenAI-mediated writing is shaped by broader struggles over voice, agency, and representation within decolonizing pedagogy.

Previous studies on decolonizing writing pedagogy

A growing body of research on decolonizing writing pedagogy has shown that CDL extends well beyond technical competence, positioning multilingual learners to critically engage with the ideologies, power relations, and normative assumptions embedded in language practices particularly as these are materialized in AI-generated content. For instance, Liu et al. (2025), drawing on Darvin and Norton's (2015) investment model, demonstrate that Chinese university students participating in AI-mediated informal English learning develop agentic, strategic, and increasingly critical relationships with GenAI tools. Their participants cultivated dispositions that enabled them to question the authority of AI outputs, interrogate the often-hidden power relations within digital platforms, and mobilize critical digital literacies to navigate the "black box" of AI. Importantly, these findings suggest that learners' engagements with GenAI are far from uniform; rather, agency emerges as negotiated, contingent, and shaped by differential access to capital, identity positions, and critical awareness. In this sense, CDL functions as a key mechanism through which learners resist algorithmically encoded Western norms and assert greater ownership over their linguistic practices.

At the same time, studies focusing specifically on L2 academic writers further illuminate the ambivalent role of GenAI in shaping writer agency and perceptions of empowerment. For instance, Moorhouse et al. (2025) report that postgraduate L2 writers commonly perceive GenAI tools as empowering, particularly for supporting idea development, linguistic refinement, and genre modelling. However, they caution that such empowerment may be *illusory* when writers lack critical awareness of how AI systems function, the biases they reproduce, and the institutional policies that constrain their use. Taken together, these findings underscore persistent tensions between writers' aspirations for autonomy and instructors' often inconsistent or restrictive GenAI policies, thereby suggesting that sustainable forms of empowerment are more likely to emerge from pedagogical approaches grounded in critical digital literacies than from outright prohibition or uncritical adoption.

In a similar vein, drawing on systemic functional linguistics (SFL) transitivity analysis, Stewart and Zheng (2024) found that AI-generated continuation writing

produced by three GenAI tools such as ChatGPT (GPT-3.5), Copilot (GPT-4), and Gemini tended to be linguistically complex yet culturally hollow. Their analysis of lexical density revealed that these AI-generated texts often prioritized academic-sounding prose and rigid sentence structures, which, in turn, risk reproducing native-speakerism norms. In this sense, such writing may inadvertently contribute to the recolonization of EFL classrooms by implicitly privileging standardized, decontextualized forms of English. Although co-generated writing samples from the three AI chatbots displayed the highest average lexical density, this apparent sophistication reflected formulaic and inflexible writing styles that may constrain EFL learners' capacity for nuanced, affective, and culturally grounded expression. On this basis, Stewart and Zheng (2024) argue that writing teachers should deliberately position generative AI as a *faulty practitioner,* a pedagogical stance that requires students and teachers to engage in critical editing and revision as a means of foregrounding how cultural values, voice, and affective meanings can be more meaningfully expressed in writing.

In the context of learners from refugee backgrounds in Australia, Bogachenko et al. (2025) examined decolonizing language learning practices through the use of Google Translate (GT), a free online machine translation (FOMT) tool that employs AI-based neural networks. Their study revealed that learners' engagement with GT reflected high levels of metalinguistic awareness and digital literacy, as participants actively contested the dominance of so-called *privileged* language varieties embedded in machine translation applications. From this perspective, learners' strategic use of GT not only challenged normative assumptions about language use but also fostered a broader recognition of multilingual learners' linguistic resources within educational settings.

Viewed collectively, this body of scholarship points to a shared understanding: decolonizing academic writing in the age of GenAI requires pedagogical approaches that foreground critical digital literacies, challenge the ideological biases embedded in AI platforms, and value multilingual, situated ways of knowing. While GenAI tools open new possibilities for participation and access, they simultaneously risk reinstating long-standing hierarchies under the guise of algorithmic neutrality. Through this lens, CDL functions as a key mediating framework enabling learners and educators to interrogate the sociotechnical forces shaping AI-generated language, cultivate reflexive awareness of identity and power, and resist the pull toward conforming to homogenized, Eurocentric norms.

Given this tenuous backdrop, there is a compelling need to foreground decolonial and CDL writing pedagogy that contests entrenched Eurocentric norms in academic writing instruction for pre-service English teachers. Put simply, decolonizing writing pedagogy involves reimagining writing education as a more inclusive, multilingual, and socially just enterprise, one that challenges English-dominant, Western academic conventions while valuing diverse ways of knowing and meaning-making.

