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Exploring the Use of AI Tools for Academic Purposes among Libyan EFL Undergraduate Students at the Department of English, Sabratha University

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Abstract

The rapid integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools in higher education has changed the learning and teaching processes, especially for those learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). This study explores how undergraduate EFL students at Sabratha University in Libya use generative AI, how it helps them, and the challenges and ethical issues they face. It specifically looks at how these tools are used to support language learning, access study materials, and improve academic performance. Using a qualitative research design, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 21 EFL students from the third to eighth semesters. The collected data were then analysed using a thematic framework to identify core patterns in the students' experiences. The results indicate that while AI tools offer great learning benefits, students also face serious practical and academic challenges. On the positive side, AI acts as a personalised learning partner that helps students build their vocabulary, translate text, and improve their writing through instant feedback. On the negative side, students struggle with a dependency dilemma, where relying too much on AI threatens to decrease their critical thinking and original writing skills. This issue is complicated by concerns over accuracy, which force students to constantly double-check AI outputs due to frequent "hallucinations" or false information. Moreover, students face a lot of confusion about

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academic integrity and what counts as their own work, a problem made worse by a complete lack of university AI guidelines. In addition, local infrastructure issues, such as weak internet, high subscription costs, and gaps in basic digital skills, heavily limit how well students can use these tools.

The study concludes that although Libyan EFL students are actively using AI chatbots to help them learn, they are navigating this huge technological shift entirely on their own. Thus, for AI integration to be safe, ethical, and successful in the long term, universities must step in. This study highlights the urgent need for higher education institutions to create clear AI policies, invest in better technical infrastructure, and offer digital literacy training so students can use these tools effectively and responsibly.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Generative AI, EFL, Academic Integrity, Libyan Higher Education, Sabratha University, Digital Literacy.

استكشاف مدى توظيف أدوات الذكاء الاصطناعي وكيفية استخدامها للأغراض الأكاديمية لدى طلبة البكالوريوس الليبيين الدارسين للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية بجامعة صبراتة

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الملخص

أصبح للاندماج السريع لأدوات الذكاء الاصطناعي في التعليم العالي تأثير كبير على عمليتي التعلم والتعليم، لا سيما لدى متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، وتستكشف هذه الدراسة كيفية استخدام طلاب مرحلة البكالوريوس (تخصص لغة إنجليزية كلغة أجنبية) في جامعة صبراتة بليبيا للذكاء الاصطناعي ومدى الاستفادة منه، بالإضافة إلى التحديات

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والالتزامات الأخلاقية الأكاديمية التي تواجههم، كما تركز الدراسة على كيفية استخدام هذه الأدوات لدعم تعلم اللغة وفهم المواد الدراسية وتحسين الأداء الأكاديمي، وباعتماد تصميم بحثي نوعي، أُجريت مقابلات مع 21 طالباً وطالبة من الفصول الدراسية من الثالث إلى الثامن، وحُلِّلت البيانات المجمعة لاحقاً باستخدام إطار تحليلي موضوعي لتحديد الأنماط الأساسية في تجارب الطلاب.

وتشير النتائج إلى أنه في حين تُوفر أدوات الذكاء الاصطناعي فوائد تعليمية كبيرة للطلاب إلا أنهم يواجهون أيضاً تحديات عملية وأكاديمية حرجة؛ فمن الناحية الإيجابية، يعمل الذكاء الاصطناعي كشريك تعلم يساعد الطلاب على بناء حصيلتهم اللغوية من المفردات، وترجمة النصوص، وتحسين مهاراتهم الكتابية، أما من الناحية السلبية، فيعاني الطلاب من معضلة التبعية، حيث يؤدي الاعتماد المفرط على هذه الأدوات إلى إضعاف مهارات التفكير النقدي والقدرة على الكتابة الفعالة، وتزداد هذه المسألة تعقيداً بسبب المخاوف المتعلقة بالدقة، والتي تجبر الطلاب على التحقق المستمر من مخرجات الذكاء الاصطناعي نتيجة المعلومات الغير دقيقة المتكررة، وعلاوة على ذلك، يواجه الطلاب حالة من اللبس الشديد بشأن النزاهة الأكاديمية وهي مشكلة تفاقمت بسبب الغياب التام للإرشادات التوجيهية المنظِمة لاستخدام الذكاء الاصطناعي في الجامعة، بالإضافة إلى ذلك، فإن مشكلات البنية التحتية المحلية، مثل ضعف شبكة الإنترنت، وتكاليف الاشتراك المرتفعة، وقلة المهارات الرقمية الأساسية، تحُد بشكل كبير من مدى قدرة الطلاب على استخدام هذه الأدوات بفعالية.. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أنه على الرغم من أن طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في جامعة صبراتة يستخدمون بنشاط التطبيقات المدعومة بالذكاء الاصطناعي لمساعدتهم في عملية التعلم، إلا أنهم يخوضون هذا التحول التكنولوجي الضخم بمفردهم تماماً، وبالتالي، لكي يكون دمج الذكاء الاصطناعي آمناً ونزيهاً وناجحاً على المدى الطويل، تسلط هذه الدراسة الضوء على الحاجة الملحة لقيام مؤسسات التعليم العالي لإنشاء سياسات واضحة لاستخدام الذكاء الاصطناعي، والاستثمار في بنية تحتية تقنية أفضل، وتقديم التدريب على الثقافة الرقمية لتمكين الطلاب من استخدام هذه الأدوات بكفاءة ومسؤولية.

