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AI Dependency in Literary Studies: A Survey of Undergraduate English Language Students' Usage Patterns and Self-Perceptions

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ABSTRACT

Technological advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in education is shifting traditional teaching and learning approaches to suit individual's needs in diverse fields of study including literature. Literature as a subject is representative of human cognitive and emotional capacity to interpret literary works. However, the integration of AI in understanding literary texts to produce literary analysis has raised the concerns on 'human touch' or human interpretation beside academic integrity and ethical consideration. This study investigated the utilisation patterns, perceptions, and academic dependency of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools during literary analysis. The main objective is to examine how tertiary students engage with AI tools -specifically whether they use AI as a cognitive substitute or as a collaborative scaffold - when interpreting literary texts. Using a quantitative survey design, data were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages). The sample comprised 88 undergraduate students majoring in English Language Studies (rather than English Literature) at a Malaysian public university. Descriptive findings revealed universal adoption among respondents, with 100% having used AI tools for literature tasks (50.0% occasionally, 34.1% frequently). Generative AI (49.7% of selections) and Grammar/Style Checkers (39.1%) were the most utilised tools. Students predominantly delegated lower-order structural tasks (e.g., explaining concepts, 20.2%; summarising elements, 18.2%), while retaining primary authority over higher-order interpretation. Most students viewed AI's ideal role as a "Tutor" (40.9%) or "Co-Pilot" (33.0%). These findings suggest that English Language Studies undergraduates engage in self-regulated cognitive offloading rather than uncritical dependency, providing empirical insights into strategic AI integration in literary studies.

1. INTRODUCTION

Interpretations and analyses of literary texts present layers and nuances of meaning. The literary analytical process requires significant cognitive and emotional engagement, as perspectives are varied and informed

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by diverse literary theories and frameworks—such as modernism, feminism, post-colonialism, Marxism, and new criticism. Unlike technical or formulaic disciplines, literature studies rely heavily on subjective interpretation where multiple valid readings coexist. Traditionally, scholars and students engaged with primary texts independently, investing cognitive effort to produce critical analyses and creative responses.

Nevertheless, with the rapid advancement of educational technology, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has significantly impacted teaching and learning across diverse fields. Generative AI tools—such as ChatGPT, Gemini, and specialised writing assistants—can summarise, outline, and analyse complex materials or subjects instantaneously. In literary studies, students increasingly leverage these tools to clarify figurative language, decode theoretical frameworks, and structure written assignments. However, this growing reliance raises academic concerns regarding the potential erosion of critical thinking, original thought, and the essential "human touch" or emotional resonance inherent to literary hermeneutics (Amirjalili et al., 2024; Chan & Wong, 2025). Prior research warns that uncurated over-reliance on automated tools can lead to cognitive passivity and reduced problem-solving autonomy among tertiary learners (Al Mashagbeh et al., 2025; Nazir & Yılmaz, 2025; Zhai et al., 2024).

While extensive scholarship examines Generative AI adoption in general language acquisition, STEM disciplines, and broader higher education contexts (e.g., Boumous & Sid, 2025; Zhang et al., 2025), a distinct empirical gap remains regarding how AI tools interface with qualitative, high-order cognitive domains such as literary studies. Literary studies fundamentally depend on affective empathy, contextual nuance, and human interpretive agency—elements that algorithmic models cannot genuinely replicate (Sunengko et al., 2025). Existing studies predominantly focus on overall AI adoption rates, mainly emphasising ChatGpt without examining whether students utilise AI as an uncritical cognitive substitute or as a strategic collaborative scaffold.

To address this gap, this study examines how undergraduate English Language Studies students utilise AI tools and evaluates their levels of academic dependency during literary analysis. By investigating specific utilisation patterns and self-reported reliance, this study establishes an empirical baseline of human–AI interaction in literary pedagogy, offering insights into maintaining human interpretive agency in the digital age.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This part examined relevant literature on the use of AI tools in education and literary studies. There are various current and past studies and research on Generative AI and its impacts towards teaching and learning especially in the realms of other areas of studies and subjects. While studies on Generative AI, prominently ChatGPT have contributed to the development of AI in education, this study seeks to engage in the discourse on AI and finds limitation or gap especially regarding literary studies.