Method

Study design and context

In this study, we adopted a qualitative case study approach that was situated within a larger, ongoing project that examined decolonizing writing pedagogy in the age of AI. This design was selected to enable an in-depth exploration of a

bounded, context-specific case namely, a pre-service English teacher, Dava, who was navigating AI-mediated writing within an EFL teacher education program in Indonesia. In line with qualitative case study traditions, the study focuses on understanding the complexity of a single, information-rich case within its real-life instructional context (e.g., Duff, 2008; Yin, 2018).

Within this project, Author 1, who is originally from Indonesia, served as a co-instructor, working with pre-service English teachers enrolled as EFL students at an Indonesian private university. The overarching aim of the program is to prepare pre-service teachers to become effective writing instructors in their future professional contexts. To support this goal, the institutional curriculum comprises a sequence of three English writing courses (*Basic Writing, Academic Writing, and Thesis Writing*) which students complete prior to graduation as part of their initial teacher education. In the focal course, Author 1 designed the syllabus to include an explicit policy guiding the pedagogical use of AI in learning to write. This policy permitted students to use AI tools for purposes such as idea generation, proofreading, and improving clarity, while emphasizing critical and reflective engagement with AI outputs. In practice, most participants relied on free versions of GenAI tools when engaging in English writing activities.

Participants

Although Author 1 (H) taught a total of 25 students in the academic writing course, this study focuses on a single focal participant, Dava, an 18-year-old male pre-service English teacher enrolled in an initial teacher education program at the aforementioned private university. Born in Cirebon, a city located in West Java, Dava, like many other students enrolled in the program, acquired English as an additional language and used Indonesian as a lingua franca. These two languages in his linguistic repertoire existed in addition to Sundanese, his home language. Dava was selected based on what Creswell (2012, p. 127) describes as an '*intense case'*, that is, an information-rich case that vividly manifests the phenomenon under investigation. In particular, Dava distinguished himself as one of the students who demonstrated a capacity to engage with AI in ways that reflected emerging forms of critical digital literacy, and he voluntarily agreed to participate in this study.

In recruiting Dava as our focal participant, we ensured that ethical considerations were addressed throughout the study, particularly with regard to participant anonymity. We obtained informed consent prior to data collection, used a pseudonym to protect the participant's identity, and did not disclose the name of the institution. Following De Costa et al. (2021), we also sought to create a comfortable environment so that the participant could freely express his views while minimizing potential harm and respectfully representing his voice in the study.

Researcher positionality

Given our dual roles as researchers and instructor, ethical considerations were central to this study, particularly as the processes of data collection and analysis were inevitably shaped by our presence and interpretive positions (De Costa et al., 2020; De Costa et al., 2021). Author 1 developed a teacher student relationship with Dava through his role as a co-instructor of the course, designing learning activities, providing instructional guidance, and interacting with participants throughout the

workshop sessions. This relationship enabled sustained, context-sensitive engagement, but also introduced potential power dynamics that could shape how Dava participated and expressed his perspectives. To address this, we adopted a reflexive stance throughout the study, acknowledging how Author 1's positionality may have influenced data generation and interpretation. For instance, efforts were made to create a supportive and non-evaluative environment, emphasizing that participation in the study would not affect academic assessment. Author 2, who did not have a direct instructional relationship with Dava, served in the role of collaborator and consultant, maintaining an ongoing advisory position by offering feedback, providing interpretive insights, and contributing to analytic decision-making across the study. This form of collaboration resonates with Canagarajah's (2024) call for working alongside local teacher educators to design pedagogies that are locally grounded and context responsive.

Pedagogical task

Guided by the idea of collaborative project in decolonizing higher education pedagogy (De Costa et al., 2024), Author 1 designed two core pedagogical tasks aimed at decolonizing writing pedagogy and fostering pre-service English teachers' critical digital literacy. These tasks were also informed by Canagarajah's (2024) assertion that writing is fundamentally embodied and relational rather than purely textual. In the first task, Author 1, in his role as instructor, intentionally incorporated elements of Cirebon local culture into an imagined writing process, inviting students to view writing genres and traditional dance as interconnected meaning-making practices. This pedagogical move resonates with Tardy's (2019) observation that writing genres, much like dance genres, are shaped by conventions, patterns, and social purposes. To operationalize this connection, Author 1 drew on semiotic and multimodal resources such as *Tari Topeng* (a traditional Cirebon mask dance; see Figure 1) as local semiotic resources for writing in English. The rationale behind this pedagogical decision was to support students in developing a more grounded understanding of genre by encouraging them to interpret genre conventions through their own cultural knowledge and local ways of meaning-making. To further scaffold this learning process, students were invited to examine features of Cirebon writing styles as comparative resources for identifying and reflecting on genre moves. In the second task, Author 1 asked participants to write a picture of the Duolingo English test with AI help and asked them to discuss it critically.

