

THE COPY AND PASTE CULTURE IN THE AGE OF GENERATIVE AI: IMPLICATIONS FOR ACADEMIC WRITING SKILLS AMONG ENGLISH STUDENTS IN SOUTH-SOUTH NIGERIA

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Abstract

The proliferation of generative artificial intelligence (AI) applications such as ChatGPT, Gemini and Copilot has reshaped how university students in Nigeria approach academic composition, giving rise to a copy and paste disposition in which machine-generated text is transferred into assignments with minimal intellectual engagement. This paper narrows its focus to the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria, comprising Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo and Rivers States, and adopts a quantitative survey research design to examine the extent to which this culture threatens core writing competencies, namely independent composition, paraphrasing ability, citation literacy, and authorship and intellectual ownership, among English students in the region. Anchored on Self-Regulated Learning theory, the study drew a sample of 330 undergraduate English students from six federal universities across the six South-South states, using a multi-stage (proportionate stratified and simple random) sampling technique; 300 questionnaires were correctly completed and returned, yielding a 90.9 percent response rate. Data were collected using a structured, validated and reliability-tested questionnaire (overall Cronbach's alpha = .82) and analysed using descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistics (Pearson Product Moment Correlation, simple linear regression, independent samples t-test and one-way ANOVA), all tested at the .05 level of significance. Findings show a high extent of generative AI-enabled copy and paste practice among respondents (grand mean = 2.98), a low extent of AI literacy (grand mean = 2.21), and comparatively low mean scores on independent composition, paraphrasing ability, citation literacy and authorship and intellectual ownership (means ranging from 2.11 to 2.44). Copy and paste culture correlated negatively and significantly with all four writing competencies (r ranging from $-.41$ to $-.57$, $p < .001$), and all four corresponding null hypotheses were rejected. No significant difference was found in copy and paste culture by gender, $t(298) = 1.15$, $p = .251$, or by state/institution, $F(5, 294) = 1.87$, $p = .098$, suggesting that the pattern is broadly uniform across the zone. The paper argues that uncritical AI adoption is significantly associated with lower levels of core writing competencies among English students in South-South Nigeria and recommends AI literacy instruction, revised assessment design, explicit institutional policy, and continued periodic quantitative monitoring.

Keywords: *generative artificial intelligence, copy and paste culture, academic writing skills, quantitative survey research, South-South Nigerian university students*

Introduction

Academic writing has traditionally served as the principal medium through which university students demonstrate command of content knowledge, logical reasoning and disciplinary conventions. For students of English in Nigerian universities, the ability to compose a coherent, well referenced and analytically sound piece of writing is not merely an assessment requirement

but a professional competency that underpins their eventual roles as teachers, communicators, editors and researchers of the English language. In recent years, however, the emergence of generative artificial intelligence tools has introduced a fundamentally different relationship between the student and the written text. Rather than labouring through the stages of drafting, revising and editing, a growing number of students now generate entire

essays, term papers and even segments of theses through a single prompt typed into an AI chatbot, after which the output is copied, minimally adjusted and submitted as original work.

This practice, which this paper refers to as the copy and paste culture, is not entirely new to Nigerian higher education. Long before the advent of generative AI, students routinely lifted content from textbooks, unpublished project reports and internet sources, a tendency that several scholars have linked to weak foundational writing instruction and inadequate supervision (Orim et al., 2013). What generative AI has done is to industrialise this tendency, making plagiarism faster, more fluent and considerably harder to detect through conventional similarity checking software (Perkins & Roe, 2024). Unlike earlier forms of textual borrowing, AI generated content is often original in the technical sense of not matching any single existing source verbatim, yet it remains ethically and pedagogically problematic because it bypasses the cognitive labour that writing is designed to cultivate.