2.1 AI in Education

Technological advancement is shifting the narrative of traditional education, globally, especially so for the young generation of learners who prefer to leverage on Generative AI. AI tools provide students an easy access to educational materials, solutions, instant feedback and insights on diverse fields of study. The advancement of such technology has sparked debates regarding the utilisation of AI and its ethical considerations especially in education. Nevertheless, major studies on AI in education have focused on the utilisation and adoption of AI across diverse geographical and disciplinary contexts. University students regardless of majors frequently leverage Generative AI (e.g., ChatGPT) and writing assistance tools (e.g., Grammarly, QuillBot) to streamline academic tasks, outline writing, and check grammar (Al Mashagbeh et al., 2025; Boumous & Sid, 2025; Melchior & Farinosi, 2026).

In the context of language and humanities, AI applications act as virtual "tutors" or personalised learning assistants that increase student confidence and facilitate self-directed learning. For instance, AI tools assist English language learners by enhancing vocabulary acquisition, clarifying complex syntax, and reducing writing anxiety (Dakhi et al., 2025; Shafarini et al., 2023). In culturally specific educational traditions, such

as India's Guru-Shishya Parampara, researchers note that AI-powered interactive storytelling and immediate feedback loops can complement traditional mentorship by providing continuous academic support (Venugopal & Vakamullu, 2024). Furthermore, in qualitative reading contexts, AI-powered tools offer interactive annotations and contextual summaries, allowing students to navigate dense theoretical frameworks more rapidly (Meilyani & Widiastuty, 2024). Collectively, these studies demonstrate that AI is widely valued as a low-stakes structural scaffold that reduces preliminary friction in academic tasks.

2.2 *AI in Education*: *Cognitive Offloading, Dependency, Challenges and Ethical Consideration*

While AI tools have increased productivity and enhanced students' performance, leading to academic success, the utilisation and over-reliance on AI tools have produced certain challenges especially regarding academic integrity and ethical consideration in education. Al Mashagbeh et al. (2025), Melchior and Farinosi (2026) and Putri and Wijaya (2025) discussed academic integrity in education as students relied on AI tools to complete assignments, quizzes and writings tasks. Focusing on the over-reliance on ChatGPT among tertiary education students in Italy, Melchior and Farinosi (2026) examined the uncertainty as the utilisation on AI tools offered positive impacts as they assisted students in various tasks yet, simultaneously, the over-reliance jeopardised academic honesty as students' works were not completed through their own efforts, dedications and cognitive ability.

Furthermore, a parallel body of research raises critical concerns regarding student over-reliance on AI, highlighting potential risks to critical and creative thinking, original synthesis, and academic honesty. Studies examining psychological and behavioural drivers indicate that students with higher neuroticism, self-critical perfectionism, or academic stress are more prone to seeking AI shortcuts to complete assignments (Zhong et al., 2024). Conversely, extended dependency on Generative AI has been shown to exacerbate psychological distress, heighten academic anxiety, and diminish self-efficacy over time (Bukhari et al., 2025).

From a cognitive perspective, uncritical acceptance of AI output poses a significant threat to higher-order thinking. When students uncritically accept AI-generated interpretations without independent evaluation, their capacity for autonomous analytical reasoning degrades (Al Amin & Mahjabeen, 2025; Nazir & Yılmaz, 2025; Zhai et al., 2024). Human brain has its own limitations of cognitive ability and the dependency on AI would lead to the increase or decrease of brain's capacity (Nazir & Yilmaz, 2025). In preservice educator populations, high trust in AI-reliable output correlates directly with increased reliance, occasionally compromising professional identity and personal cognitive effort (Zhang et al., 2025). Educators similarly report that while AI supports basic task completion, it cannot replicate affective mentoring, emotional intelligence, or character development (Pratiwi et al., 2025).