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الكلمات المفتاحية: الذكاء الاصطناعي، اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، النزاهة الأكاديمية، التعليم العالي الليبي، جامعة صبراتة، الثقافة الرقمية

Introduction

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into higher education has greatly increased scholarly and ethical discussions about its transformative influence in education and learning outcomes, making it a contemporary reality rather than a futuristic one (Dwivedi et al., 2023; Holmes et al., 2022). Within the field of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL), AI tools, such as generative LLMs, automated feedback systems, and intelligent language practice applications, have become effective tools that can provide personalised, and flexible assistance that supports and complements traditional teaching approaches (Ma and Chen, 2024; Qassrawi et al., 2024; Thiruchelvan and Zakaria, 2025). From enabling on-demand conversational practice to repeated writing feedback, these technological tools have the potential to completely transform the process of learning new skills (Alzubi, et al. 2025)

The majority of the previous studies, however, are focused on university settings in Western and East Asian academic environments, indicating a clear geographical bias in the current research. This focus creates significant gaps in our knowledge of the dynamics of AI adoption in underrepresented global regions, such as Africa and the Arab world. The case study of higher education in Libya is quite interesting. Baroud et al. (2024) argue that as the Libyan context is marked by post-conflict recovery, limited access to modern educational materials and ongoing infrastructure issues, there is a need for a localised analysis of how students use and navigate these new technologies. According to preliminary research on Libyan educators, teachers' opinions of AI's ability to improve EFL instruction are highlighted (Almashrgy and Alburki, 2024; Hadaga and Elfalfal, 2025), and support vocabulary enrichment is highly enhanced (Alkurtehe and Rathakrishnan, 2025). Nevertheless, there are few critical studies that concentrate on

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students' experiences: their actual usage patterns, perceived usefulness, and the effective academic and cognitive impacts at the undergraduate level, especially with regard to ethical boundaries and digital justice (Ahmad, 2025).

Through focusing on EFL undergraduates at Sabratha University, this study seeks to critically examine the perceived usefulness, contextual obstacles, and self-reported academic impact of various AI tools. This study aims to produce deep, context-specific insights through qualitative data. These insights can directly enhance EFL pedagogy, guide the development of institutional policies concerning AI governance, and lay the groundwork for future research in similar constrained educational contexts, especially by evaluating the need for critical digital literacy training (Abushafa, 2025; Darvin, 2025).

Literature Review

Language Learning and AI Tools: Effectiveness, Mediation, and Linguistic Differences

Integrating AI into second language acquisition (SLA) has been documented to be effective across key language skills. Adaptive language applications driven by AI showed positive effects on vocabulary development (Li et al., 2025; Singh and Sharma, 2024). Writing assistants and generative AI provide immediate, repeated feedback, enhancing lexical complexity and coherence (Thiruchelvan and Zakaria, 2025; Smith and Jones, 2021). Reading and vocabulary frequently demonstrate the strongest outcomes, and meta-analyses validate statistically significant achievements (Li et al., 2025). Nevertheless, for AI to be effective, the literature emphasises that teacher interaction and instructional design are of great importance (Abdalrahim and Elrasoul, 2025; Holmes et al., 2022). Since AI tools function best as scaffolding partners, teachers should make a framework to guide their strategic deployment (Abdalrahim and Elrasoul, 2025). Moreover, some studies in related language contexts, such as Arabic, highlight that current models struggle with linguistic nuance, including idiomatic expressions and

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cultural sensitivity, which indicates a need for context-specific refinement (Alkaabi and Almaamari, 2025; Sahrir et al., 2025).