Within the Nigerian context, this development carries particular urgency for departments of English and allied language disciplines, where writing is both the object and the medium of instruction. Emerging evidence suggests that Nigerian undergraduates and postgraduates are adopting generative AI tools at a rapid pace, frequently for purposes that extend beyond legitimate academic support into wholesale content generation (Nwokorie & Onichakwe, 2024; Essien et al., 2024). Concerns have equally been raised regarding the low level of AI literacy among Nigerian scholars and students, which limits their capacity to use these tools ethically and critically rather than as shortcuts around the writing process (Akwang & Ebiwolate, 2024).

While these patterns appear to cut across Nigerian higher education generally, the South-South geopolitical zone, comprising Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo and Rivers States, presents a particularly instructive context for closer examination. The zone hosts a growing number of federal, state and private universities with active departments of English and language

education, and existing accounts of generative AI adoption in the zone, while informative, have so far relied largely on secondary literature review or on samples not drawn specifically from English departments (Essien et al., 2024; Akwang & Ebiwolate, 2024). Rather than relying on impressionistic claims or general survey evidence, the present paper adopts a quantitative survey research design: it administers a structured, validated questionnaire directly to a representative sample of undergraduate English students drawn from universities across the six South-South states, to establish, with statistical precision, the extent of AI-enabled copy and paste practice in the zone and its measurable relationship with core writing competencies. It is against this backdrop that the present paper examines the implications of the copy and paste culture engendered by generative AI for the academic writing competencies of English students in South-South Nigerian universities, with a view to proposing pedagogical and policy responses that safeguard the integrity of writing instruction in an AI-mediated era.

Objectives of the Study

This paper is guided by the following objectives, to:

- i. determine the extent of generative AI-enabled copy and paste practice among English students in South-South Nigerian universities;
- ii. assess the level of AI literacy among English students in the region;
- iii. determine the level of independent composition, paraphrasing ability, citation literacy, and authorship and intellectual ownership among English students in South-South Nigeria;
- iv. examine the relationship between generative AI-enabled copy and paste culture and each of the four core writing competencies identified above, and determine whether copy and paste culture scores differ significantly by gender and by state/institution among English students in South-South Nigeria; and
- v. recommend pedagogical and institutional strategies for the responsible integration of generative AI into academic writing

instruction within South-South Nigerian universities.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

- i. To what extent do English students in South-South Nigerian universities engage in generative AI-enabled copy and paste practice?
- ii. What is the level of AI literacy among English students in South-South Nigeria?
- iii. What is the level of independent composition, paraphrasing ability, citation literacy, and authorship and intellectual ownership among English students in South-South Nigeria?
- iv. What is the relationship between generative AI-enabled copy and paste culture and each of the four core writing competencies among English students in South-South Nigeria?
- v. Is there a significant difference in copy and paste culture scores of English students by gender and by state/institution in South-South Nigeria?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at the .05 level of significance:

- i. Ho1: There is no significant relationship between generative AI-enabled copy and paste culture and independent composition ability among English students in South-South Nigeria.
- ii. Ho2: There is no significant relationship between generative AI-enabled copy and paste culture and paraphrasing ability among English students in South-South Nigeria.
- iii. Ho3: There is no significant relationship between generative AI-enabled copy and paste culture and citation literacy among English students in South-South Nigeria.
- iv. Ho4: There is no significant relationship between generative AI-enabled copy and paste culture and authorship and intellectual ownership among English students in South-South Nigeria.

- v. Ho5: There is no significant difference in the mean copy and paste culture scores of English students (a) by gender or (b) by state/institution in South-South Nigeria.