Data collection and data source

In this study, we drew on multiple data sources (see Table 1) to support methodological triangulation. Following the collection of students' written reflections and writing assignments, Author 1 invited Dava, our case participant, to participate in interactive Zoom-based discussions and interviews. Two interview sessions were conducted, each lasting between 60 and 90 minutes. For the photovoice component, we adopted the procedure outlined by Kingery et al. (2016), asking the participant to create a set of photovoice artefacts after engaging in writing activities and interacting with AI tools. Data collection for the photovoice task took place over a two-week period, during which Dava documented his experiences across both in-class and out-of-class writing activities. These included

classroom-based writing tasks guided by Author 1 as well as independent writing practices completed at home, where he frequently engaged with free GenAI tools.

Dava was instructed to document his experiences by taking photographs that captured his emotions and reflections related to AI-mediated writing. He was then asked to select three photographs that best represented his experiences and to narrate their significance through an audio recording. Specifically, he was guided to reflect on each image using the SHOWED framework describing what he *saw*, what was *happening*, how the image related to his *own life*, *why* the issue or strength existed, and what actions he could *take* in response (Kingery et al., 2016). The rationale for collecting data through photovoice was to capture the embodied, affective, and reflexive dimensions of GenAI-mediated writing that might not be fully elicited through interview data alone.

We argued that this approach enabled the participant to critically examine his experiences and articulate meaning-making processes beyond purely textual representations (Nurhadi et al., 2022). In addition, WhatsApp was used as a follow-up data collection tool after analyzing initial interview transcripts. We employed asynchronous, open-ended written prompts to clarify ambiguous points and invite elaboration on emerging themes. Participant responded with short written responses, allowing for flexible and context-sensitive follow-up. This process deepened the analysis and enhanced the credibility of interpretations by accurately representing Dava's perspectives.