Generative AI in EFL Writing: Effectiveness Versus Authorship and Depth

Generative AI, best represented by LLMs, has immensely changed the way that EFL learners receive writing assistance due to the significant advantages they provide in generating ideas, paraphrasing, and editing, which increases writing fluency and efficiency (Roe et al., 2024; Woo et al., 2024). Studies throughout the Arab world confirm students' use of grammar checkers and assignment writing tools (Sahrir et al., 2025). However, the risk of superficial engagement is a critical issue. Over-reliance might encourage surface-level edits at the expense of in-depth linguistic processing, which leads to undermining critical thinking and self-monitoring skills (Cotton et al., 2024; Marzuki et al., 2025). This conflict emphasises AI literacy, cautioning against unchecked reliance that de-emphasises creativity and originality (UNESCO, 2023). Serious academic integrity concerns increase because of the ambiguity regarding the legitimate use of AI tools, which can result in outright plagiarism or inaccurate citations in the AI-generated content if not controlled (Leong and Zhang, 2025; Milne, 2025; Kacena et al., 2024).

Affective Aspects: Motivation, Engagement, and the Digital Divide

Beyond performance, AI tools have an impact on the learner's affective and behavioural side. The speed and personalisation of AI feedback can reduce procrastination and delay, which would significantly increase learner motivation and interaction (Ma and Chen 2024; Zhang and Zhang, 2024). Nevertheless, this positive influence is affected deeply by the learner's current level of digital literacy, which might change to frustration and exclusion when learners have lower digital proficiency (Ateya and Mohammed, 2025; Silvhiany et al., 2021). As argued by Mohamed et al. (2025); and Milne (2025), even though AI can promote independence and autonomy, an over-reliance on technology might paradoxically lead

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to total dependence, when students hand over language assignments to AI tools, challenging the proof of authorship.

Contextualising AI Adoption: The Libyan Need

While studies from Saudi Arabia demonstrate strong student support for AI generative technologies for language education and learning (Allehyani et al., 2025), research within the broader Arab context consistently highlights persistent technical and ethical concerns (Rini and Nabhan, 2023). Particular structural obstacles are introduced by the Libyan setting. Based on faculty surveys conducted by Baroud et al. (2024); Hadaga and Elfalfal (2025), institutional barriers such as infrastructure deficiencies, unequal access, and lack of formal training hinder adoption significantly. In particular, challenges including high costs of implementation, inadequate technology infrastructure, and data security issues act as the main inhibitors to the successful application of AI (Emran and Elhony, 2025; Yahya et al., 2025; Adam, 2025). This systemic context indicates that student-level adoption patterns at Sabratha University are heavily influenced by resource availability and institutional uncertainty, making the study of student-centred barriers crucial (Alahwal et al., 2025).

Local Studies

Research on AI integration in EFL contexts has increased internationally. Nevertheless, there is still a notable lack of empirically grounded study in Libya's higher education system. This study expands the literature in the Libyan context as it immediately fills a gap in the existing body of local work, which is primarily exploratory in nature, and focused on learners' opinions rather than student-centred outcomes.

Hadaga and Elfalfal's (2025) study on EFL teachers' opinions of AI integration at the University of Benghazi is one of the most contextually significant contributions. According to their findings, most of the teachers surveyed indicated that they learned about AI through informal self-study rather than formal training, in spite of their generally positive attitudes toward AI tools, acknowledging

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their potential to support vocabulary instruction and personalise feedback. This indicates a structural weakness: organized professional development has not yet been incorporated into theoretical openness toward AI in Libyan universities. As a result, educational AI use is still uneven and mostly unguided, which creates the ideal setting for students to use AI tools without ethical boundaries or critical oversight.