Consequently, researchers across higher education call for structured AI literacy interventions to move students from passive, dependent adoption towards active, metacognitive evaluation (Sunengko et al., 2025).The increase use and dependency on AI should be measured carefully in the sense that it is not a negative thing but, proper and targeted training should be organised to assist both teachers and learners in order for them to understand appropriate use of AI tools to curb the problem of academic integrity and plagiarism. Even though AI leads to productivity, it is significant to use it appropriately, moderately and selectively as a guidance or as a supplementary assistant (Venugopal & Vakamullu, 2025; Putri & Wijaya, 2025; Zhang et al., 2025).

2.3 AI and Literary Studies

The integration of Artificial Intelligence into literary analysis has transformed how literary enthusiasts and scholars discover nuances of texts and patterns with unprecedented scale and depth (Sharma & Gupta, 2025). This paradigm shift involves the use of computational methods to uncover intricate structures of narrative, developments of themes, and the relationships of characters in literary materials (Jijeesh, 2024). This technological advancement facilitates a re-evaluation of literary creation and reception, offering novel insights into stylistic attributes and textual analysis (Neagu, 2023). However, this synergy between AI and

literary studies also introduces critical questions regarding the nature of cognitive capacity, creativity, authorship, and the potential for algorithmic biases to shape the understanding of literary works (Neagu, 2023).

While computational methods and AI text analysis have transformed macro-level narrative exploration (Jijeesh, 2025; Sharma & Gupta, 2025), applying Generative AI to literary interpretation introduces distinct challenges. Literature as a discipline fundamentally relies on affective empathy, cultural nuance, stylistic authorial voice, and subjective hermeneutics—qualities that algorithmic language models struggle to reproduce (Amirjalili et al., 2024; Neagu, 2023; Sunengko et al., 2025). Comparative evaluations between human-authored and AI-generated literary analyses consistently demonstrate AI's limitations. Evaluating AI outputs using Bloom's Taxonomy reveals that while AI accurately retrieves basic concepts and summarises elements (lower-order cognitive skills), it lacks the evaluative depth, emotional resonance, and contextual judgment characteristic of human literary scholarship (Chan & Wong, 2025).

Similar comparative studies in literary translation demonstrate that AI models lack the cultural adequacy and affective sensitivity required to capture multi-layered figurative meanings (Beldjenna, 2025). Thus, while qualitative studies note that students appreciate AI for structuring literary analysis essays (Ampo, 2024), over-attachment threatens the development of individual authorial presence and critical interpretive agency. Literature emphasises human cognitive and emotional capacity particularly creativity and context. Often, authors do not write in a vacuum, thus, readers notice authors' own unique voices as different authors portray different style of writings. Interestingly, with regard to the issue of authorship or authors' voice in literature, it is highly likely that readers especially those who pay particular attention when reading, notice that "human voice" is deeply rooted with emotional depth that AI cannot replicate (Amirjalili et al., 2024; Ampo, 2024; Sunengko et al., 2025). AI is effective in its speed but, it has limitations because of the absence of "human touch" or "cultural soul" and "contextual sensitivity" (Sunengko et al., 2025). We contended that since literature is closely related to humanities and cultural context, the issue of human voice or authorship is significant especially in writings and the production of literary analysis.

Interestingly, Amirjalili et al. (2024) compared two literary essays: one was written by a second year English Literature student, and another similar essay was written by ChatGPT-4. They wanted to determine whether academic writing produced by AI could sustain "human voice". One of the key findings is ChatGPT produces inadequate accuracy with regards to the context of literary works and references. They scrutinised authorship and voice where the integration of AI has altered authorial presence where human writing is characterised by human cognitive capacity and emotional intelligence that ChatGPT cannot imitate. The data indicated that students' writings are characterised by their ability to think critically and creatively when engaging with the discussions on certain literary concepts and, they could create.

