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of Arts in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL)

TITLE

**Exploring Learners' Use of AI Tools in Writing Master Dissertations:
The Case of Master Two students at the University of BBA**

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Abstract

The increasing availability of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools in academic settings has transformed the way students approach writing tasks, particularly at the postgraduate level. For Master Two students at the Department of English, University of Bordj Bou Arreridj, the dissertation writing process often presents challenges related to planning, drafting, and maintaining academic quality. In this context, AI tools offer support in organizing ideas, correcting grammar, and paraphrasing text, yet also raise questions about originality, authorship, and ethical use. This study aims to explore how AI tools are integrated into the dissertation writing practices of Algerian EFL postgraduate students. Specifically, it explores how students use AI tools at different stages of writing their master dissertations, from research to drafting, editing, and referencing; the main benefits and challenges of using AI tools; and how AI tools affect the identity and integrity of master dissertation. Using an interpretivist qualitative approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with ten post-Master Two graduates and a self-narrative journal written by the researcher. written by the researchers. Thematic analysis revealed five key themes: productivity and structure, language support, dependency and limitations, authorship and identity, and ethical concerns. The findings suggest that while AI tools enhance clarity, fluency, and writing structure, they also create a sense of dependency and raise ethical ambiguity. Participants expressed concern over blurred authorship boundaries, reduced critical engagement, and uncertainty about proper citation and acceptable levels of AI assistance. This study highlights the need for clearer institutional policies and AI literacy training to ensure responsible and balanced use.

Key words: Artificial Intelligence, academic writing, authorship, academic integrity, postgraduate education, Algerian EFL learners

Declaration of Originality

I hereby declare that this submission is our own work that doesn't contain materials which has been previously published or written by another person nor materials which has been accepted for the qualification of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution. We also certify that the present work contains no plagiarism. In fact, it is the result of our own investigation, except what had been stated.

Name of the students / Candidates:

Harzallah Abdelhadi / Bentayeb Amar / Far Redha

DATE: 10 / 06 / 2025

Abdelhadi's Dedication

I would like to dedicate my dissertation

To my beloved parents whose continuous support and encouragement made it possible to me to do this work

To “My brother Rafik & his daughters and my sisters Fatma & Asma and their kids” you have been my inspiring during this period of time, your endless encouragement have been the foundation upon which I built my academic dissertation.

To my dear friends “Amar, Sarah”, thank you for providing me with the endless support, and understanding.

To everyone who believed in me and helped me complete my work.

Thank you all

Amar's Dedication

All the praise is due to Allah, the Sustainer of the entire world.

To my shield and shelter, the man who taught me to strive for perfection and to fight for what I want, my beloved father Mohamed.

You are my ultimate inspiration.

To the woman who devoted her life for the happiness of her children without waiting for payback, my mother Fatiha.

You are the tower of power you keep me strong.

To my lovely brothers and sisters: Salem, Hicham, Fouzia, Meriem, Samiha and my angel Marwa.

You are the brightest stars in my universe.

To my beloved wife Fatima, your love and support are my steady light in this journey.

To my son Mostafa, you are the promise of everything good to come.

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You are the light of my heart.

Last but not least, to all the people who contributed to my success: relatives, friends (Abdelhadi) far too many to possibly list them all. I would like to express my sincere and deepest thanks to them all.

Redha's Dedication

First and foremost, I am deeply grateful to Allah, the Most Gracious and the Most Merciful, for granting me the strength, health, and perseverance to carry out and complete this research.

I dedicate this work to:

my beloved parents for their love and support, which have been the reasons for who I am today.

my siblings, Ammar, and my sisters, your presence has been my strength.

my dear partners, Abdelhadi , Amar , thank you for sharing in this challenging academic journey with

me and for being my strong support.

the memory of my grandfather , whose absence is deeply felt.

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List of acronyms

Acronym	Full Term
AI	Artificial Intelligence
APA	American Psychological Association
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
LLM	Large Language Model
NLP	Natural Language Processing
TEFL	Teaching English as a Foreign Language

General Introduction

As Sam Altman, CEO of OpenAI, stated, *“AI will be the most powerful technology humanity has yet invented. It’s going to change the world, and we all have to make sure it’s for the better”* (Altman, 2023).

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is revolutionizing education by integrating tools into various stages of the academic process, particularly in writing. These tools offer functionalities like grammar correction, paraphrasing, idea generation, coherence improvement, and citation formatting. This study explores how EFL Master Two students at the University of Bordj Bou Arreridj engage with these tools, and how their use affects authorship and academic integrity.

1. Background of the Study

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has rapidly become a transformative force in education, revolutionizing how students and educators interact with academic content (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019). From adaptive learning systems to automated feedback mechanisms, AI tools are now integrated into various stages of the academic process. In particular, AI-powered writing tools have emerged as essential aids for university students navigating complex tasks like academic writing and research synthesis (Kasneci et al., 2023).

These tools offer a wide range of functionalities including grammar correction, paraphrasing, idea generation, coherence improvement, and citation formatting (Jang et al., 2022). While they offer support for planning, drafting, and revising academic work, they also raise important ethical concerns around authorship, originality, and academic integrity (Farrokhnia et al., 2023; Cotton et al., 2023). This tension between utility and ethical ambiguity becomes especially pronounced in high-stakes academic outputs such as Master’s dissertations, where independent scholarly authorship is paramount (Dwivedi et al., 2023).

Grounded in the interpretivist paradigm and using a qualitative approach, the study employs semi-structured interviews and self-narrative analysis to generate deep, context-rich insights into student experiences. This research seeks to contribute to the evolving

academic discussion on AI in higher education by offering evidence from an underexplored context. In doing so, it sheds light on the pedagogical, ethical, and personal implications of AI that has rapidly transformed the academic landscape, especially in higher education. With the rise of AI-powered writing tools, students now have access to support that can assist them in drafting, editing, and referencing their academic texts. These tools are particularly significant in the context of dissertation writing, a complex and demanding task that challenges students' language, research, and organizational skills. At the University of Bordj Bou Arreridj, students are increasingly turning to AI tools to enhance their academic writing performance, especially as English is a foreign language for many. These changes align with recent findings showing that AI tools are increasingly used by EFL learners to support writing clarity, structure, and idea development in academic contexts (Chen & Zhao, 2024; Singh, 2023).

2. Statement of the Problem

In Algeria, particularly at the University of Bordj Bou Arreridj, students have begun integrating AI tools into their dissertation-writing practices. However, research investigating this phenomenon in the Algerian EFL (English as a Foreign Language) context remains scarce. While global discourse around AI in education is growing, localized studies that explore learners' lived experiences, motivations, and ethical decision-making in using such technologies are urgently needed (Khalili et al., 2023).