This issue is supported by Baroud et al.'s (2024) institutional case study at the University of Zawia, which looked at educators' opinions on AI as a tool for content development. According to their findings, fruitful and meaningful adoption of AI-enhanced education is significantly hindered by deeply rooted structural obstacles, such as inadequate infrastructure, a lack of institutional policy, and unequal access to digital resources. Importantly, Baroud et al. place these difficulties in the larger perspective of Libya's broader post-conflict recovery context, arguing that the country's educational system still lacks the fundamental elements required for fair and long-lasting technology integration.

A more comprehensive institutional analysis of AI in Libyan higher education at the systemic level is provided by Alahwal et al. (2025) through outlining the opportunities and difficulties universities face when attempting to integrate AI-driven tools. According to their research, a major vulnerability is the lack of formal AI governance frameworks. They point out that in the absence of clear institutional regulations; individual teachers are forced to decide what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable AI use on an as-needed basis. Consequently, students receive conflicting or non-existent instructions regarding the ethical aspects of AI-assisted work. This policy deficiency directly impacts academic integrity.

Other studies, such as Emran and Elhony (2025) and Adam (2025) examine the infrastructure factor, demonstrating the practical limitations that set the Libyan context apart from the wealthier settings that predominate in international research. The main obstacles to successful AI adoption in Libyan institutions, according to Emran and Elhony (2025), are high implementation costs, unreliable technology infrastructure, and data security concerns.

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Similarly, Adam's descriptive field-based study highlights unequal and limited access to technology as a structural cause of educational inequality, arguing that the Libyan case cannot be directly compared to global models without taking these material constraints into consideration.

In terms of infrastructure and policy, Yahya et al. (2025) provide a macro-level perspective, charting the development of digital education in Libya and pointing out persistent challenges as essential roadblocks, such as unreliable connectivity, insufficient hardware supply, and weak institutional frameworks. Their work offers a crucial counterbalance to tales of simple digital transformation, highlighting the need for systemic investment rather than piecemeal tool use for sustainable AI adoption in Libya.

An investigation of AI's impact on Libyan learners' language development at the level of language-specific pedagogy was carried out by Alkurtehe and Rathakrishnan (2025) to examine AI use in vocabulary instruction. Although their results confirm that AI technologies can significantly help in lexical learning, they also raise issues regarding pedagogical reliance, pointing out that teachers' inconsistent integration strategies may restrict the breadth of students' language involvement. In the same line of thought, Abushafa (2025) evaluated the digital training needs of faculty at the University of Zawia and found substantial skill gaps that thwart even well-meaning attempts to use AI in the classroom.

When combined, these local studies indicate that Libyan EFL teachers and students are neither apathetic toward AI nor merely unable to interact with it. Instead, they are managing the adoption of technology in an environment that is structurally unprepared to facilitate it. However, the majority of the work to date is institutionally descriptive and faculty-focused. In-depth, student-centred empirical descriptions of how undergraduates truly view, use, and are impacted by AI tools in their day-to-day academic practice have not yet been extensively explored. Through a qualitative investigation at Sabratha University, the current study aims to fill this exact empirical gap, the lack of learner-perspective data.

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Research Questions

This study addresses the following research questions:

- What are the perceptions of Libyan EFL undergraduate students of the value and usefulness of AI tools for academic purposes?
- What challenges do students experience in using AI tools?
- What is the perceived influence of AI tools on students' academic performance, language development, and autonomous learning?

Methodology

This study used a qualitative research method to investigate how English as a Foreign Language (EFL) undergraduate students use artificial intelligence (AI) technologies for academic purposes, including how they view their advantages and deal with the difficulties that come with using them. Although previous international research has primarily relied on quantitative frameworks like the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology and the Technology Acceptance Model, these models may not adequately capture the lived experiences, contextual limitations, and complex viewpoints of students in developing and post-conflict educational environments like Libya (Baroud et al., 2024). Therefore, a qualitative method was deemed more appropriate because it allows for a deeper understanding of how students use AI technologies in their learning processes and consider ethical issues.

Research Design

The study used a qualitative descriptive design as it offers comprehensive, understandable descriptions of participants' experiences in language that closely mirrors their own viewpoints. Qualitative description is especially well-suited for applied educational research because it emphasizes clarity and integrity to the stated reality of participants, in contrast to more interpretive qualitative approaches. This approach also provided the flexibility required to investigate emergent patterns of use without imposing preconceived theoretical frameworks, given the quickly evolving

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nature of generative AI technology. In a setting where formal regulatory guidelines and institutional policies are still few, it also made it possible to pay close attention to how students modify AI tools to meet their academic demands (Alahwal et al., 2025).