Literature Review

Conceptualising Copy and Paste Culture in Academic Writing

The term copy and paste culture describes a pattern of academic behaviour in which students reproduce, with little or no modification, content sourced from external materials, whether print, digital or, increasingly, AI generated. Prior to the popularisation of generative AI, this behaviour was primarily associated with the ease of information retrieval afforded by the internet, which allowed students to locate relevant material within seconds and transplant it directly into their own work (Orim et al., 2013). Scholars have consistently linked the persistence of this culture to deficiencies in writing instruction, limited access to structured feedback and time pressure associated with heavy academic workloads. What distinguishes the contemporary iteration of this culture is the substitution of the search and copy process with a generate and copy process, whereby the student no longer even needs to locate an existing text; the AI system composes an entirely new one on demand, tailored to the specific prompt supplied (Farrokhnia et al., 2024). This shift, though technologically sophisticated, ultimately performs the same pedagogical disservice as earlier forms of plagiarism: it removes the student from the intellectual labour of composing, structuring and defending an argument.

Generative Artificial Intelligence and the Evolution of Student Writing Practices

Generative AI systems function by predicting and producing coherent sequences of text based on patterns learned from vast training corpora, enabling them to draft essays, summarise sources and even simulate scholarly argumentation within seconds of receiving a prompt. Yusuf et al. (2024) observe that this capability has generated a dual narrative in higher education discourse: on one hand, generative AI is celebrated as a tool capable of reforming pedagogy through personalised feedback and scaffolded support; on the other, it is viewed as a direct threat

to academic integrity, since it can produce complete assignments that closely mimic authentic student authorship. A SWOT analysis of ChatGPT conducted by Farrokhnia et al. (2024) similarly identifies opportunities such as improved accessibility of writing support alongside threats, including the erosion of students' independent composition ability and an increased risk of unoriginal submission. Darvishi et al. (2024) provide further empirical weight to these concerns, reporting that students who habitually depend on AI assistance for writing tasks demonstrate weaker self-regulation and produce noticeably poorer outcomes once that assistance is withdrawn, an effect the authors attribute to the erosion of student agency over time.

Generative AI Adoption among University Students in South-South Nigeria

A growing corpus of studies focused on or situated within South-South Nigeria confirms that generative AI tools have become deeply embedded in student and researcher academic practice. Essien et al. (2024), examining postgraduate students in the South-South geopolitical zone, reported generally favourable perceptions of generative AI tools for academic writing, tempered by an acknowledgement among respondents that overreliance on such tools could compromise the development of independent writing competence. Akwang and Ebiwolate (2024) conducted a mixed methods study of 133 targeted library and information science professionals across twelve university libraries in the six South-South states, using a 55 item structured questionnaire with a Cronbach reliability coefficient of .804, and reported low awareness, low institutional support, and a high application index of AI powered tools to routine library services but not specifically to research writing, a gap that compounds the difficulty of guiding students in the region towards ethical and pedagogically sound AI use.

Comparative evidence from the neighbouring South-East zone reinforces these regional patterns: Nwokorie and Onichakwe (2024), studying undergraduates at Imo State University, Owerri, found that a substantial proportion of students relied on AI platforms not merely for idea generation but for the direct

production of assignments and project write ups. Okunlola (2024) extends this discussion by situating AI facilitated plagiarism within the broader context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, arguing that Nigerian undergraduates increasingly perceive AI-assisted content generation as a legitimate shortcut rather than an ethical breach. None of these studies, however, surveys undergraduate English students specifically, a gap the present study addresses directly by sampling English students themselves rather than library professionals or students in a neighbouring zone.

Implications of AI-Enabled Copy and Paste Practices for Writing Skills Development

The convergence of the studies reviewed above points to several implications for the academic writing competencies of English students in South-South Nigeria. First, there is emerging evidence of diminished engagement with the generative stages of writing, namely brainstorming, outlining and drafting, as students increasingly delegate these processes to AI systems (Darvishi et al., 2024). Second, paraphrasing and citation literacy, both central to the discipline of English studies, appear to be weakening as students submit AI generated text without verifying sources or reformulating ideas in their own voice, a tendency that Perkins and Roe (2024) argue is often difficult for conventional plagiarism detection software to flag. Third, the copy and paste culture appears to blur students' understanding of authorship and intellectual ownership, a concern echoed by Afolabi (2024) in relation to AI's growing role in Nigerian publishing education. The quantitative survey presented later in this paper examines precisely how strongly each of these implications is empirically supported among English students in the region, and how each relates statistically to AI-enabled copy and paste practice.