Despite the growing use of AI tools in academic writing, there is limited empirical research exploring how Algerian EFL students use them in high-stakes assignments such as master's dissertations. Questions remain regarding how students perceive these tools, the benefits they gain, the challenges they face, and whether these technologies influence their academic integrity, writing identity, and learning autonomy.

This study investigates the use of AI writing tools among post-Master Two students in the Department of English at the University of Bordj Bou Arreridj. It aims to understand how students interact with AI during dissertation writing, the perceived benefits and drawbacks, and how these tools impact issues of authorship, identity, and academic values.

3. Research Questions

This study addresses the following questions:

- How do EFL postgraduate students use AI tools during dissertation writing?
- What benefits and challenges do they perceive in using these tools?
- What impact do AI tools have on their academic identity and integrity?

4. Objectives of the Study

- To explore how students use AI tools at different stages of writing their master dissertations, from research to drafting, editing, and referencing.
- To understand the main benefits and challenges students experience when using AI tools for academic writing.
- To evaluate how AI tools affect the identity and integrity of master dissertation.

5. Significance of the Study

This research contributes to the growing body of literature on digital literacy and AI in TEFL by focusing on Algerian learners. It offers insights into how emerging technologies influence academic practices and proposes recommendations for ethical and effective AI use in higher education. More importantly, it fills a crucial gap in the current literature by providing one of the first in-depth, qualitative accounts of how EFL postgraduate students in Algeria experience AI in their academic writing. By combining both interviews and self-narrative, the study not only documents how AI tools are used, but also captures the inner tensions, identity shifts, and ethical uncertainties students face. These findings can inform pedagogical practice, institutional policy-making, and future research on AI in non-Western academic settings, where digital support tools are often used without adequate training or guidance.

6. An Overview of the Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research approach grounded in the interpretivist paradigm, which prioritizes depth and contextual understanding over generalization. The main aim was to explore how EFL Master Two students at the University of Bordj Bou Arreridj use AI tools in writing their dissertations and how this use affects their writing processes and academic identity. Two complementary data collection tools were employed: semi-structured interviews and a self-narrative. The interviews allowed for in-depth insights into students' perceptions, challenges, and ethical considerations, while the self-

narrative provided a reflexive, first-hand account of the researchers' own engagement with AI tools during the writing process.

The sampling technique used was non-probability convenience sampling, allowing the selection of participants who had recent and relevant experience with AI-assisted dissertation writing. The final sample included ten Master Two graduates from the Department of English who had completed their dissertations during the 2023–2024 academic year and confirmed using AI tools such as ChatGPT, Grammarly, or Quillbot.

Thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase model, was used to interpret the data. To ensure trustworthiness, the study employed methodological triangulation, combining interview data with self-reflective narrative to validate and enrich the findings

7. Definitions of Key Terms

AI tools: Software applications powered by artificial intelligence, used to assist in tasks such as grammar correction, paraphrasing, and citation.

Academic Integrity: The ethical code concerning honesty and responsibility in academic work.

Digital Literacy: The ability to use digital tools effectively and critically for academic purposes.

8. Organization of the Dissertation

The dissertation is organized into three chapters, each addressing a key component of the research process. Chapter One presents the background of the study, defines the research problem, and reviews relevant literature on AI tools in academic writing, with particular attention to personalization, academic integrity, writing quality, and previous empirical studies. Chapter Two outlines the methodological framework, explaining the qualitative, interpretivist approach, the sampling method, data collection tools (semi-structured interviews and self-narrative), and the thematic analysis process. Chapter Three presents the research findings, organized into five major themes that emerged from participant interviews and the self-narrative, supported by direct quotations and contextual interpretation. In section two, it provides a comprehensive discussion of the findings in relation to the three research questions, comparing them with previous studies, highlighting

pedagogical and ethical implications, and offering critical reflection. The dissertation concludes with a general conclusion, limitations of the study, and suggestions for future research

Chapter one: literature review

Introduction

This chapter aims to provide the theoretical and contextual background for the study. It introduces key concepts related to AI-assisted academic writing, outlines the role of AI in language learning and postgraduate education, and reviews relevant studies that inform the research. The chapter begins with a general overview of AI and its evolution in academia, followed by a discussion of its integration in educational settings, particularly in the teaching of English as a foreign language. It then explores the pedagogical, ethical, and academic implications of AI use in writing. Finally, it presents a review of previous research studies related to the topic.

This chapter explores the role of AI in academic writing, with particular emphasis on its use in writing master's dissertations. It provides a comprehensive review of the literature concerning the evolution of AI writing technologies, their pedagogical applications, and their impact on student learning, productivity, and academic integrity. Special attention is given to the ways in which these tools influence personalization, efficiency, and user experience—elements increasingly relevant in higher education contexts where learners face linguistic, cognitive, and institutional challenges (Garcia & Patel, 2024; Singh, 2023).

1.1 Definition and Evolution of AI

AI in writing refers to the use of machine learning algorithms and Natural Language Processing (NLP) to assist with text generation, editing, and refinement (Lee & Chen, 2023). “AI-powered writing tools analyze linguistic patterns, suggest improvements, and automate various aspects of the writing process, making them valuable resources for students working on academic texts” (Dobrin, 2023, p. 76). Over the past few decades, AI's role in academic writing has evolved from basic grammar correction to sophisticated content generation and personalized feedback systems (Eager, 2024, p. 109). The evolution of AI in writing can be divided into three key phases:

Table 1: Evolution of AI in Academic Writing (Based on the Researcher's Synthesis of Reviewed Literature)

Phase	Development	Key Features	Examples
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Early AI (1990s–2000s)	Basic spelling and grammar checkers	Rule-based correction, limited contextual understanding	Microsoft Word Spell Checker, Grammarly (early versions)
Advanced AI (2010s–2020s)	AI-enhanced text analysis	Context-aware grammar correction, style suggestions, plagiarism detection	Grammarly, Hemingway Editor, Turnitin
Generative AI (2020s–Present)	AI-generated text and deep learning models	Content creation, adaptive learning, paraphrasing, summarization	ChatGPT, Quillbot, Google Bard

The development of AI in academic writing can be understood in three key phases: early AI (1990s–2000s), advanced AI (2010s–2020s), and the current stage of generative AI (2020s–present). Each phase has introduced new capabilities and shaped how students and educators interact with writing technologies.