Participants and Research Context

The study was carried out at Sabratha University at the English Department of the Faculty of Arts and Education. Given students' growing reliance on digital technologies despite the persistent infrastructure and educational problems that define the local context, this setting was chosen as a pertinent place for investigating AI adoption in higher education (Hadaga and Elfalfal, 2025).

Purposive sampling was used to choose participants, focusing on students who have a track record of using AI tools in educational settings. This technique guaranteed that the people chosen could provide insightful and significant viewpoints on the topic being researched. In order to ensure a diversity of viewpoints, the sample comprised students from both genders and various levels. Participants had to be enrolled as undergraduate EFL students at the English Department at Sabratha University, have completed at least one academic year (third semester or above), and have regularly or frequently used AI tools for academic or language-learning purposes, such as ChatGPT, Grammarly, or Google Translate. 17 students were selected for semi-structured interviews based on variation in self-reported AI usage intensity.

Data Collection Instrument

Semi-structured interviews were used to gather data because they are very effective in research in education (Burton et al., 2014). By using this strategy, the researcher was able to cover the main goals of the study while giving participants the opportunity to share more details about their experiences and bring up any pertinent topics. The interview protocol was structured around five thematic areas: patterns of AI use, perceived linguistic and academic benefits, challenges and barriers, strategies for verifying AI-generated information, and ethical perceptions of AI use in academic assignments. It was created in direct accordance with the research questions of the study.

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Data Collection Procedure

During the academic semester (Spring, 2026) in which the study was carried out, data was collected. Participants had the choice of attending face-to-face interviews at Sabratha University or participating via online audio calls due to practical and time limitations. Although English was the primary language used for the interviews, participants were allowed to switch to Arabic as necessary to better clearly communicate their opinions. This bilingual approach promoted more open discussion of difficult intellectual and ethical topics and helped lessen language anxiety, as argued by Dörnyei (2011).

With the participants' informed consent, each 25- to 30-minute interview was audio recorded. The researcher translated any Arabic comments into English after transcribing the recordings verbatim. All translations were then examined by a bilingual reviewer to confirm accuracy and guarantee faithfulness to the intended meanings.

Data Analysis procedure

Thematic analysis (TA) was used to analyse interview data in accordance with Braun and Clarke's six-phase methodology (2006). This method was chosen for its methodical yet adaptable approach to finding and analysing recurrent patterns in qualitative data. The following is how the analytical process went:

- Data familiarization: Before beginning any official coding, the researchers carefully read the transcripts several times to have a comprehensive grasp of the participants' answers.
- Creating first codes: Based on their content and applicability to the study topics, significant data segments were found and labelled.
- Looking for themes: After the first codes were examined, they were categorised into more general thematic groups that represented common patterns of meaning throughout the dataset.

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- Theme review: To guarantee internal coherence and sufficient foundation in the data, candidate themes were compared to the entire dataset.
- Defining and naming themes: Each finalised theme was given a clear, concise description and a descriptive label.
- Writing the report: The results were arranged into a logical analytical story, backed up by quotes from representative participants, and contextualized by citing pertinent literature.

Ethical Considerations

All stages of the investigation were conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines. Prior to data collection, the head of the Department of English at Sabratha University granted institutional consent. The goal of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their unrestricted freedom to discontinue participation at any time without consequences were all explicitly disclosed to each participant. Prior to the interview, each participant provided written informed consent.

All personally identifiable information was eliminated from the transcripts to ensure anonymity, and participants were given numerical codes or pseudonyms. Only the researcher had access to the password-protected files, including the audio recordings and transcripts. Given the uncertainty surrounding the employment of AI in academic contexts, special attention was paid to creating a nonjudgmental interview environment that encouraged participants to be candid and open about their practices and beliefs.

Data Analysis and Findings

This chapter presents the findings from the semi-structured interviews that looked at how undergraduate English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students use generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools for academic purposes. The study analysed interview responses from 21 students ranging from the 3rd semester to the 8th semester. Looking at this wide range of academic levels helps show the unique experiences of students in their middle semesters, who are still actively building their core language skills, alongside senior students in their final semesters who face much more advanced

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academic and graduation expectations. The data was examined using a thematic analysis approach to identify common patterns, beliefs, and behaviours across the group and focus on the depth of the students' personal experiences. The analysis revealed five main themes that describe how these EFL students interact with AI.