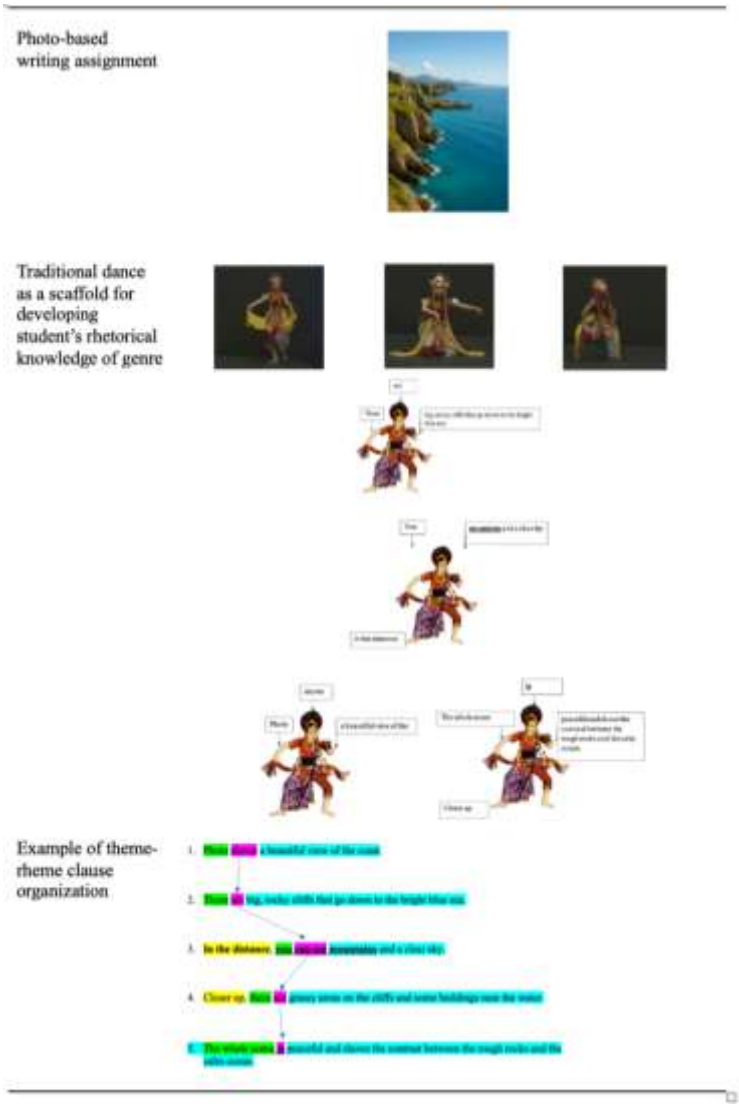

Figure 1. Example of using local resource to scaffold writing instruction

Table 1. Summary of data sources

Data source	Content
Semi-structured interview	Two interview sessions conducted in November and December, each lasting approximately 45 minutes
Written interview	WhatsApp was used to collect additional data after the interview transcripts were analyzed.
Photovoice	Participant-generated photovoice artefacts and narratives
Written reflection	Written reflections collected via Google form written reflection
AI logs	Archived GenAI interaction logs
Screen Zoom-mediated interaction	Screen-recorded online Zoom-based interactions

Data analysis

To analyze our data, we adopted a combination of inductive and deductive analytic processes. Interview data, written reflections, and photovoice narratives were first translated into English by Author 1 using TurboScribe (https://turboscribe.ai), after which the translations were carefully checked for accuracy through repeated comparison with the original data. The analysis proceeded in three iterative stages (initial coding, pattern coding, and focused coding) following Saldaña (2021).

In the first cycle of coding, we conducted initial coding to identify salient segments of meaning across the dataset. At this stage, codes were generated inductively from the data, capturing participant's experiences with AI-mediated writing, emotional responses, and reflections on learning. This process generated an initial set of 18 codes capturing the participant's experiences, emotions, and reflections related to AI-mediated writing. These codes were subsequently refined and organized into four overarching themes, as presented in Table 2. In the second cycle, we engaged in pattern coding, grouping the initial codes into broader categories by identifying similarities, relationships, and recurring patterns. During this stage, we also incorporated deductive lenses informed by our conceptual framework (e.g., critical digital literacy and decolonial perspectives), which guided the refinement and organization of categories. In the third stage, we conducted thematic development, synthesizing categories into overarching themes that captured the core dimensions of the participant's experience. These codes were subsequently refined and organized into four overarching themes, as presented in Table 2. In this single-case study, we do not use themes to identify patterns across participant but to trace recurring patterns within the participant's experiences across time and contexts. In this sense, we treat themes as analytic lenses to interpret multiple dimensions of experience within a bounded case (Duff, 2008).

This process involved constant comparison across data sources (interviews, photovoice, and written reflections) to ensure consistency and depth of interpretation. To enhance the credibility of the analysis, coding decisions were discussed iteratively between the authors. Author 1 conducted the primary coding, while Author 2 reviewed the coding scheme, provided critical feedback, and challenged emerging interpretations. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion until agreement was reached. In addition, follow-up clarification through WhatsApp was used to verify interpretations and elaborate on emerging themes. Table 2 presents a summary of the final themes alongside representative excerpts from the participant data.

Table 2. Coding scheme

Theme	Example of participant data
Language learning investment and the use of GenAI to support his motivation	*because I wanted to study abroad ... ChatGPT for find information ... Gemini for daily English such as conversation, chat ...*
Reflection on using GenAI tools	*most of us probably familiar with AI and how efficient and helpful it is but still we need to have critical digital literacy before accept anything that AI told us because it can be a bias information.*

Theme	Example of participant data
Critical dialogue	*I do not think we in Indonesia can do cycling on the road because in some of our roads it is not good for us to ride bicycles, not like developed countries.*
The need for further support	*Maybe in university, there should be professional development for teachers about GenAI, because now many teachers still don't know how it works.*

Findings and Discussion

Findings

We gained valuable insights into 1) Dava' investment to learn English and the use of AI tools, 2) his reflection on learning to write using ChatGPT, 3) his critical interaction with ChatGPT, and 4) his future hope to secure additional support as an English teacher.