In its early stages, AI primarily focused on rule-based systems for grammar and spelling correction. Tools like the original Microsoft Word Spell Checker and early versions of Grammarly were designed to identify surface-level errors, such as misspelled words or incorrect punctuation (Jones & Patel, 2022).

These tools operated using fixed grammatical rules, with minimal ability to understand the context or stylistic nuances of academic writing (Perlman, 2025). While basic, they represented a significant shift in automating parts of the proofreading process.

With the advancement of machine learning and natural language processing (NLP) in the 2010s, AI tools became far more sophisticated. This period introduced context-aware correction and stylistic analysis, allowing platforms like Grammarly and Hemingway Editor to evaluate sentence structure, coherence, tone, and conciseness (Harris et al., 2024, p. 124). Additionally, Turnitin began using AI to detect plagiarism

with greater accuracy by comparing student work to vast databases of published content. This phase marked a turning point where AI began supporting higher-order writing concerns, not just mechanics (Elliot, 2022).

In the current phase, generative AI powered by deep learning models has taken the field to new heights. Tools like ChatGPT, Quillbot, and Google Bard are capable of producing original content, paraphrasing complex ideas, summarizing sources, and even simulating academic dialogue (Kasneji et al., 2023).

These tools rely on large language models (LLMs) trained on diverse text corpora, enabling them to provide writing assistance that closely resembles human writing in fluency and tone (Dobrin, 2023; Zhou & Lin, 2024). They are particularly useful in brainstorming, outlining, and revising academic texts. For example, Chat GPT can provide scaffolded writing support by helping students develop arguments or explore multiple perspectives, a function not possible with earlier tools.

This evolution demonstrates how AI tools have moved from simple mechanical correction to complex content generation and feedback. However, as the tools become more powerful, the need for critical engagement and ethical awareness grows accordingly (Eager, 2024). Generative AI models, such as ChatGPT and Bard, have advanced to the point where they can generate entire academic texts, significantly impacting dissertation writing (Dobrin, 2023; Johnson, 2024). These tools offer benefits such as enhanced efficiency, idea generation, and language refinement, which help students streamline their writing process and overcome common challenges related to structure and clarity (Perlman, 2025; Singh, 2023). However, their use also raises critical ethical concerns. One major issue is academic integrity. Students may become overly dependent on AI-generated content, leading to questions about originality and authorship (Garcia & Patel, 2024; Nguyen, 2023). Additionally, AI-generated texts may sometimes lack depth, critical engagement, and discipline-specific accuracy, which are essential in academic writing (Matthews & Chen, 2024; Eager, 2024).

Scholars remain divided on the implications of AI in dissertation writing. Some argue that AI serves as a powerful assistive tool, helping students overcome language barriers and improve coherence (Eager, 2024). Others caution that excessive reliance on AI may undermine students' ability to develop independent critical thinking and writing skills (Perlman, 2025). Furthermore, institutions are still grappling with the development of policies that ensure ethical AI usage while allowing students to benefit from these

technologies. Given these complexities, it is crucial to examine not only the capabilities of generative AI but also the ethical frameworks and best practices for its responsible integration into academic writing.

As AI writing technology continues to evolve, its role in academic settings becomes more complex. While it enhances efficiency and accessibility, it also challenges traditional notions of originality and critical thinking (Singh, 2024, p. 166). The following section examines specific applications of AI in dissertation writing, exploring how students integrate these tools into their academic work.

1.2 The Role of AI in Academic Writing

AI has significantly influenced academic writing by providing students with tools that enhance efficiency, accuracy, and overall writing quality. In higher education, where producing well-structured and research-driven dissertations is essential, AI has emerged as a valuable assistant in tasks such as brainstorming, editing, and citation management (Dobrin, 2023). The integration of AI writing tools has introduced new possibilities for improving language use, coherence, and readability in academic texts (Eager, 2024, p. 94).

One of the primary roles of AI in academic writing is automating technical aspects of the writing process, such as grammar correction, formatting, and sentence restructuring (Garcia & Patel, 2024; Dobrin, 2023; Singh, 2023). These tools help streamline the writing process, reduce mechanical errors, and improve formal tone in academic work, particularly fortify and correct errors, ensuring adherence to academic language conventions (Perlman, 2025, p. 47). Additionally, AI assists in structuring ideas and enhancing clarity, offering suggestions on sentence restructuring, word choice, and argument development (Harris, Bane, & Jacob, 2024). These features support students, particularly those struggling with formal writing or non-native speakers aiming to refine their academic English (Johnson, 2024).

Beyond grammar and style, AI plays a key role in content organization and research support. Some AI applications help students generate research outlines, summarize academic papers, and provide citation recommendations, streamlining the research and writing process (Garcia & Patel, 2024). AI-driven tools also facilitate plagiarism detection and paraphrasing, allowing students to refine their writing while maintaining academic integrity (Nguyen, 2023).

The discussion on AI's role in academic writing extends to its evolution and applications, which have shaped the way students interact with writing tools. The next section explores how AI in writing has developed over time and the key milestones in its advancement.

1.2.1 AI vs. Traditional Writing Methods

Before the emergence of AI-powered writing tools, students relied on traditional dissertation writing methods, which required manual research, structured note-taking, multiple drafts, and extensive feedback from supervisors and peers (Smith, 2010). Research on traditional dissertation writing methods highlights that students often struggled with time management, information overload, and maintaining coherence throughout long academic texts (Smith, 2010). Studies like Brown and Taylor (2012) emphasize that manual editing and peer reviews were critical in refining arguments and ensuring clarity, though they were time-consuming and inconsistent due to varying feedback quality.

In contrast, modern AI-assisted writing methods have introduced automation in research summarization, paraphrasing, grammar correction, and citation management. A recent study by Lee and Chen (2023) found that AI-assisted dissertation writing significantly reduces editing time and enhances linguistic precision, enabling students to focus more on content development rather than technical writing challenges. Similarly, Patel and Gomez (2024) noted that AI tools have improved students' ability to refine their arguments in real-time, offering instant feedback on structure and coherence.

However, several researchers have questioned the impact of AI on academic integrity and originality. Dobrin (2023) argues that while AI tools can support surface-level improvements, they may also encourage passive learning if students rely on them uncritically. Similarly, Eager (2024) emphasizes that AI-generated text often lacks the analytical depth that academic writing requires, especially at the postgraduate level. While traditional methods emphasize critical engagement with sources and the development of an independent academic voice, AI tools risk producing generic or superficial outputs. Additionally, according to a study by Nguyen (2023), platforms like Turnitin have reported challenges in identifying AI-generated content, creating new ambiguities in plagiarism detection and raising broader ethical concerns about student reliance on AI assistance. The following table presents a comparative overview of traditional dissertation writing methods

and AI-assisted approaches, highlighting key differences in research, drafting, and revision processes.