Educational Use and Language Learning Support

The main reason students turn to generative AI tools is that they act like a personal, on-demand tutor. All the interviewees use these tools to complete language tasks, break down difficult classroom materials, and study on their own.

When it comes to writing improvement and learning vocabulary, senior students in their final semesters often use AI to make advanced structural and stylistic changes to their drafts. For instance, S1 uses AI to simplify difficult grammar rules and gather ideas before starting to write, noting that they ask the tool to explain grammar simply or offer a creative starting point. S12 uses the software to rewrite awkward sentences and find better vocabulary choices, while S2 and S4 regularly use these tools for editing, paraphrasing, and improving overall sentence structures for their advanced assignments.

On the other hand, students in the earlier third or fourth semesters tend to use AI for basic, mechanical help. For example, S16 uses AI to build simple paragraph outlines and fix spelling mistakes, while S17 generates lists of synonyms to help build a basic vocabulary base. S1 highlights this vocabulary support by explaining that whenever they learn a new word, they ask the AI to provide its meaning and use it in a sentence to make it easier to understand and remember.

Reading and summarizing academic texts is another major area of use, especially since students often find university readings too difficult for their current English level. S3 and S8 regularly use AI to turn long book chapters and dense research articles into short, easy-to-read outlines. S3 shares that for reading, the tool explains difficult words and texts in a very simple way. S18 also notes that these AI explanations make difficult linguistic theories much easier to understand.

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Translation practices are also incredibly common across all levels. S5 and S6 describe translating technical terms and full paragraphs from Arabic to English to ensure their assignments make sense before submission, while S19 relies heavily on free translation tools to change difficult lecture slides into Arabic just to understand the core lessons.

Finally, while students generally find AI less helpful for speaking and listening than for reading and writing, some still find creative ways to practice. S7 generates interactive quizzes to test her own understanding, while S10 practices sentence patterns by studying conversational examples created by chatbots, explaining that it helps improve writing through corrections and speaking through example dialogues. S20 balances this by using text-to-speech features to practice pronunciation and chatting with AI systems to build speaking confidence in a private, stress-free environment.

Student Independence Versus Overreliance

As students include AI deeper into their daily study routines, a clear tension arises. While these tools help them produce better work quickly, they can also weaken the students' independent writing and thinking skills over time.

This creates a help-dependence trap where students recognise that while AI improves the quality of their assignments, it reduces their own mental effort at the same time. A clear example of this is shown when S11 remarked that it enhances their output, yet sometimes they no longer know how to write without it. This highlights a risky situation where a temporary learning aid quickly turns into a permanent psychological crutch.

The impact on learning and skill mastery is felt differently depending on how far along the students are in their degree, with eighth-semester and senior students generally being more aware of the long-term dangers. S9 and S10 warn that copying directly from AI without doing any personal work or fully understanding the topic is simply a form of academic dishonesty. S9 draws a clear line regarding authorship, stating that using AI is acceptable as long as the final work reflects their own ideas and they fully understand what was written.

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In contrast, lower-semester students are much more likely to become overly dependent without realizing the consequences. S19 admits that she often skips reading her textbook assignments entirely, choosing instead to read short AI summaries, a habit that inevitably harms her long-term language growth. Similarly, S16 notes that when technical issues block his access to AI, he loses all confidence and finds himself completely unable to write basic paragraphs on his own.

Checking Accuracy and Information Trust

A major problem identified by the students is that AI feedback can be unreliable and misleading. This theme looks at how students deal with AI "hallucinations", where the software creates false information, and the specific ways they check facts before turning in their work.

Students note that AI systems frequently give confusing or context-blind and sometimes completely wrong answers. S1 observes that AI sometimes gives answers that are too complex or unclear, or it fails to understand what the user really wants, resulting in wrong answers. S13 mentions that AI often fails to understand the specific local or academic context of an assignment, while S14 points out an even bigger academic danger, noting that AI tools sometimes invent completely fake book citations and research references that do not exist in reality.

To protect themselves from these mistakes, students use different checking methods depending on their academic experience. Students like S15 and S10 carefully compare chatbot answers with their university textbooks and course handouts, with S10 managing this by cross-checking the answers with the textbook or directly asking the teacher.