Dava' investment in learning English and using AI tools

Dava's narrative illustrates how his engagement with English and AI was deeply shaped by long-term aspirations and personal agency. He described learning English from an early age, motivated by his desire to pursue higher education abroad and to secure better professional opportunities in the future. He noted:

> *First, at the beginning, it was because I wanted to study abroad. And also, because I feel it's more professional. Being able to speak English has its advantages. Maybe I can get a better job, or maybe a chance to work abroad as well…. That's why I study English a lot, and also because I like it. Self-taught. I've never taken any course at all. So maybe from watching movies or anything like that, I usually imitate how they speak. And until now, I still do that.* (Dava, interview November 2025)

Dava became aware that English proficiency development required engagement across multiple skills, including writing. On this basis, he actively invested in learning how to write by drawing on a range of resources, including various AI tools. Table 3 summarizes the various AI tools he used for different purposes.

Table 3. Overview of GenAI platforms and Dava's purposes of use

	GenAI platforms	Dava's purposes of using AI tools
1	ChatGPT	He uses ChatGPT to find information and complete course-related assignments.
2	Perplexity	He uses Perplexity to search for specific information to support academic assignments.
3	Blackbox	He uses Blackbox to generate ideas, support writing, and locate information.
4	Gemini	He uses Gemini to practice daily English use, including conversation, chatting, speaking, and writing.
5	grammarly	He uses Grammarly to edit sentences, correct grammatical errors, and proofread spelling.

Dava's reflection on learning to write using ChatGPT

More than two years after ChatGPT was first launched in 2022, Dava began using ChatGPT regularly between 2023 and 2025, alongside other AI tools such as QuillBot and Gemini. He reported employing these tools for multiple purposes, most notably to support the completion of writing assignments assigned by his teachers. Although his initial engagement with ChatGPT began during high school, his use of it became more intentional and frequent during his initial teacher education (ITE) program, where he was preparing to become a pre-service English teacher. In his data interview, he shared:

> *Today I learn about critical digital literacy, most of us probably familiar with AI and how efficient and helpful it is but still we need to have critical digital literacy before accept anything that AI told us because it can be a bias information.* (Dava, written reflection, October 2025)

In his photovoice artefact, Dava described how interacting with GenAI helped him to complete the difficult content of his teacher's lecture. At the same time, he expressed an emerging awareness of the risks associated with an overreliance on ChatGPT, observing that excessive dependence on AI tools could limit his opportunities to fully develop his own writing skills.

Dava's photovoice:
My friends and I are paying attention to the learning materials in a lecture session held through a Zoom meeting, which is made possible by rapid technological development that enables distance education. It can be seen that the lecturer cannot fully control and ensure the full participation of all students. In some of the materials discussed, my friends and I found it difficult to understand certain topics, so I needed AI assistance to work on and comprehend the materials delivered. In other learning sessions, my friends and I sometimes used AI to summarize and take notes on the materials explained. The downside here is that we became overly dependent on AI for some assignments, which prevented us from developing our writing skills or our understanding.

Figure 2. Dava photovoice of experience with AI interaction

So it's like learning from books is being replaced because it is helped by technology (AI).

Figure 3. Dava's photovoice of perception with AI use

In one photovoice artefact (see Figure 4), Dava drew a comparison between his own pet cat and AI's capacity to interpret meaning. He explained:

For me, cats are animals that are difficult to predict. They live based on instinct, while AI, in my view, is very easy to predict. This is because AI is a machine that anyone can create, and it can be given certain restrictions or prohibited outputs, which makes most AI responses predictable and unable to violate those rules.

	From my experience using AI, for example, an AI that can detect or read a cat's facial expression, the results are not always 100% accurate. For instance, when I gave the AI a photo of a cat in an unusual position, it almost could not correctly answer the question, "what animal is this?".

Figure 4. Dava's photovoice of comparing his own pet with AI ability to detect

The photovoice and interview data show how Dava engaged with AI as both a learner and a pre-service teacher. The data also indicate that he used AI to support comprehension and complete academic tasks. At the same time, he reported becoming aware of the risks of overreliance on AI, particularly in relation to his writing development.

Dava's critical interaction with ChatGPT

Following Mirhosseini and De Costa (2025), Author 1 engaged Dava in a critical discussion on how to use GenAI to interrogate unequal access to knowledge and resources. In this pedagogical task, Dava was asked to demonstrate his interaction with AI. Notably, when Dava tried to interact with ChatGPT through ChatGPT 3.5 (free version) *https://chatgpt.com/share/6930eed6-7164-800d-8e70-ba6d1534f770*, he asked something about creating an essay about cycling and included a request for ChatGPT to provide the references. Figure 5 shows how ChatGPT generated the requested content.