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts Self-Regulated Learning (SRL) theory, originally advanced by Zimmerman (2002), as its theoretical anchor. SRL theory conceives of learning as a cyclical process in which learners actively plan, monitor and evaluate their own cognitive and behavioural

engagement with a task, rather than passively receiving information or outsourcing effort to external agents. Applied to the writing process, self regulation requires students to set goals for a given piece of writing, select appropriate strategies for achieving those goals, monitor their progress through drafting and revision, and reflect critically on the quality of the final product. The theory is particularly apt for examining generative AI use among South-South Nigerian students because it foregrounds the question of who retains control over the cognitive work of writing: the student or the machine. SRL is preferred over alternative frameworks such as the Technology Acceptance Model or Social Cognitive Theory because those frameworks primarily explain whether and why a technology is adopted, whereas the present study is concerned with what happens to a specific competency, writing, once the technology has already been adopted; SRL supplies the goal setting, strategy selection, self-monitoring and reflection constructs needed to explain how outsourcing these very processes to generative AI erodes the writing competencies under investigation, making it the most directly applicable framework for this study.

Recent scholarship has extended SRL theory directly into the domain of AI assisted learning, arguing that generative AI can either strengthen or undermine self-regulation depending on how it is deployed within the writing process (Liu, 2026). Where students use AI tools to support specific phases of self-regulation, the technology can complement rather than displace the learner's own regulatory effort. However, when AI generated text is copied wholesale and submitted with minimal alteration, the cyclical process of goal setting, monitoring and reflection that defines self-regulated learning is effectively bypassed (Darvishi et al., 2024). This theoretical lens provides the constructs operationalised in the questionnaire used for the survey that follows, since each writing-skill subscale corresponds to a point at which the self-regulatory cycle is either supported or short-circuited by AI use.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative, descriptive survey research design, a design suited to eliciting and statistically analysing the self-reported practices, perceptions and competencies of a defined population using a structured instrument administered at a single point in time (a cross-sectional survey).

Population of the Study

The population comprised all undergraduate students in Departments of English and Literary Studies / English Language Education in federal universities across the six South-South states of Nigeria, namely Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo and Rivers. One federal university was purposively selected from each state on the basis of having an active, accredited Department of English, giving six participating institutions, namely University of Uyo (UNIUYO), Federal University Otuoke (FUOTUOKE), University of Calabar (UNICAL), Admiralty University of Nigeria (ADUN), Ibusa, University of Benin (UNIBEN), and University of Port Harcourt (UNIPORT). Departmental records put the combined population of 300-, 400- and 500-level English students across the six institutions at 1,850.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The sample size was determined using the Taro Yamane (1967) formula, $n = N / [1 + N(e)^2]$, where N is the population size (1,850) and e is the margin of error (0.05). This yielded a minimum sample size of 328.9, rounded up to 330. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed. At the first stage, the six universities were purposively selected as described above. At the second stage, the sample was proportionately (stratified) allocated across the six universities according to each institution's share of the total population, yielding allocations ranging from 48 to 62 respondents per institution, as shown in Table 1. At the third stage, simple random sampling (balloting) was used to select individual respondents from the 300-, 400- and 500-level class lists within each institution.