Other students look to external digital sources to verify their work. S8 cross-checks confusing grammar rules across several different websites, while S14 protects her research by searching for AI-generated sources on Google Scholar to make sure the articles actually exist. S9 adds that she verifies accuracy by checking results in published articles or educational videos.

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Meanwhile, students in the middle semesters rely more heavily on asking people for help. S3 and S21 handle confusing AI answers by directly asking their teachers or friends to explain the topic. S18 uses a mixed approach, checking her grammar textbook first and then asking her teacher if the AI explanation remains too complicated to solve alone.

Ethical Confusion and Defining Original Work

The interview answers show that students face a lot of confusion regarding the rules of using AI. Because the university does not have an official policy, students have to draw their own moral lines between fair assistance and academic dishonesty.

There is a sharp split between seeing AI as a helper versus a tool for cheating. Almost all students agree that using AI as a learning assistant is ethical, but using it to replace your own thinking is wrong. S1, S10, and S6 believe that using AI to explain a concept, translate a word, or suggest a synonym is perfectly fine. S10 explains that using AI for learning and understanding is acceptable, but copying answers directly is not, meaning the student should use AI strictly as a helper rather than a replacement for real effort.

When it comes to honesty and disclosure, some advanced students believe in being completely open about using technology. S9 suggests that students should write a short note at the end of their assignments stating exactly which AI tools they used and how they used them to maintain academic integrity.

However, the complete lack of official university rules creates an unstable environment. S18 and S20 point out that different teachers react in completely different ways. Some penalize any sign of digital help, while others do not notice or care at all. This lack of consistency leaves students throughout their semesters confused and anxious about what is allowed and what is forbidden. **Institutional Problems "Bad Infrastructure and Low Digital Literacy"**

A major issue for students is the lack of stable technology and basic infrastructure in their environment. These issues limit how well students can use technology and create an unfair divide between different members of the class.

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Students consistently blame infrastructural failures like electricity cuts and bad internet for disrupting their studies. S21 and S7 explain that they often cannot use AI for homework because the internet connection drops for hours at a time, both on campus and at home. S20 describes how regular power outages completely cut off his access to online study tools right when he is trying to prepare for upcoming exams, especially in hot summers and cold winters.

This divide is made worse by the factor of money and paid subscriptions. S2, S5, and S4 point out that while advanced versions of AI tools give much better language feedback, they require expensive paid subscriptions that university students simply cannot afford. S9 reflects on this financial challenge, noting that AI tools are developing quickly, and many of them have transitioned from being free to requiring payment. As a result, many are forced to use basic, free versions that make more mistakes.

There is also a major gap in language and digital skills. S8 and S10 state that AI answers are often too long, wordy, or text-heavy for them to understand easily. S10 comments that sometimes the explanations are just too difficult or confusing. S17 notes that when she types a prompt into an AI tool, it often replies with complex, high-level English that completely exceeds her current vocabulary, making the tool useless. These experiences show that students strongly feel they need formal university training to learn how to write proper prompts and critically analyse AI responses.

Discussion and Conclusions

The interview findings show that student experiences are shaped heavily by their unique local educational environment rather than abstract technology trends. Consistent with global trends, Libyan EFL students at Sabratha University exhibit high acceptance of AI tools for academic support (Li et al., 2025; Qassrawi et al., 2024). The positive views and perceived utility reported in broader global and regional contexts are immediately reflected in this high baseline of student acceptance (Dwivedi et al., 2023; Ma and Chen, 2024). The actualized experiences of these Libyan undergraduates, however, varied significantly due to severe localized limits, filling

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the exact empirical geographic gap identified by Ahmad (2025), despite the fact that foundational literature frequently assumes a frictionless digital landscape.

Helpful Tool Versus Cognitive Lazy Habits

The language benefits discovered in this study, such as vocabulary building, grammar checking, and text summarising, demonstrate that AI can be a highly valuable learning partner when used correctly. It helps students to study independently and organise their thoughts for writing. These particular affordances support claims made by Roe et al. (2024) and Woo et al. (2024) that Large Language Models (LLMs) greatly improve writing fluency, paraphrasing, and editing efficiency for EFL learners, as well as earlier findings by Alkurtehe and Rathakrishnan (2025) regarding AI's potential to improve lexical learning.