Figure 5. Dava's interaction with ChatGPT free version

After reviewing the AI-generated content, we engaged Dava in an interactive, Zoom-mediated discussion to elicit his responses to and interpretations of his use of ChatGPT. During this exchange, Dava demonstrated a critical stance toward the text by situating it within his local context. Specifically, he noted: "*I do not think we in Indonesia can do cycling on the road because in some of our roads it is not good for us to ride bicycles, not like developed countries that have special lanes."* As Dava lived in a semi-urban area where bicycling was rarely found, he also added

his critical commentary – stemming from his local knowledge – that "*AI-generated content overgeneralizes the effect of using a bicycle for mental well-being without seeing any context."*

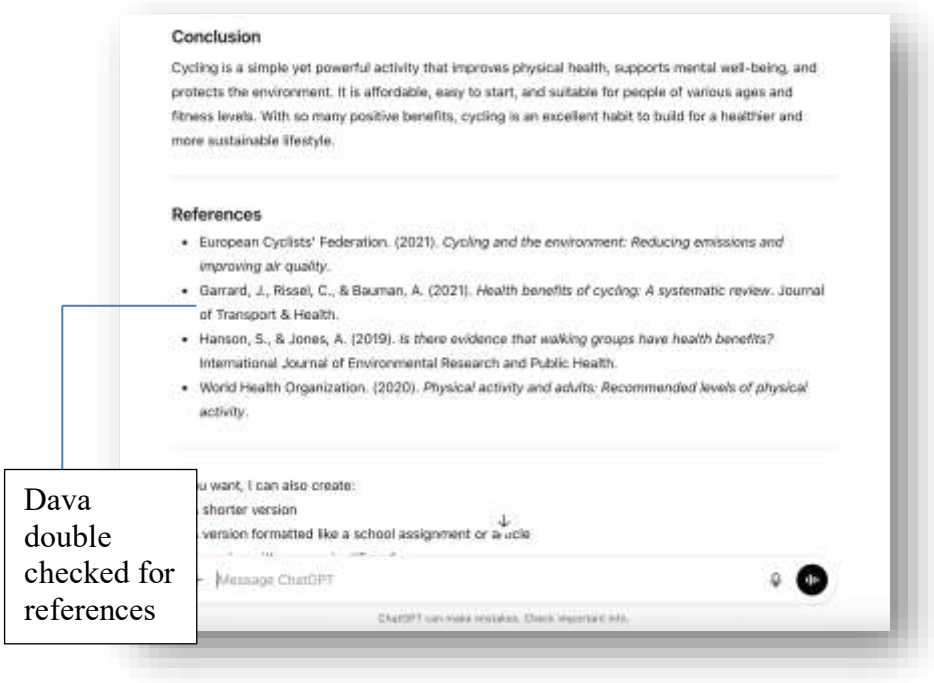

Figure 6. Dava's activity double checking references

He explained:

> *We need to be more cautious when using gen AI, and like Pak … [Author 1] told us that we need to have more critical digital literacy because some AI is bias and more westernism. I think I agree that AI is helpful for us as a collaborator, not just following what AI told us because sometimes it's not always right.* (Dava, written reflection, September 2025)

Dava's hope for additional support for English teachers

In our discussions with Dava, he articulated a clear need for additional support in learning how to use GenAI critically and ethically, which he suggested could be addressed through the integration of dedicated coursework or professional development for teachers. Anchored in his aspirations to become both a teacher and a journalist, Dava emphasized the importance of fostering students' motivation to write in English. Reflecting on this, Dava noted that

> *I was wondering if there is a guideline for us to know when we are allowed to use GenAI tools, and not to use. I think it is important because we need to make sure that policy can be understood by students. Maybe, it can be part of AI literacy in the curriculum. This ethical guideline and how to use it enable us to have AI literacy.* (Dava, written interview via WhatsApp, December 2025)

> *Maybe in university, there should be professional development for teachers about GenAI, because now many teachers still don't know how it works. I think it would be good if there is a training or workshop for learning how to use AI or a discussion about AI and writing, especially AI for writing.* (Dava, written interview via WhatsApp, December 2025)

> *I don't want to rely too heavily on AI and I am trying to reduce it. We learn about writing, but we never learn how to use AI responsibly in writing. I think that's missing.* (Dava, written interview via WhatsApp, December 2025)

These data show that Dava sees a clear gap in how AI is currently addressed in writing instruction. He points out that students are taught how to write, but not how to use AI responsibly, which he considers important. He also suggests that teachers need more training so they can guide students in using AI in a more critical and ethical way.