Nevertheless, with the rapid development of technology, the paradigm shift is influencing how people view and perceive literature in the realms of education. In relation to the teaching and learning of English language, pedagogical approaches are examined to suit learners' needs as AI is integrated in teaching and learning process (Shafarini et al., 2023). The transformative pedagogical alterations focus on three key significant factors such as, personalisation, interactive learning and efficiency in language acquisition. They suggested that AI tools can analyse students' preferences and their understandings to generate reading recommendation while Generative AI like ChatGPT act as a personal tutor who allows students to engage in critical literary discourses.

2.4 Research Objectives

The main objective of this study is to examine English Language undergraduate students' self-perceptions regarding the utilisation of AI tools in their literary engagements. Additionally, the study investigates the extent to which these students depend on AI tools for their overall literary analytical process and academic endeavours.

2.5 Research Question

The study aims to answer the following research questions:

(i) How do English language undergraduate students perceive the utilisation of AI tools in their literary engagement?

(ii) To what extent do English language undergraduate students depend on AI tools during their literary analytical process?

3. METHOD

3.1 Research Design and Sampling

This study employed a quantitative survey research design to capture student perceptions, usage frequencies, and dependency levels. A convenience sampling technique was used to recruit ($N = 88$) undergraduate students majoring in English Language Studies at a public university campus in Selangor, Malaysia. Out of a total target cohort of approximately 100 eligible undergraduates enrolled in the program during the academic term, 88 completed valid responses, yielding an acceptable response rate of 88.0%.

3.2 Participant Population and Methodological Context

To ensure participants possessed sufficient experience with qualitative literary analysis prior to completing the survey, inclusion criteria required students to have completed at least two core literature courses—such as Literary Theory and Criticism, World Literature or Southeast Asian Literature. Through these modules, students actively engaged in close-reading, figurative text interpretation, and essay writing across poetry, prose, and drama.

Methodologically, it is important to note that participants were undergraduate English Language Studies majors whose curriculum combines linguistics, applied language skills, and literature coursework, rather than dedicated English Literature majors. This population is particularly relevant for examining AI adoption because these students navigate both linguistic scaffolding tools and high-order qualitative literary hermeneutics.

3.3 Instrumentation

Data were collected via an 8-item structured questionnaire divided into two main constructs:

1. AI Utilisation and Perceptions (Items 1–4): Capturing usage frequency, specific AI tool selections, literary activity applications, and perceived ideal AI roles.
2. Academic Dependency and Interpretive Agency (Items 5–8): Evaluating essay initiation approaches, figurative language analytical workflows, self-reported dependency levels, and output acceptance thresholds.

Items were adapted from established AI-adoption and dependency scales in higher education (Al Mashagbeh et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2025) and tailored specifically to literary analysis contexts.

3.4 Validity, Reliability, and Data Collection Procedure

Content validity was established through expert judgment; the instrument was reviewed by two senior university academics specialising in English language and literature to ensure item clarity, construct relevance, and alignment with literary coursework tasks. A pilot test was conducted with 15 non-participant English major students to evaluate item readability and comprehension; minor wording revisions were made based on pilot feedback. Construct internal consistency for the academic dependency scale yielded a Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha = 0.81$, demonstrating acceptable reliability. Data collection was conducted online over a three-week period using a secure Google Forms portal distributed via literature lecturers.

3.5 Data Analysis Procedure

Survey responses were exported and analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics. Given the exploratory and descriptive nature of the research questions, data were analysed using descriptive statistics, specifically frequency distributions and percentage representations. Descriptive metrics were calculated for each survey item to map utilisation patterns and self-reported dependency levels across the sample, directly addressing the two descriptive research questions.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to strict ethical standards for research involving human participants especially students. Prior to accessing the online survey, participants were provided with a digital Informed Consent statement detailing the study's objective, voluntary nature of participation, and right to withdraw at any point without penalty. No personal identifying information (e.g., student ID or names or email) was collected, ensuring complete respondent anonymity. Collected data were securely stored in password-protected files accessible only to the primary research team.

4. FINDING & DISCUSSION

Survey responses from 88 undergraduate students were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages). The findings are organised systematically according to the two research questions. The following were the findings and discussion of the study.