Table 1: Proportionate Allocation of Sample Size by State/Institution

S/N	State	Federal University	Population	Sample Allocated
1	Akwa Ibom	University of Uyo (UNIUYO)	318	57
2	Bayelsa	Federal University Otuoke (FUOTUOKE)	271	48
3	Cross River	University of Calabar (UNICAL)	302	54
4	Delta	Admiralty University of Nigeria (ADUN), Ibusa	347	62
5	Edo	University of Benin (UNIBEN)	324	58
6	Rivers	University of Port Harcourt (UNIPORT)	288	51
	Total		1,850	330

Research Instrument

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled the "Generative AI Copy-Paste Culture and Writing Skills Questionnaire" (GACPWSQ), developed by the researcher from constructs identified in the reviewed literature and the Self-Regulated Learning framework. The instrument comprised three sections. Section A elicited demographic information (gender, age, level of study, and institution/state). Section B contained items measuring six dimensions of AI-enabled copy and paste culture identified in the literature review, namely convenience driven adoption, erosion of independent composition ability, superficial citation and referencing practice, inadequate institutional regulation, the AI literacy gap, and blurring of authorship and intellectual ownership (the exact item count per dimension is not recoverable from the document: Table 3 reports only dimension-level means, not item-level breakdowns; by contrast, the separate 4-item AI literacy measure in Table 4 is the only construct in the instrument whose item count is stated). Section C contained items measuring the four core writing competencies, namely independent composition, paraphrasing ability, citation literacy, and authorship and intellectual ownership (likewise not recoverable, as Table 5 also reports only competency-level means; authors

should insert the exact per-competency item counts from the original instrument). All items in Sections B and C were rated on a four-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2) and Strongly Disagree (1); a mean item or subscale score of 2.50 and above was interpreted as indicating agreement or a high extent, and a mean below 2.50 as indicating disagreement or a low extent.

Validity of the Instrument

The face and content validity of the instrument were established by three experts, two from the Department of English and one from the Department of Educational Measurement and Evaluation at the author's institution, who reviewed the items for clarity, relevance and adequacy of coverage of the constructs under investigation. Their comments informed the removal, merger and rewording of several items before the instrument was finalised.

Reliability of the Instrument

The instrument was trial-tested on 30 undergraduate English students at a South-South university not included in the main study, and the responses obtained were subjected to Cronbach's alpha reliability analysis. The copy and paste culture subscale yielded a reliability coefficient of .79 and the writing skills subscale yielded a coefficient of .85, with an overall coefficient of

.82, indicating that the instrument was internally consistent and reliable for the study.

Method of Data Collection

Copies of the questionnaire were administered to sampled respondents both physically, with the assistance of trained research assistants at each institution, and through an online (Google Forms) version for respondents who preferred that format, over a four-week period. Respondents were briefed on the purpose of the study, assured of the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses, and participated voluntarily. Of the 330 copies administered, 300 were correctly completed and returned, representing a response rate of 90.9 percent; the remaining 30 were either not returned or were discarded on account of incomplete responses. Analysis in this paper is accordingly based on the 300 valid responses.

Method of Data Analysis

Research Questions 1 to 3 were answered using descriptive statistics, namely frequency counts, percentages, means and standard deviations, with a criterion mean of 2.50 applied as the decision rule. Research Question 4 and Hypotheses 1 to 4 were tested using Pearson Product Moment

Correlation and simple linear regression, to determine the strength, direction and statistical significance of the relationship between copy and paste culture and each of the four writing competencies. Hypothesis 5a was tested using an independent samples t-test, and Hypothesis 5b was tested using a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), to determine whether copy and paste culture scores differed significantly by gender and by state/institution, respectively. All hypotheses were tested at the .05 level of significance, and data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics, version 26.

Data Analysis and Results

This section presents the results of the survey of 300 English students across the six South-South states. Section 4.1 presents the demographic characteristics of respondents; Sections 4.2 to 4.4 present descriptive results for Research Questions 1 to 3; Section 4.5 presents the correlation and regression results for Research Question 4 and Hypotheses 1 to 4; and Sections 4.6 and 4.7 present the t-test and ANOVA results for Hypotheses 5a and 5b.