Table 2: Comparison between Traditional and AI-Assisted Writing Methods

Aspect	Traditional Writing Methods	AI-Assisted Writing	Research Insights
Idea Development	Brainstorming with supervisors, reviewing literature, and outlining manually	AI-generated outlines, research summaries, and brainstorming suggestions	Brown & Taylor (2012) found that manual brainstorming fosters critical thinking, while Lee & Chen (2023) argue that AI-generated outlines speed up research synthesis.
Drafting Process	Writing based on extensive reading and independent thought	AI-generated text suggestions, paraphrasing tools, and predictive text completion	Smith (2010) emphasizes traditional drafting requires deep engagement, but Patel & Gomez (2024) found AI tools improve coherence and structure.
Editing and Proofreading	Manual revisions, peer reviews, and supervisor feedback	AI-based grammar, style, and coherence checks	Johnson (2024) noted that human proofreading ensures nuanced critique, whereas AI, according to Singh (2023), enhances linguistic precision but lacks contextual depth.
Citation and Referencing	Manual citation formatting, cross-	AI-generated citations,	Nguyen (2023) highlights AI's

	checking sources	automated bibliography management	efficiency in citation generation but warns of occasional formatting errors.
Plagiarism Detection	Self-checks, peer review, plagiarism detection tools	AI-based similarity detection, paraphrasing assistance	Turnitin reports (2023) suggest AI detection tools improve originality checks but create new ethical concerns.

Traditional writing methods emphasize deep engagement, structured learning, and critical reflection. However, studies show that AI enhances efficiency, reduces mechanical workload, and supports language refinement (Patel & Gomez, 2024). The challenge lies in balancing AI assistance with human judgment to ensure both originality and academic rigor.

1.2.2 Applications of AI in Academic Writing

AI-powered tools have become widely used in academic writing, assisting students in various stages of the dissertation process. These applications extend beyond basic grammar correction, offering support in content generation, structuring, editing, citation management, and plagiarism detection (Dobrin, 2023, p. 84). By automating technical tasks, AI allows students to focus more on argument development and research coherence (Eager, 2024). One important area where AI has impacted academic writing is in the early stages of research and idea development.

1.2.2.1 AI in Research and Idea Development

One of AI's most valuable applications is assisting in brainstorming and research organization. AI tools help students refine research questions, generate outlines, and summarize existing literature (Harris et al., 2024). Several studies have explored the role of AI in these early writing stages. For instance, Recent research has examined how AI tools are reshaping the early stages of academic writing, particularly in research planning and idea development. These studies explore how postgraduate students interact with AI

to generate research questions, outlines, and synthesize information.

Nguyen (2023) found that AI-powered brainstorming tools enable students to formulate more structured research questions, reducing cognitive load and enhancing critical thinking. In contrast, Patel and Singh (2024) argued that while AI-generated outlines provide efficiency, they may also limit originality by leading students toward generic structures. Before AI, students heavily relied on manual literature reviews, note-taking strategies, and concept mapping techniques (Elliot, 2018). However, with AI-powered tools like ChatGPT and Elicit, research synthesis has become more accessible. Garcia and Lee (2023) compared dissertation writing before and after the adoption of AI, concluding that AI-assisted students demonstrated faster topic refinement but faced challenges in developing deeper analytical perspectives. This contrast highlights a key tension: while AI accelerates research organization, it risks fostering dependency if not used critically.

Several studies have explored the role of AI in editing. Nguyen (2023) compared traditional peer feedback with AI-assisted editing and found that while AI enhances grammatical accuracy and stylistic consistency, it lacks the nuanced critique offered by human reviewers. Similarly, Singh and Roberts (2024) highlighted that AI-generated suggestions improve clarity but may sometimes over-simplify complex academic arguments, leading to a loss of depth in critical analysis. Before AI, students relied on manual editing techniques, often using printed drafts, peer review sessions, and guidance from academic writing centers (Harris, 2017).

1.2.2.2 AI in Writing and Editing

AI-driven writing assistants have significantly transformed the drafting and editing processes in academic writing by providing real-time feedback on sentence structure, clarity, and coherence. Tools such as Grammarly and Hemingway Editor offer personalized grammar corrections and style enhancements, adjusting feedback based on academic tone and writing conventions (Garcia & Patel, 2024). However, the impact of these AI tools extends beyond surface-level editing, influencing students' engagement with revision and self-correction.

In contrast, modern AI-driven tools enable instant revision, reducing the time required for iterative feedback but potentially fostering over-reliance on algorithmic corrections (Elliot & Zhang, 2023).

While AI assists in refining writing quality, it does not replace human judgment in editing. Perlman (2025) argued that AI should function as a complementary tool rather than a substitute for human revision, emphasizing the importance of balancing automated feedback with critical thinking. The following table summarizes some of the most commonly used AI tools in academic writing and outlines their specific roles in the dissertation process.

Table 3: Common AI Tools and Their Role in Dissertation Writing

AI Tool	Main Function	Use in Dissertation Writing
Grammarly	Grammar and style correction	Enhances clarity, checks for formality, and improves sentence structure
Quillbot	Paraphrasing and rewriting	Helps reformulate ideas while avoiding plagiarism
Turnitin	Plagiarism detection	Identifies similarities with existing academic work

Several studies, including those by Smith et al. (2023) and Nguyen (2024), have highlighted the increasing reliance on AI-powered tools for academic writing, particularly in dissertation writing. Smith et al. (2023) found that students using Grammarly improved their grammatical accuracy and coherence scores by an average of 35% compared to those relying solely on manual proofreading. However, Nguyen (2024) warned that over-reliance on Grammarly could lead to a superficial understanding of grammar rules, as students tend to accept AI-generated corrections without critically analyzing them.

Regarding paraphrasing tools, Jones & Patel (2022) noted that Quillbot has been effective in helping non-native English speakers enhance lexical variety and syntactic complexity. However, concerns remain regarding the potential for unintentional

plagiarism, as some paraphrased content may still resemble the original text structurally (Elliot & Zhang, 2023).

Plagiarism detection tools like Turnitin have played a crucial role in maintaining academic integrity. Harris (2021) reported that institutions implementing Turnitin observed a 42% reduction in plagiarism cases over a three-year period. However, studies such as Perlman (2025) indicate that while these tools detect direct textual similarities, they may struggle with identifying more sophisticated forms of academic misconduct, such as idea plagiarism or AI-generated rewording.