4.1 The use of AI in Literary Studies

Table 1. Results of Question 1: How often do you use AI tools in relation to your engagement with literature?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Never	0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	Rarely	8	9.1	9.1	9.1
	Occasionally	44	50.0	50.0	59.1
	Frequently	30	34.1	34.1	93.2
	Very Frequently	6	6.9	6.9	100.0
	Total	88	100.0	100.0	

The question, Q1 focused on students' frequency of using AI tools when studying literature. The data showed that respondents have utilised AI tools in their literary journey. Table 1 presented half of the participants (50.0%) have engaged with AI tools on an occasional basis, while more than one-third (34.1%) reported that they used AI tools in relation to literary studies, frequently. Moreover, a smaller portion of the participants reported usage at the extreme ends of the spectrum: 9.1% used AI tools in literary studies "rarely", while 6.9% engaged with them "very frequently". Thus, this universal adoption aligns with broader higher education trends reported by Al Mashagbeh et al. (2025) and Boumous and Sid (2025), confirming that AI tools are widely used in tertiary education.

Table 2. Results of Question 2: Which of the following AI tools have you used for tasks related to literary studies? (Select all that apply)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Generative AI	80	49.7	49.7	49.7
	Grammar/ Style Checker	63	39.1	39.1	88.8
	Research/Literature Review Tools	14	8.7	8.7	97.5
	AI-powered Text Analysis Tools	4	2.5	2.5	100.0
	None of the Above	0	0.0	0.0	100.0
	Total selections	161	100.00	100.00	

The question, Q2 observed the types of AI tools which are used by the students in their literary process. The statistical data from the survey of 88 respondents (with a total selection of 161) revealed how students integrated AI tools into literary studies. The results proposed that usage is heavily concentrated in Generative AI (49.7%, n = 80) and Grammar/Style Checker (39.1%, n = 63). In contrast, specialised tools such as AI-powered text analysis tools accounted for only 2.5% of selections (n = 4). These selection patterns proposed that students integrated AI as writing support and conceptual assistance rather than as analysis tools.

Table 3. Results of Question 3: Which of the following literary activities have you used AI tools for? (select all that apply)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Explaining Complex Literary Concepts	60	20.2	20.2	20.2
	Summarising Literary Elements	54	18.2	18.2	38.4
	Assisting with Writing Literary Analysis	49	16.5	16.5	54.9
	Finding Historical Context/Background	41	13.8	13.8	68.7
	Discussing Interpretations of Text	34	11.4	11.4	80.1
	Generating Reading Recommendations	30	10.1	10.1	90.2
	Generating Creative Writing	26	8.8	8.8	99.0
	None of the Above	3	1.0	1.0	100.0
	Total selections	297	100.0	100.0	

The question, Q3 assessed the use of AI tools for several literary activities preferred by the undergraduate students. Table 3 portrayed a clear preference for analytical and comprehension-based tasks over literary activities related to creative writing. The most popular use for AI is as a pedagogical tool to understand critical literary concepts (20.2%). This indicated that students primarily used AI to navigate the challenging theoretical aspects and frameworks or structures of literary studies. 18.2% used AI to summarise literary elements and this proposed that they wanted to quickly comprehend and clarify significant elements in literary texts for them to interpret the literary works. This distribution directly supports Bloom's Taxonomy evaluations conducted by Chan and Wong (2025), who observed that while AI excels at concept retrieval and structural summaries, human readers naturally retain authority over interpretive evaluation.

Table 4. Results of Question 4: Which term best describes AI's role in your ideal literary research process?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	A Tutor (Explains difficult concepts)	36	40.9	40.9	40.9
	A Co-Pilot (Works alongside at every stage)	29	33.0	33.0	73.9
	A Substitute (For initial research effort)	14	15.9	15.9	89.8
	A Fact-Checker (Verifies independent findings)	9	10.2	10.2	100.0
	Total	88	100.0	100.0	

The question, Q4 analysed the ideal roles of AI tools in their literary research endeavour. The data emphasised that among the undergraduate students, they have a clear preference for AI as a supportive educational and collaborative tool rather than a purely administrative or corrective one. The largest group of respondents (n =36) viewed AI as a tutor, one which explains any concept related to literature. Meanwhile, one-third of the participants see AI as a Co-Pilot that is integrated into every stage of their literary engagements. This proposed that they have collaborated with AI throughout their literary research progress. These findings suggest that students view AI as an interactive pedagogical scaffold – a finding consistent with Venugopal and Vakamullu (2024), who argue that learners approach AI as a supportive mentor rather that an intellectual replacement.