4.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 2: Demographic Distribution of Respondents (n = 300)

Variable	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	118	39.3
	Female	182	60.7
Age	16–20 years	84	28.0
	21–25 years	168	56.0
	26 years and above	48	16.0
Level of Study	300 Level	96	32.0
	400 Level	132	44.0
	500 Level	72	24.0
State/Institution	Akwa Ibom (UNIUYO)	52	17.3
	Bayelsa (FUOTUOKE)	46	15.3
	Cross River (UNICAL)	48	16.0

Variable	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
	Delta (ADUN)	51	17.0
	Edo (UNIBEN)	49	16.3
	Rivers (UNIPORT)	54	18.0

Table 2 shows that the majority of respondents were female (60.7 percent) and aged between 21 and 25 years (56.0 percent). Respondents were fairly evenly distributed across levels of study and across the six states, with no state contributing less than 15.0 percent or more than 18.0 percent of the sample, consistent with the proportionate stratified sampling technique adopted.

4.2 Research Question 1: Extent of Generative AI-Enabled Copy and Paste Practice

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation of Copy and Paste Culture Dimensions (n = 300)

Dimension	Mean	SD	Decision
Convenience driven adoption	3.24	0.68	Agree (High)
Erosion of independent composition ability	3.05	0.74	Agree (High)
Superficial citation and referencing practice	2.86	0.81	Agree (High)
Inadequate institutional regulation	3.11	0.70	Agree (High)
AI literacy gap	2.68	0.77	Agree (High)
Blurring of authorship and intellectual ownership	2.92	0.79	Agree (High)
Grand Mean	2.98	0.75	Agree (High)

Table 3 shows that all six dimensions of copy and paste culture recorded mean scores above the 2.50 criterion mean, with a grand mean of 2.98, indicating that English students in South-South Nigerian universities engage in generative AI-enabled copy and paste practice to a high extent. Convenience driven adoption (mean = 3.24) and inadequate institutional regulation (mean = 3.11) recorded the highest mean scores, while superficial citation practice (mean = 2.86) recorded the lowest, though still above criterion.

4.3 Research Question 2: Level of AI Literacy

Table 4: Mean and Standard Deviation of AI Literacy Items (n = 300)

Item	Mean	SD	Decision
I can distinguish reliable AI generated content from unreliable content	2.34	0.81	Disagree (Low)
I know how to properly acknowledge the use of AI tools in my written work	2.21	0.85	Disagree (Low)
I have received formal training on the ethical use of AI tools for academic writing	1.98	0.88	Disagree (Low)
I can critically evaluate AI generated text before incorporating it into my own writing	2.29	0.80	Disagree (Low)
Grand Mean	2.21	0.84	Disagree (Low)

Table 4 shows that all four AI literacy items recorded mean scores below the 2.50 criterion mean, with a grand

mean of 2.21, indicating a low level of AI literacy among English students in South-South Nigeria. Formal training on the ethical use of AI tools recorded the lowest mean score (1.98), suggesting that curricula in the sampled institutions have not yet caught up with the pace of student AI adoption.

4.4 Research Question 3: Level of Core Writing Competencies

Table 5: Mean and Standard Deviation of Writing Competencies (n = 300)

Writing Competency	Mean	SD	Decision
Independent composition ability	2.24	0.79	Low
Paraphrasing ability	2.11	0.83	Low
Citation literacy	2.34	0.77	Low
Authorship and intellectual ownership	2.44	0.81	Low
Grand Mean	2.28	0.80	Low

Table 5 shows that all four writing competencies recorded mean scores below the 2.50 criterion mean, with a grand mean of 2.28, indicating that English students in the sampled South-South universities self-report a comparatively low level of independent composition, paraphrasing ability, citation literacy and authorship and intellectual ownership. Paraphrasing ability recorded the lowest mean score (2.11), while authorship and intellectual ownership recorded the highest, though still below criterion (2.44).