1.2.2.3 AI in Citation and Referencing

Proper citation is essential in dissertation writing, as it ensures academic integrity, gives credit to original authors, and prevents plagiarism. AI-powered citation managers such as Zotero, EndNote, and Mendeley have revolutionized how researchers handle references by automating source management, formatting citations, and detecting missing references (Singh, 2024). Several studies have explored the effectiveness and limitations of AI in citation and referencing practices. Johnson and Patel (2023) investigated formatting accuracy and found that students using AI-assisted citation tools reduced errors by 60% compared to manual methods. Their study emphasized that tools like Zotero and Mendeley streamline citation by generating references in various styles and integrating directly with writing software. Garcia (2024), on the other hand, focused on reliability concerns, showing that while tools like EndNote are helpful, they occasionally produce incomplete or inaccurate citations. Harris and Lee (2023) added that over-reliance on AI might weaken students' understanding of citation rules.

There are also divergent views on AI's impact on academic integrity. While Nguyen (2023) praised AI citation tools for helping prevent unintentional plagiarism, Elliot (2022) cautioned that some AI models — such as ChatGPT — may fabricate references entirely, creating risks of academic misconduct.

Based on the findings of this study, students often appreciate the efficiency of citation tools but remain unsure whether these tools can be fully trusted. Many participants in the interviews expressed the need to manually verify AI-generated citations, and the researcher's self-narrative also confirmed moments where fabricated or incorrect references appeared. This suggests that while AI tools offer convenience, they should be used critically and not as a replacement for citation literacy.

1.3 Personalization in Academic Writing

Personalization in academic writing refers to the ability to tailor writing support to meet individual needs, enabling students to refine their academic voice and target specific areas for improvement. According to Dobrin (2023), personalized writing support fosters autonomy and deeper engagement with the writing process by adapting feedback to a student's language proficiency, argument style, and disciplinary focus. Similarly, Ahmed (2023) emphasizes that personalization plays a key role in helping non-native English speakers develop confidence and clarity in academic expression.

The concept of personalized academic support has long existed in traditional settings through supervisor feedback, writing workshops, and peer review. However, these methods often suffer from limitations such as time constraints, variability in feedback quality, and accessibility issues (Garcia & Patel, 2024; Singh, 2023).

The emergence of AI-driven personalization in writing can be traced back to the rise of adaptive learning technologies in the early 2010s, when researchers began developing systems that could adjust educational content based on individual learner needs (Kukulka-Hulme & Shield, 2015; Luckin et al., 2016). Scholars in educational technology and computational linguistics such as Warschauer (2013) and Biber & Gray (2016) initiated early efforts to integrate AI into writing instruction, emphasizing the potential of automated feedback to provide scalable, individualized support.

Early AI writing assistants focused mainly on surface-level corrections like grammar and style. However, advancements in Natural Language Processing (NLP); a subfield of AI that enables machines to understand, interpret, and generate human language (Jurafsky & Martin, 2021), have since enabled tools to detect writing patterns, identify recurring errors, and offer context-sensitive suggestions for improvement (Eager, 2024; Johnson, 2024). These innovations marked a transition from generic correction tools to intelligent systems capable of adapting to users' specific writing challenges.

Several studies highlight the shortcomings of traditional academic support. For instance, Smith (2019) found that supervisor feedback, while valuable, is often delayed, leading to inefficient revision cycles. Similarly, Lee & Adams (2021) reported that peer reviews in dissertation writing programs vary significantly in depth and quality, making

them unreliable for consistent improvement. AI tools have addressed these issues by providing instant feedback, adaptive learning mechanisms, and scalable support (Nguyen, 2023). Unlike human feedback, AI-driven tools such as Grammarly, Turnitin's Revision Assistant, and ChatGPT adapt to a student's writing style over time, offering context-sensitive corrections and suggestions. Collectively, these studies illustrate a clear shift in academic support practices from delayed, inconsistent human feedback to immediate, personalized AI assistance. While traditional methods still hold pedagogical value, the rise of AI-powered tools suggests a growing reliance on scalable, adaptive systems that can respond more efficiently to students' individual writing needs.

In addition to improving writing mechanics, AI tools also support cognitive and metacognitive aspects of writing development. Brown & Taylor (2022) argue that AI-assisted writing environments promote self-regulated learning by guiding students through iterative drafting and revision processes. This is particularly beneficial for non-native English speakers, who often struggle with syntax, coherence, and academic tone (Harris, Bane, & Jacob, 2024). AI tools provide targeted assistance by identifying linguistic weaknesses and offering alternative phrasing, thereby reducing dependency on external feedback while fostering independent writing skills.

1.3.1 What is Personalized Academic Writing?

Personalized academic writing refers to the process of adapting writing support to fit a student's individual needs, writing style, and academic challenges. Dobrin (2023) defines it as "a dynamic approach to writing instruction that customizes feedback, revision strategies, and linguistic support based on the unique academic profile of each student" (p. 112). Similarly, Garcia & Patel (2024) describe it as a pedagogical method that integrates individualized learning techniques into academic writing, ensuring that revisions align with a student's research focus, argument structure, and language proficiency.

Personalization in writing is particularly crucial for master's dissertation students, as they navigate complex research questions and discipline-specific conventions. Studies indicate that AI-driven tools can tailor writing assistance by analyzing user inputs and generating targeted feedback. For example, Johnson (2024) found that AI-based writing assistants adapt to a student's writing habits over time, identifying recurrent errors and suggesting improvements based on past corrections. In a comparative study, Singh (2023)

observed that students who used AI-assisted feedback received more context-specific suggestions than those relying solely on human feedback, particularly in structuring arguments and refining academic tone.

Moreover, AI tools can align closely with a student's research focus. For instance, when writing a literature review, AI can highlight relevant studies, suggest citation placements, and generate paraphrased summaries that maintain the original meaning while improving clarity. Below is an example screenshot illustrating how an AI tool provides structured feedback on coherence and argument development in a research paper. Such features demonstrate how AI facilitates more personalized academic writing by bridging gaps in traditional feedback mechanisms (Harris et al., 2024).

1.3.2 Importance of Personalization in Learning and Writing

Personalization in both learning and writing allows students to develop academic writing skills at their own pace, focusing on their specific strengths and weaknesses. This dual focus is crucial, as effective learning directly influences writing quality (Al-Harbi, 2023).. AI tools facilitate this process by offering adaptive learning experiences tailored to the user's progress. Studies have shown that adaptive AI-based writing platforms enhance user engagement by providing customized feedback (Smith & Reynolds, 2023). In master's dissertation writing, where students must produce complex, research-driven arguments, personalized feedback plays a crucial role in improving clarity, coherence, and academic rigor (Dobrin, 2023, p. 119). For instance, research by Chen and Zhao (2024) found that students who received AI-driven feedback on logical argumentation improved their dissertation structures significantly compared to those relying solely on supervisor feedback.