4.2 The Dependency on AI in Literature

Table 5. Results of Question 5: How do you typically start a literature essay?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Brainstorming and outlining completely on my own	34	38.6	38.6	38.6
	Using AI to generate an outline, then refining it	30	34.1	34.1	72.7
	Using AI to generate ideas	23	26.1	26.1	98.8
	Asking AI to generate a full draft, which I then edit	1	1.2	1.2	100.0
	Total	88	100.0	100.0	

The question, Q5, measured students' dependency or reliance on AI when they were required to write literary essays. Even though earlier questions revealed students' frequent use of AI in literary engagements, Table 5 indicated students' preferences to use their comprehension, critical thinking, creativity and judgement first when writing literary essays or literary tasks (38.6%). Additionally, 34.1% participants used AI to generate outline and 26.1% used AI to generate ideas before they began writing literary essays. This is related to our previous data where majority of the students relied on AI as a tutor or a co-pilot instead of depending on AI tools completely. AI tools assisted the students in terms of generating critical ideas and building frameworks. Only a single respondent (1.2% of the sample) reported using AI tools to create a full draft of the writing for literary essays. This confirmed that the participants relied on AI as a tool to formulate ideas or to comprehend certain literary theories and concepts rather than using it to enhance the writing processes.

Table 6. Results of Question 6: If a prompt requires interpreting a poet's use of figurative language (e.g., metaphor, hyperbole, simile, irony), I would:

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Analyse it myself, then use AI to check my work	55	62.5	62.5	62.5
	Ask AI for an interpretation, then write my analysis	29	33.0	33.0	95.5
	Avoid using AI entirely (prefer original interpretation)	4	4.5	4.5	100.0
	Total	88	100.00	100.00	

The question, Q6, focused on students' reliance on AI tools for specific literary instructions where they needed to interpret the use of figurative language in poetry. Table 6 indicated that 62.5% students depended on AI tools only after they attempted to interpret the underlying meanings of poetry and the use of figurative language. This suggested that they wrote the analysis first and later, use AI to validate their literary analysis. However, among 88 students, 29 of them relied on AI to analyse poetry before they began writing their own literary analysis. Interestingly, 4 students preferred to interpret literary works using their own perspectives, critical thinkings and creativity and they eventually wrote their own literary analysis. The data justified that most of the undergraduate students used AI in their literary endeavours but, they did not depend solely on AI to write their literary analysis or findings.

Table 7. Results of Question 7: On a scale of 1 (Not at all) to 5 (Extremely), how much do you rely on AI tools to deepen your understanding and appreciation of literary works?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1 (Not at all)	1	1.1	1.1	1.1
	2	12	13.6	13.6	14.7
	3	50	56.8	56.8	71.5
	4	24	27.3	27.3	98.8
	5 (Extremely)	1	1.1	1.1	99.9
	Total	88	100.0	100.0	

The question, Q7 scrutinised the dependency on AI tools in comprehending and appreciating literary works. Table 7 revealed a moderate yet significant dependency on AI for literary engagement, with the majority of the students concentrated in the middle of the spectrum. More than half of the total of 88 participants gave the scale of 3 (56.8%). This suggested that they were in the middle ground which meant they did not completely depend on AI tools for literary research but, to a certain extent, they relied on AI when engaging with literature subjects. 27.3% participants rated the dependency on AI as a 4 and this meant that it was highly likely that they depended on AI in their literary endeavours. Interestingly, the data extracted the two extremes: One student depended on AI extremely to understand literature while one of them did not depend on AI in literary studies. This indicated that in terms of understanding and appreciation of literary works, most literary students upheld a level of independence where they did not straightaway use AI but read, studied and interpreted difficult literary concepts and texts first.