Discussion

In this study, we examined how our pedagogical practices mediated a pre-service English teacher's engagement with GenAI within a decolonial and critical digital literacy framework for writing instruction. Situated in a Global South context, the case of Dava illustrates how his agency, voice, and writer identity were negotiated as he interacted with AI-mediated writing practices. More broadly, our findings reveal the tensions that emerged between the affordances of GenAI tools and the risks of dependency within a decolonial writing pedagogy.

To answer the first research question, we explored how a decolonial critical digital literacy-oriented pedagogy mediated a pre-service English teacher's negotiation of agency, voice, and writer identity in AI-mediated writing. Our findings suggest that Dava strategically mobilized multiple GenAI tools namely ChatGPT, Perplexity, Blackbox, Gemini, and Grammarly to support different aspects of the writing process. These tools were used to search for information, generate ideas, revise grammar, and practice English communication. Rather than positioning AI as an autonomous author, Dava treated these technologies as one semiotic resource within a broader writing ecology. His practices align with Canagarajah's (2023) ecological view of writing, which conceptualizes 'writing as a distributed and relational process' that draws on multiple semiotic resources and social actors. In this sense, AI tools became part of the learner's meaning-making repertoire rather than a replacement for human authorship. In addition, For Dava, English was not merely an academic requirement, but a form of symbolic and material capital (Bourdieu, 1991) associated with professionalism, mobility, and self-improvement.

Importantly, Dava's engagement with AI was closely tied to his investment in learning English and his aspirations for professional mobility. For him, English proficiency represented a form of symbolic and material capital that could open opportunities for international study and career advancement. Our findings resonate with Darvin and Norton's (2015) investment framework, which conceptualizes language learning as a socially situated process shaped by learners'

identities, aspirations, and access to resources. At the same time, this study extends previous research by demonstrating how such investment unfolds within AI-mediated writing environments. While prior studies have shown that learners use AI tools for linguistic assistance and idea generation (Moorhouse et al., 2025), the case of Dava illustrates how AI-mediated writing can also become a site for negotiating writer identity and critical awareness. In this sense, GenAI did not merely function as a technical writing aid but also shaped how Dava positioned himself as an emerging academic writer.

To answer the second research question, we examined the tensions that emerged when engaging with GenAI as a resource in academic writing. Consistent with prior research, our findings echo earlier scholarship suggesting that GenAI functions as a double-edged sword in language education. As Dobinson et al. (2024) and Dovchin (2024) argue, AI tools can simultaneously democratize access to knowledge while reproducing linguistic hierarchies embedded in Western-centric datasets. Our study contributes to this significant and evolving conversation by demonstrating how such tensions were experienced and negotiated in situated academic writing practices within Indonesia. Drawing on Canagarajah's (2024) notion of writing as a distributed and relational practice, a decolonial pedagogy resists positioning GenAI as a surrogate writer and instead frames it as one semiotic resource among many within a broader communicative ecology. Such an approach is congruent with Darvin's (2025) call for CDL development that makes platform ideologies visible and enables learners to exercise agency in negotiating AI-generated discourse. In addition, the photovoice and interview data together illustrated how Dava negotiated his identity as both a language learner and a pre-service English teacher, while engaging with AI tools. His reflections illuminated our understanding of how GenAI use in academic writing should not be understood in isolation from longer histories of coloniality in knowledge production. In other words, from a decolonial standpoint, AI's predictability rooted in algorithmic rules and constrained outputs stands in contrast to the embodied, affective, and context-sensitive nature of human meaning-making. Such a standpoint needs to be taken into consideration because pedagogical interventions that explicitly attend to epistemic justice, promote reflexive and critical AI use when planning instruction. Crucially, this pedagogical stance and practice reaffirm writing as a situated, relational, and embodied practice rather than a process of mere textual reproduction.

More broadly, our findings suggest that integrating GenAI into writing pedagogy requires approaches that foreground CDL and decolonial perspectives. As Stewart and Zheng (2024) astutely observe, AI-generated texts often reproduce linguistically sophisticated yet culturally decontextualized discourse that privileges standardized forms of English. Without critical engagement, such practices risk reinforcing native-speakerist norms and Eurocentric knowledge systems. Notably, Dava's case underscores how a decolonial critical digital literacy–oriented pedagogy can help learners interrogate these dynamics. Through guided reflection and discussion, Dava developed critical awareness of the limitations and ideological assumptions embedded in AI-generated texts. Such awareness, in turn, enabled him to reposition AI not as a surrogate writer but as a collaborative tool that needs to be used critically and reflexively.