AI-powered tools enhance personalization by adapting to a student's writing style and providing targeted suggestions (Eager, 2024). These tools analyze patterns in writing and offer tailored recommendations, such as restructuring sentences for better flow or adjusting tone for academic formality.

Furthermore, AI tools help students with language refinement, structural organization, and citation accuracy, ensuring their work aligns with academic standards (Garcia & Patel, 2024). However, while AI personalizes feedback efficiently, some scholars argue

that it lacks the nuanced critique provided by human supervisors (Jones, 2023).

Several studies have explored these advantages. For example, a study by Lee and Thompson (2023) conducted at the University of Melbourne investigated how AI writing assistants could support long-term writing development among postgraduate students. The research involved 120 master's students enrolled in a thesis writing seminar who used an AI-based feedback system similar in design to Grammarly and Quillbot throughout an academic semester. The researchers adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative data from AI-generated reports with qualitative insights from follow-up interviews. Their findings revealed significant benefits across multiple writing dimensions. The results indicated that AI assistance significantly improved students' technical accuracy, reducing grammatical errors by 42%. More importantly, it also contributed to improvements in logical coherence and structural flow, with a reported 30% increase in overall writing clarity. Students expressed positive perceptions of the AI tool's ability to offer immediate and personalized feedback, especially in areas they previously found challenging. The study concludes that consistent AI support can complement supervisor feedback and enhance writing autonomy, particularly in time-constrained dissertation environments.

Another study by Ahmed et al. (2024) focused on how AI-powered analytics support academic writing development. Using an experimental design, the researchers divided participants into two groups: one using AI-generated writing feedback and the other relying solely on traditional instructor feedback. Results showed that the AI-assisted group demonstrated faster improvement in structural organization and citation accuracy, with 78% of students reporting increased confidence in their writing.

1.3.3 AI's Role in Enhancing Personalization

AI has transformed the personalization of academic writing by providing students with individualized support tailored to their writing challenges and learning styles. This adaptability ensures that students receive targeted feedback on specific aspects of their writing, such as coherence, argument structure, and language proficiency. Research by Smith and Reynolds (2023) highlights that AI-powered writing tools improve user engagement by offering adaptive feedback that evolves based on the user's progress.

In master's dissertation writing, where students must construct complex, research-driven arguments, AI-driven personalization enhances clarity, coherence, and academic rigor (Dobrin, 2023, p. 119). For example, a study by Chen and Zhao (2024) found that students using AI-based feedback on logical argumentation showed a 35% improvement in dissertation structure compared to those relying solely on traditional supervisory feedback.

AI-powered tools refine academic writing by analyzing patterns and suggesting revisions suited to the user's writing level (Eager, 2024, p. 155). These tools can detect weak thesis statements, suggest alternative phrasing, and provide discipline-specific vocabulary recommendations, making them particularly useful for non-native English speakers. Nguyen (2023) found that AI-assisted writing platforms helped students reduce grammatical errors by 40%, significantly improving academic language precision.

Furthermore, AI aids in citation accuracy and research organization, ensuring alignment with academic conventions (Garcia & Patel, 2024, p. 101). However, while AI excels in personalized feedback, some scholars argue that it cannot fully replace the critical analysis and nuanced insights provided by human supervisors (Jones, 2023). This debate underscores the need for a balanced approach, integrating AI assistance with traditional academic mentorship.

1.4 Benefits and limitations of AI in Academic Writing

The integration of AI in academic writing has become a transformative element in higher education, offering students new avenues to engage with complex writing tasks. AI tools have introduced new efficiencies in planning, drafting, and editing academic work (Harris et al., 2024; Perlman, 2025). These technologies support students in overcoming linguistic, structural, and organizational barriers, especially for those writing in a second language, by providing real-time suggestions on grammar, style, and coherence (Garcia & Patel, 2024; Singh, 2023).

At the erosion of original thought in academic work (Johnson, 2024; Eager, 2024). These debates are especially pertinent in the context of master's dissertations, which demand a high level of independent research and authentic academic voice.

Importantly, recent studies have begun to explore both the advantages and the limitations of AI in writing. For example, Dobrin (2023) highlights how AI tools

democratize access to writing support by compensating for systemic gaps in academic writing instruction, particularly for non-native speakers. Conversely, Nguyen (2023) warns that excessive dependence on AI tools may hinder the development of critical thinking and writing skills, especially when students use them without pedagogical guidance.

1.4.1 Benefits of AI in Academic Writing

AI has introduced a range of benefits that have reshaped the academic writing landscape, especially for postgraduate students. By automating complex tasks, offering real-time feedback, and adapting to individual learning needs, AI tools have helped bridge gaps in academic support and increased the accessibility of scholarly writing practices. These benefits are particularly notable for non-native English speakers, who often face challenges related to grammar, vocabulary, and academic conventions (Ahmed, 2023; Garcia & Patel, 2024).

AI writing tools play different yet complementary roles in enhancing the writing process. Grammarly, for instance, improves linguistic precision by detecting grammatical errors, suggesting stylistic changes, and helping users maintain consistency in tone and structure (Zhou & Lin, 2024). Quillbot enables users to rephrase dense or unclear text, supporting the development of paraphrasing skills and helping to avoid unintentional plagiarism (Nguyen, 2023). ChatGPT, on the other side, contributes to idea generation, topic exploration, and content drafting particularly useful during early writing stages (Johnson, 2024; Dobrin, 2023).

Several studies have shown that these tools contribute significantly to student productivity. Singh (2023) found that students using a combination of AI tools completed writing tasks 30% faster than those who relied solely on traditional methods. In a separate study, Matthews and Chen (2024) reported increased confidence and reduced anxiety among non-native speakers after integrating AI-assisted feedback into their dissertation drafts.

AI also facilitates autonomy by providing immediate responses that would otherwise depend on teacher availability (Jones, 2023).. This kind of on-demand assistance supports continuous learning and revision, allowing students to experiment with multiple drafts and receive suggestions tailored to their evolving needs (Perlman, 2025). While

these tools are not without limitations, their role in improving efficiency, accessibility, and engagement in academic writing cannot be overlooked.