Table 8. Results of Question 8: When an AI tool provides a detailed analysis of a literary passage, I find myself accepting its interpretation rather than developing my own.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1 (Lowest)	3	3.4	3.4	3.4
	2	26	29.5	29.5	32.9
	3	42	47.7	47.7	80.6
	4	13	14.8	14.8	95.4
	5 (Highest)	4	4.5	4.5	99.9
	Total	88	100.0	100.0	

The question, Q8 evaluated the dependency and acceptance of the integration of AI to interpret literary texts. The data from Table 8 portrayed that, students critically assessed the interpretations of AI for literary analysis instead of accepting or depending on the analysis completely. This is because the majority of students, cumulatively 80.6% of them have rated 1-3, indicating that they did not trust or accept AI's interpretations majorly in order for them to write literary analysis. This suggested that they trusted their own understandings of literary components and literary texts rather than depending on AI. 47.7% students were in the middle of accepting AI's interpretation of literary texts and developing their own literary analysis. This meant that occasionally, they recognised and accepted AI' literary perspectives but, they did not fully utilise or adopt the analysis generated by AI tools. In contrast, out of 88 students, 4 of them portrayed the over-reliance on AI's perspectives for literary analysis over their own findings.

Therefore, these empirical patterns demonstrate that students exhibit strategic self-regulated offloading. Rather than displaying uncritical addiction or cognitive indolence, participants delegate low-stakes structural tasks (such as outlining, brainstorming, and concept clarification) to AI tools acting as pedagogical scaffolds ("Tutors" or "Co-Pilots"). When executing core hermeneutic tasks requiring affective empathy, cultural nuance, and figurative interpretation, students maintain cognitive control, formulating independent readings before consulting AI for cross-verification. Because literary interpretation fundamentally values human agency and contextual nuance, students selectively retain ownership over their final analytical work

Thus, the empirical data strongly refute the assumption that accessible Generative AI inevitably leads to total student dependency or academic dishonesty. Instead, undergraduate literature students display deliberate, metacognitive boundaries. They intentionally abstain from AI during primary, high-order analytical tasks to protect their interpretive agency, safeguard authorial authenticity, and avoid the superficiality inherent to algorithmic text generation. Where AI is avoided entirely or restricted to a post-analytical proofreading role, students actively prioritise the irreplaceable human core of literary scholarship: emotional resonance, historical empathy, qualitative nuance, and original critical thought.

When interpreting these empirical findings, a key methodological nuance involves the reliance on self-reported survey data. Self-reported estimates of AI usage and dependency may be subjected to social desirability bias, as students are aware of academic integrity and plagiarism policy (Al Mashagbeh et al., 2025; Melchinor & Farinosi, 2026). Consequently, students may underreport the frequency with which they adopt AI-generated content. Additionally, because the survey utilised adapted non-clinical Likert scales rather than a standardised, clinically validated AI dependency instrument, the reported percentages capture subjective self-perceptions rather than objective cognitive dependency.

5. CONCLUSION

Integrating AI tools into qualitative higher education disciplines presents a duality: while AI significantly enhances efficiency and concept accessibility, uncurated over-reliance risks eroding critical thought. This study evaluated undergraduate English Language Studies majors' perceptions, usage patterns, and dependency levels in literary coursework. The findings show that students do not engage in passive cognitive indolence. Instead, they demonstrate self-regulated cognitive offloading, using Generative AI as a low-stakes structural scaffold to navigate preliminary writing friction. Crucially, when executing high-order tasks involving figurative language and theoretical evaluation, students maintain interpretive authority and critically evaluate algorithmic output prior to adoption.