Taken together, the findings highlight the importance of reimagining writing pedagogy in the age of GenAI. Rather than framing AI as either a threat or a

replacement for human writing, educators should cultivate pedagogical spaces in which learners critically examine the sociotechnical infrastructures shaping AI-mediated language practices. In doing so, decolonial writing pedagogy can support learners in developing reflexive, agentive, and contextually grounded approaches to academic writing.

This study also contributes to the growing scholarship on AI-mediated writing and decolonizing language education in several important ways. First, by examining the case of a pre-service English teacher in Indonesia, our study provides empirically grounded insights into how learners in Global South contexts negotiate agency, voice, and writer identity when interacting with GenAI in academic writing. While previous research (e.g., Nugroho et al., 2025; Pratama et al., 2025) has documented learners' use of AI for linguistic support or idea generation, the present study demonstrates how such engagement can also become a site for critical reflection and epistemic negotiation, particularly when learners draw on local knowledge to question the assumptions embedded in AI-generated texts. Second, our study extends existing research on critical digital literacy by illustrating how CDL-oriented writing pedagogy can mediate learners' interactions with AI technologies, enabling them to move beyond passive consumption toward more reflexive and critical engagement with AI-generated knowledge. Finally, our findings contribute pedagogically by highlighting the importance of integrating decolonial perspectives into AI-mediated writing instruction, particularly in teacher education contexts where future educators must learn not only how to use AI tools, but also how to guide students in engaging with these technologies critically, ethically, and contextually.

Conclusion

In this study, we sought to offer an alternative form of pedagogical mediation for pre-service English teachers by reimagining how academic writing can be taught and learned within efforts to decolonize writing pedagogy in the age of GenAI. While GenAI tools can provide substantial support for pre-service teachers learning to write, they also carry the risk of *recolonizing* language practices through the algorithmic norms they reproduce. For this reason, we argue that pedagogical innovation is necessary if writing educators are to support pre-service English teachers, as EFL learners, in developing critical digital literacy for engaging with and interpreting GenAI-generated content. For example, students are asked to integrate Cirebon mask dance (*Tari topeng Cirebon*) into AI-mediated academic writing by selecting one *Topeng Cirebon character* (e.g. *Panji, Samba, Rumyang, Tumenggung, and Klana*) and reflect on how its philosophical traits (e.g. passion, power) relate to their identity as multilingual writers. Building on this, students were guided to critically examine how GenAI framed "local culture." Specifically, they were asked to analyze whether the AI-generated output reproduced exoticized narratives, reduced complex cultural traditions to simplified representations, or aligned local epistemologies with dominant Western academic norms.

While the findings of this study indicate that Dava was able to engage with ChatGPT critically to support idea development in English writing, they also point to several important pedagogical implications for second language writing instruction. First, writing teachers need to develop a nuanced understanding of both the affordances and the limitations of GenAI-generated content, as well as close

awareness of how students actually interact with tools such as ChatGPT in their writing processes. Next, in a global communicative landscape marked by unequal and often unjust patterns of knowledge production shaped by hegemonic forces, writing pedagogy must foreground critical language awareness when integrating GenAI into instruction. Ultimately, decolonizing writing pedagogy is not simply about adopting new technologies, but about rethinking writing itself as a cultural and social practice shaped by writers' lived experiences and material conditions. As García (2019) argued, decolonizing language education requires rejecting deficit views of multilingual writers and recognizing their full linguistic repertoires as legitimate resources for meaning-making rather than deviations from standardized norms; similarly, De Costa (2022) called for normalizing English in ways that acknowledge students' voices, identities, emotions, and confidence, regardless of their proficiency levels a position that aligns with Passi's (2023) emphasis on affirming writer voice and confidence in multilingual writing contexts.

In closing, our findings suggest that pedagogizing decoloniality through critical digital literacy-oriented writing instruction - requires students to develop the critical capacities needed to resist colonial forms of knowledge production, particularly within Global South contexts. As shown in this study, through facilitating GenAI-mediated writing practices, we worked collaboratively with multilingual pre-service English teachers like Dava to support the development of their authorial voice as a foundation for strengthening writer identity. The implications of this work indicate that writing teachers and teacher educators can adapt our pedagogical approach as a situated model for decolonizing writing pedagogy and fostering students' critical digital literacy in AI-mediated learning environments. Despite this contribution, as this study focuses on a single case, future research may examine how similar pedagogical approaches are implemented across broader classroom contexts and diverse learner populations.

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