4.5 Research Question 4 and Hypotheses 1–4: Relationship between Copy and Paste Culture and Writing Competencies

Table 6: Pearson Correlation and Simple Linear Regression of Copy and Paste Culture on Writing Competencies (n = 300, df = 298)

Writing Competency	r	R ²	β	t	p-value	Decision
Independent composition ability	-.52	.27	-.52	-10.44	<.001	Ho1 Rejected
Paraphrasing ability	-.57	.32	-.57	-11.81	<.001	Ho2 Rejected
Citation literacy	-.41	.17	-.41	-7.78	<.001	Ho3 Rejected
Authorship and intellectual ownership	-.44	.19	-.44	-8.41	<.001	Ho4 Rejected

Table 6 shows that copy and paste culture correlated negatively and significantly with all four writing competencies at the .05 level of significance. The relationship was strongest with paraphrasing ability ($r = -.57$, $R^2 = .32$), indicating that copy and paste culture accounts for approximately 32 percent of the variance in paraphrasing ability, and weakest, though still significant, with citation literacy ($r = -.41$, $R^2 = .17$). These R^2 values represent the proportion of variance statistically explained within the correlational model on this sample; because the design is cross-sectional and correlational rather than experimental, they should not be read as evidence that copy and paste culture causes the observed decline in writing competencies. Since all p-values are less than .05, the null hypotheses Ho1 to Ho4 were all rejected, confirming a statistically significant inverse relationship between generative AI-enabled copy and paste culture and each of the four core writing competencies examined in this study.

4.6 Hypothesis 5a: Copy and Paste Culture by Gender

Table 7: Independent Samples t-test of Copy and Paste Culture Scores by Gender

Gender	n	Mean	SD	df	t-value	p-value	Decision
Male	118	2.95	0.71	298	1.15	.251	Not Significant
Female	182	3.05	0.77				Ho5a Retained

Table 7 shows that male respondents recorded a mean copy and paste culture score of 2.95 (SD = 0.71) and female respondents recorded a mean of 3.05 (SD = 0.77). The obtained t-value of 1.15 was not significant at the .05 level, $t(298) = 1.15$, $p = .251$. The null hypothesis Ho5a was therefore retained, indicating no statistically significant difference in copy and paste culture by gender among the sampled respondents.

4.7 Hypothesis 5b: Copy and Paste Culture by State/Institution

Table 8: One-Way ANOVA of Copy and Paste Culture Scores by State/Institution

[Authors: verified for internal consistency using the values already reported in Table 8 — between-groups mean square ($5.32 \div 5 = 1.06$) divided by within-groups mean square ($167.30 \div 294 = 0.57$) yields $F = 1.87$, matching the reported $F(5, 294) = 1.87$ to within rounding, and the degrees of freedom sum correctly ($5 + 294 = 299 = \text{total df}$). The table is internally consistent.

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p-value
Between Groups	5.32	5	1.06	1.87	.098
Within Groups	167.30	294	0.57		
Total	172.62	299			

Table 8 shows that the one-way ANOVA comparing copy and paste culture scores across the six South-South states yielded $F(5, 294) = 1.87$, $p = .098$, which is not significant at the .05 level. The null hypothesis Ho5b was therefore retained, indicating no statistically significant difference in copy and paste culture across the six states surveyed, and suggesting that the pattern documented in this study is broadly uniform across the South-South zone rather than concentrated in any single state or institution.

Discussion of Findings

The survey findings presented above point to a paradox at the heart of generative AI integration in South-South Nigerian English departments: the very technology capable of enhancing writing instruction through instant feedback, grammar correction and idea generation is, according to the data collected directly from students, associated with a high extent of copy and paste practice (grand mean = 2.98) alongside a comparatively low level of the core writing competencies it is meant to support (grand mean = 2.28). This paradox aligns with the theoretical proposition, drawn from Self-Regulated Learning theory, that the pedagogical value of any technological aid is determined less by its inherent

capability and more by the degree of learner agency retained during its use (Zimmerman, 2002; Liu, 2026).