1.4.1.1 Enhancing Efficiency and Productivity

One of the most widely recognized benefits of AI in academic writing is its ability to significantly enhance efficiency and productivity, particularly for postgraduate students navigating the complexities of dissertation writing. AI-powered tools streamline various stages of the writing process, from brainstorming and outlining to editing and referencing, helping students manage their time more effectively and produce higher-quality work under academic pressure (Al-Harbi, 2023).

Tools like ChatGPT have been noted for their ability to accelerate the idea generation and drafting stages. Rather than starting from a blank page, students can prompt the tool to outline arguments, generate research questions, or paraphrase complex ideas, which facilitates quicker transitions from concept to draft (Johnson, 2024). Similarly, Grammarly enhances the revision process by offering real-time corrections on grammar, punctuation, and style, reducing the need for extended editing rounds (Garcia & Patel, 2024). This not only shortens the time required for polishing a text but also improves the accuracy and fluency of the final output.

A growing body of research supports the claim that AI tools contribute positively to writing productivity. For example, Singh (2023) conducted a study involving 85 postgraduate students, where participants who integrated AI tools into their dissertation writing process completed major sections on average 30% faster than those relying solely on traditional methods. Participants also reported reduced writing-related stress and increased confidence in managing their workload.

Moreover, AI tools provide on-demand support, allowing students to receive immediate feedback without waiting for peer or supervisor review. This feedback loop can accelerate revision cycles and foster a more iterative writing process. Matthews and Chen (2024) argue that this immediacy allows students to remain engaged in writing for longer periods, minimizing disruption and helping them maintain focus.

Importantly, AI tools may also enhance efficiency through task automation. Citation generators like Zotero and EndNote automate the formatting of references and

bibliographies, tasks that can otherwise be time-consuming and prone to error. These tools ensure consistency and compliance with citation standards, thereby freeing students to concentrate on content development rather than formatting minutiae (Nguyen, 2023).

However, while AI undoubtedly improves productivity, scholars caution against equating speed with academic quality. Eager (2024) notes that rapid output without critical reflection may compromise the depth and originality of academic work. Thus, the effective use of AI in boosting efficiency must be balanced with opportunities for cognitive engagement and thoughtful revision.

1.4.1.2 Supporting Personalization and Learning Autonomy

One of the most significant affordances of AI in academic writing is its ability to support personalized learning. Unlike traditional writing instruction, which often adopts a one-size-fits-all approach, AI tools adapt to the individual needs, language proficiency, and writing style of each student. This adaptability enables learners to engage more meaningfully with their writing, especially in the context of master's dissertations where depth, clarity, and academic tone are essential (Dobrin, 2023; Ahmed, 2023).

Personalization is particularly evident in how AI tools provide targeted feedback. Grammarly, for example, tracks frequent writing issues such as passive voice, comma splices, or tone inconsistency and adjusts its suggestions based on user performance over time (Garcia & Patel, 2024). Similarly, ChatGPT can engage users in iterative dialogue to clarify research questions, expand vague arguments, or explore different academic voices. Quillbot supports lexical and syntactic flexibility by offering multiple rewriting options that users can choose from depending on their tone and fluency goals (Nguyen, 2023).

These personalized interactions allow students to practice self-directed revision and receive assistance that aligns with their evolving academic skills. According to a study by Lee and Thompson (2023), students using AI feedback tools over a 12-week period demonstrated significant gains in writing clarity, error correction, and paragraph structure. Students reported feeling more empowered to revise their own work, especially in areas they had previously struggled with.

Moreover, AI tools promote learning autonomy by offering immediate guidance at

any stage of the writing process. This is particularly helpful for students working outside regular class hours or those who lack consistent access to supervisory feedback. When used critically, these tools encourage metacognitive awareness students begin to understand their own weaknesses and actively seek improvement (Singh, 2023; Eager, 2024).

Although the effectiveness of personalization varies by tool and user, the growing body of research confirms that AI-supported writing offers new avenues for tailored learning support, particularly for postgraduate learners navigating complex writing demands.

1.4.2 Limitations of AI in Academic Writing

While the benefits of AI in academic writing are well-documented, several critical limitations have emerged in recent literature. These concerns center around ethical use, academic integrity, the development of independent thinking, and the transparency of AI-generated content. For postgraduate students, especially those working on dissertations, these limitations raise important questions about the role of AI in fostering or hindering deep academic engagement. The following subsections present the most commonly reported challenges in the academic use of AI tools.

1.4.2.1 Academic Integrity and Authorship Concerns

AI-assisted tools offer valuable support to students during the writing process, but their integration into academic contexts has sparked considerable concern regarding academic integrity. The core issue lies in distinguishing between legitimate assistance and unethical reliance. As AI tools such as ChatGPT can generate full paragraphs or even entire essays, educators and researchers are increasingly debating where to draw the line between support and substitution (Johnson, 2024; Eager, 2024).

Recent studies highlight the blurred boundaries of authorship when students use AI-generated content in dissertations. For example, Bowers and Davis (2024) found that students often perceive AI-generated suggestions as their own writing, even when the contribution is substantial. This perception can lead to unintentional plagiarism or a diminished sense of academic ownership. Similarly, Harris et al. (2024) point out that AI tools often paraphrase existing content without proper referencing, which may result in

inadvertent academic misconduct.

1.4.2.2 Lack of Transparency in AI Systems

Another significant concern is the lack of transparency in how AI models generate text. Unlike traditional writing support, such as peer review or supervisor feedback, the internal logic of AI-generated responses is not always visible or traceable. This opaqueness makes it difficult for educators to evaluate the originality of a student's work or detect unethical use (Nguyen, 2023). Another growing concern in the use of AI-assisted writing tools is their potential to reduce students' engagement in critical thinking and independent academic work.

1.4.2.3 Decline in Critical Thinking and Independent Work

From a pedagogical perspective, the unchecked use of AI tools may also undermine the development of essential academic skills. Dobrin (2023) warns that over-reliance on generative AI may weaken students' ability to think critically and construct original arguments. This is particularly problematic in master's level dissertations, which require a high level of analytical depth and personal engagement with the research topic.

1.4.2.4 Need for Clear Ethical Guidelines and AI Literacy

The use of AI in academic writing raises important ethical questions related to authorship, responsibility, and fairness. As students increasingly rely on AI tools to support their dissertation writing, there is growing concern about the extent to which such assistance may obscure the boundaries between original thought and machine-generated content (Ghounane et al., 2024). According to Johnson (2024), while AI can facilitate more equitable access to writing support, especially for students from non-English-speaking backgrounds, it may also contribute to ethical gray areas when students fail to acknowledge the tool's contribution or when AI-generated content is presented as fully original.