5.1 Theoretical and Empirical Contribution

This paper contributes to the growing body of literature on AI in higher education by bridging a critical gap between general AI adoption studies and humanities pedagogy. While prior scholarship predominantly focuses on STEM or general language acquisition contexts, this study offers empirical evidence of how students navigate AI within qualitative, high-order cognitive domains. By demonstrating that students maintain metacognitive boundaries to safeguard their authorial agency, this study refutes the assumption that accessible Generative AI inherently leads to complete academic dependency or the loss of human hermeneutic capability in literary studies.

5.2 Practical and Pedagogical Implications for Literature Lecturers

These findings offer practical insights for literature educators seeking to integrate AI responsibly without compromising critical thinking. First, rather than enforcing outright bans, lecturers should establish clear pedagogical frameworks that categorise AI permissions based on cognitive depth. For instance, AI can be formally permitted as a "Co-Pilot" for lower-order preparation (e.g., historical context gathering, outline structuring), while primary close-reading and thematic interpretation must remain strictly human-driven.

Additionally, lecturers should pivot toward process-oriented evaluation formats. Assigning student reflection logs - where learners submit their raw AI prompts alongside a critical commentary explaining why they accepted, rejected, or modified the AI's interpretation - encourages evaluative judgment and AI literacy. Assessment methods should increasingly emphasise authentic human engagement, such as comparative oral defenses, localised cultural reflections, and live in-class close-reading analyses that algorithmic models cannot replicate.

5.3 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Several methodological limitations should be acknowledged when interpreting the findings. As established in the methodology, the sample was restricted to (N = 88), English Language Studies undergraduates at a single public university campus in Malaysia. Consequently, findings may not fully generalize to dedicated English Literature majors, differing institutional contexts, or non-Malaysian higher education settings. The cross-sectional survey design provides a snapshot of behaviours but cannot capture shifts in AI reliance over time. Furthermore, data rely on self-reported measures, which are inherently subject to social desirability bias regarding academic integrity and study habits. The study adapted items from broader AI adoption scales rather than employing a single standardized, clinically validated AI dependency instrument.

Future research should adopt longitudinal mixed-methods designs—combining qualitative interviews, student prompt logs, and direct text analyses—to track how prolonged AI engagement impacts students' evolving authorial voice, critical writing depth, and scholarly autonomy over multi-year academic programs.

Furthermore, there is a need for policy adaptation and assessment redesign. Institutions should move away from purely punitive AI bans toward establishing explicit AI literacy frameworks that validate strategic offloading (e.g., structural brainstorming, concept clarification) while explicitly safeguarding human hermeneutic agency. Educators should emphasize evaluative formats that require authentic human nuance - such as localised contextual reflection, comparative oral defenses, and close-reading synthesis—where algorithmic generation remains demonstrably insufficient.

This study acknowledges limitations in sample scope ($N = 88$) English Language Studies majors at a single campus) and reliance on quantitative descriptive survey data. Future research should examine postgraduate literature majors using qualitative interviews and longitudinal document analyses to observe how long-term AI engagement influences authorial voice, thesis depth, and original literary scholarship over time.

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7. CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors agree that this research was conducted in the absence of any self-benefits, commercial or financial conflicts and declare the absence of conflicting interests.

8. AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Siti Noor Aisyah Hasnan: conceptualised the central research idea, carried out the research idea and wrote the article mainly introduction, literature review, methodology, findings and discussions. **Muhammad Syakiriin Mohd Izan:** wrote the conclusion, recommendation and finalised the paper. **Raja Nurul Nadia Raja Abdul Razak:** supervised research progress and data collection. **Evanna Devi Seyapalan:** anchored the review, revisions and approved the article submission.

9. DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI AND AI-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES

This manuscript was developed with the assistance of Gemini AI for the purpose of revising language and possession of sources. The tool/service supported the author(s) in reviewing and refining the content, and the authors assume full responsibility for the final version submitted for publication.

10. DATA AVAILABILITY/SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

The datasets used and analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

11. ETHICS STATEMENT

This study was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Ethics Committee of UPTM. All procedures involving human participants/animal subjects were in fulfilment of the ethical standards of the 1964 Helsinki Declaration. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and data anonymity was strictly maintained throughout the study.

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