The significant negative correlations reported in Table 6 lend empirical weight to concerns raised in the literature review: higher levels of copy-and-paste culture were associated with lower reported levels of the four writing competencies, namely independent composition, paraphrasing ability, citation literacy and authorship and intellectual ownership, which declined in tandem, with the relationship strongest for paraphrasing ability. This finding is consistent with Darvishi et al. (2024), who similarly reported weaker self-regulation and poorer independent outcomes among students who habitually depend

on AI assistance. The low grand mean recorded for AI literacy (2.21), and particularly the very low mean recorded for formal training on ethical AI use (1.98), corroborates the institutional support gap documented among South-South library professionals by Akwang and Ebiwolate (2024), and suggests that the policy and curricular infrastructure needed to govern AI-assisted writing across the zone remains underdeveloped relative to the pace of student AI adoption.

The absence of a statistically significant difference in copy and paste culture by gender or by state/institution (Tables 7 and 8) indicates that the phenomenon documented here is not confined to a particular demographic group or a particular part of the South-South zone, but reflects a broadly shared pattern of AI-enabled academic practice among English students' region-wide. This uniformity strengthens, rather than weakens, the case for a zone-wide rather than institution-specific policy response. At the same time, the literature cautions against a wholly prohibitive response. Farrokhnia et al. (2024) and Yusuf et al. (2024) both emphasise that generative AI, when deliberately scaffolded into instruction, can strengthen rather than weaken writing competence. The evidence generated by this survey therefore supports a calibrated response for South-South Nigerian universities: one that neither ignores the disruptive potential of the copy and paste culture nor rejects generative AI outright, but instead repositions the technology as a supervised component of a self-regulated writing process.

Conclusion

This paper has applied a quantitative survey research design to examine generative artificial intelligence-enabled copy and paste culture and its implications for the academic writing competencies of English students in South-South Nigeria. Drawing on responses from 300 undergraduate English students across the six South-South states, the study found a high extent of copy and paste practice, a low level of AI literacy, and comparatively low levels of independent composition, paraphrasing ability, citation literacy and authorship and intellectual ownership, with copy and paste culture significantly and negatively correlated with all

four writing competencies. Drawing on Self-Regulated Learning theory, the paper has argued that the central danger of this culture lies not in the technology itself but in the erosion of learner agency that occurs when AI generated output substitutes for, rather than supports, the student's own cognitive engagement with the writing task. Because the pattern documented here did not differ significantly by gender or by state, the paper concludes that uncritical AI adoption is significantly associated with lower levels of core writing competencies among English the sampled English students across the participating institutions, and that a coordinated, zone-wide institutional response is warranted.

Recommendations

Arising from these findings, the paper recommends the following measures for South-South Nigerian universities and departments of English:

1. Institutions across the South-South zone should develop and clearly communicate explicit policies distinguishing acceptable AI-assisted writing support from impermissible AI generated submission, with corresponding guidance embedded in course syllabi.
2. Faculty should redesign writing assessments to include process based components, such as annotated drafts, reflective writing logs and in-class composition, that make the stages of a student's thinking visible and harder to fully delegate to AI.
3. AI literacy should be formally incorporated into English language curricula in South-South Nigerian universities, equipping students to use generative tools critically, including verifying AI generated claims, citations and interpretations before incorporation into their own work, given the low AI literacy grand mean (2.21) recorded in this study.
4. Lecturers in the region require targeted professional development in generative AI, given the documented gap in AI literacy among academic staff (Akwang &

- Ebiwolate, 2024), to enable them to model and enforce responsible use.
5. Given the significant negative relationship found between copy and paste culture and all four writing competencies, institutions should prioritise paraphrasing and independent composition support, the two competencies most strongly associated with copy and paste culture in this study.
 6. Because copy and paste culture did not differ significantly across the six states surveyed, interventions should be coordinated at the zone level, for example through a joint South-South universities AI-in-writing policy framework, rather than left to isolated institutional efforts; periodic follow-up surveys are recommended to track change over time.

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