However, a deeper look reveals a major cognitive risk. The unstable balance between independence and dependence shows that using AI too much can easily hide a student's true lack of language skills. When lower-semester students use AI summaries to avoid reading their textbooks entirely, they choose fast task completion over deep, meaningful learning. This gives them a false sense of confidence. Even senior students face the risk of losing their skills if they rely on automation rather than authentic generation. In the long run, this habit hurts their critical thinking, language absorption, and independent writing abilities. This behavioural pattern directly supports the warnings issued by Cotton et al. (2024) and Marzuki et al. (2025), who argued that over-reliance promotes superficial involvement and surface-level modifications at the price of deep linguistic processing. Moreover, this cognitive trade-off exemplifies the paradox identified by Mohamed et al. (2025) and Milne (2025): rather than promoting learner autonomy, unregulated reliance on technology eventually leads to total academic dependence and puts on the line the formation of authentic authorship.

The Infrastructure Reality

The severe structural problems mentioned by the students, such as constant power cuts, unstable internet, and the high cost of advanced software, indicate that introducing technology into universities is

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not a smooth process. These material difficulties create a major divide between students. While wealthier students might afford better internet and advanced, paid AI programmes that offer accurate editing, less privileged students are left using unreliable, free software that is frequently interrupted by power failures. Therefore, student technology use cannot be judged by standardized Western expectations that assume every student has perfect internet and electricity. These findings back up the assessments by Yahya et al. (2025) and Emran and Elhony (2025), who found unstable connectivity, insufficient hardware, and high implementation costs as systemic barriers specific to the Libyan educational context. This study goes beyond mere description by demonstrating how material discrepancies generate internal divides among undergraduates, so validating Adam's (2025) contention that unequal digital access is a direct structural cause of educational inequality. As a result, this data confirms that student technology use cannot be judged using standardized Western expectations (Holmes et al., 2022), which assume continuous electricity and connectivity; rather, it must be evaluated using the localized, post-conflict recovery framework articulated by Baroud et al. (2024).

Policy Gaps and Ethical Confusion

The most urgent issue identified in the study is the absolute lack of clear university guidelines regarding AI. While students try to act honestly by setting personal boundaries using AI only to edit or get ideas rather than to copy directly, they are doing so entirely on their own without support. Because universities have not provided official rules, individual teachers are left to make their own subjective decisions. This leads to a confusing and unpredictable environment for students. This vacuum creates the type of unpredictable, ad-hoc academic environment predicted by Alahwal et al. (2025), who stated that a lack of formal institutional governance forces teachers to define acceptable use on an as-needed basis, directly threatening academic integrity and leaving students vulnerable to ethical confusion (Leong and Zhang, 2025; Milne, 2025).

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One teacher might accept AI-assisted work, while another might punish it as plagiarism. This confusion highlights the fact that teachers themselves often lack official training on how to handle AI, leaving them unprepared to guide their students toward responsible, ethical, and critical digital habits. This pedagogical tendency is closely related to the empirical findings of Hadaga and Elfalfal (2025), who found out that Libyan educators mostly learn AI through informal self-study rather than institutionalized professional development. Because institutions have failed to address systematic faculty training deficiencies (Abushafa, 2025), students must navigate these technologies without institutional support. This emphasizes the urgent need for systematic critical digital literacy training for both students and faculty, as advocated by Darvin (2025) and Abushafa (2025), to ensure that technology serves as an instructional scaffold (Abdalrahim and Elrasoul, 2025) rather than a source of academic and ethical division.

Conclusion and Practical Recommendations

The findings of this study indicate that undergraduate EFL students are neither completely against AI nor entirely dependent on it. Instead, they are trying to navigate a major technological shift on their own, inside a university system that currently lacks the infrastructure and the rules to support them properly. Right now, students frequently use AI as a quick shortcut to finish assignments rather than as a tool for deep, long-term language learning.

To fix these issues, universities must stop using old, punitive methods that simply try to ban technology. Instead, they need to create proactive institutional strategies. First, universities must quickly create clear, realistic guidelines that tell students exactly how and when they are allowed to use AI tools for their graded homework assignments. Second, they should introduce special practical workshops for both students and teachers. These workshops should teach students how to write high-quality prompts, how to check AI for mistakes or fake references, and how to openly state when they have used digital tools. Taking these steps will

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ensure that AI remains a helpful learning guide that builds up, rather than destroys, the independent writing skills of the students.

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