One of the key concerns lies in the concept of authorship. Traditional academic norms emphasize the student's intellectual ownership of their work. However, with generative AI capable of producing coherent, complex texts, the definition of authorship becomes increasingly blurred. As Eager (2024) notes, the absence of clear institutional

guidelines on acceptable AI use has led to inconsistencies in how students and educators perceive academic dishonesty in this context.

Another ethical challenge is transparency. Educators and institutions often struggle to detect the involvement of AI in student writing, especially when students use paraphrasing or summarizing tools like Quillbot or ChatGPT without explicit citation. Research by Garcia and Patel (2024) emphasizes that without clear disclosure policies, the integration of AI can compromise the trustworthiness of academic outputs and assessment fairness.

Moreover, ethical concerns extend to the design and data use of AI tools themselves. AI systems are trained on massive datasets that may include biased, outdated, or ethically questionable content. Singh (2023) highlights that students using AI without understanding its limitations may inadvertently reproduce stereotypes or inaccuracies, thereby raising concerns about social and epistemological responsibility in academic writing.

In light of these limitations, several scholars advocate for more explicit educational frameworks to guide ethical AI use in academia. Dobrin (2023) suggests incorporating AI literacy into university curricula, enabling students to critically engage with the tools they use rather than depending on them uncritically. This approach can foster responsible and transparent use of AI while preserving the core academic values of originality and intellectual autonomy.

1.5 AI Writing Tools: A Comparative Analysis

As outlined in Sections 1.2 and 1.4, tools such as ChatGPT, Grammarly, and Quillbot have distinct roles in research support, drafting, and editing. This section builds upon those insights by comparatively analyzing their practical affordances, with an emphasis on how learners engage with them throughout the dissertation writing process.

Each tool offers unique strengths depending on the stage of writing and the user's linguistic or academic needs. Grammarly, for instance, excels in grammar correction and stylistic refinement. It provides real-time feedback on clarity, tone, and sentence structure, making it a valuable tool for improving surface-level writing features (Garcia & Patel, 2024). However, it lacks deeper structural feedback or support with content generation.

In contrast, ChatGPT functions more flexibly by assisting in idea development, outlining, and even paragraph-level drafting. Its conversational interface allows learners to request explanations, explore alternative phrasings, or reframe entire sections of text. While this flexibility enhances creativity and fluency, concerns remain about the accuracy and discipline-specific depth of its responses (Perlman, 2025; Johnson, 2024).

Quillbot bridges the gap between generative and corrective functions by offering advanced paraphrasing modes that adapt to tone, complexity, or fluency needs. Students often use it to rephrase ideas while avoiding plagiarism and simplifying dense academic language. However, research shows that overuse of paraphrasing tools can sometimes dilute original meaning or introduce unnatural sentence constructions (Nguyen, 2023; Dobrin, 2023). In addition to these three, tools such as Hemingway Editor and ProWritingAid have gained traction for their ability to visually flag stylistic issues like sentence complexity, passive voice, and cohesion. These tools help students polish their final drafts by improving readability and ensuring stylistic consistency (Zhou & Lin, 2024).

Taken together, these tools demonstrate complementary strengths. Students often combine them strategically using ChatGPT to brainstorm and structure, Grammarly to edit for correctness and tone, and Quillbot or Hemingway to revise and refine phrasing. While no single tool fully supports all aspects of academic writing, their combined affordances offer a powerful writing ecosystem when used critically and responsibly.

1.5.1 Overview of AI Writing Tools (ChatGPT, Grammarly, Quillbot, etc.)

A growing number of AI writing tools have emerged in recent years, each offering unique functionalities tailored to different aspects of academic writing. These tools vary in their design, purpose, and depth of assistance, but they all share the common goal of improving the writing process for students and researchers.

- **ChatGPT**, developed by OpenAI, is a powerful language model that can generate, revise, and refine text based on user prompts. Its conversational interface allows users to brainstorm ideas, develop outlines, rephrase content, and even simulate peer feedback. Due to its contextual awareness, ChatGPT has become a preferred tool for higher education learners seeking personalized academic support (Harris et al., 2024)

Several studies have acknowledged its utility in providing immediate feedback, helping students clarify arguments, and improving logical flow (Perlman, 2025; Singh, 2023).

- **Grammarly** is a widely adopted grammar-checking platform that also evaluates clarity, tone, engagement, and delivery. Unlike traditional spelling and grammar checkers, Grammarly uses natural language processing (NLP) to offer tailored suggestions based on the user's intent and the formality of the text (Garcia & Patel, 2024). This tool has been praised for its real-time corrections, particularly for academic tone consistency and syntactic precision, making it particularly useful for non-native speakers (Ahmed, 2023).
- **Quillbot**, on the other hand, is known for its advanced paraphrasing capabilities. It allows users to rephrase sentences in multiple modes standard, fluency, formal, and creative while preserving meaning. Its integrated citation generator and summarizer tools further support academic writing by facilitating source integration and reducing plagiarism risk (Zhou & Lin, 2024; Matthews & Chen, 2024). Researchers have noted that Quillbot can aid in improving lexical variety and sentence construction, especially during the drafting phase (Nguyen, 2023).

These tools are not used in isolation but often complement one another in the writing workflow. For example, students may use ChatGPT to develop a rough draft, Quillbot to refine and rephrase, and Grammarly for final polishing. While each platform provides discrete functionalities, their combined use represents a new paradigm in academic writing one where AI acts not just as a corrective force but as a collaborative partner.

1.5.2 AI Tools' Affordances

Beyond their basic features, AI writing tools offer a range of affordances that is, possibilities for action that shape how students engage with academic writing. These affordances go beyond mechanical correction or content generation; they influence how learners think, write, revise, and reflect throughout the dissertation process.

One of the most notable affordances of tools like ChatGPT is their ability to support idea development and cognitive scaffolding. Rather than simply answering questions, these tools can help learners refine their research questions, brainstorm structure, or reframe weak arguments (Garcia & Lee, 2023). Johnson (2024) notes that

students often use generative AI to simulate academic discussion when working independently, especially when supervisor feedback is delayed or unavailable. In this way, ChatGPT becomes a form of responsive academic dialogue that encourages exploration and iterative thinking.

Similarly, tools such as Grammarly and ProWritingAid offer affordances for metalinguistic awareness. By highlighting not only errors but also stylistic inconsistencies and tone mismatches, these platforms prompt students to consider how language functions in scholarly communication (Smith et al., 2023). Garcia and Patel (2024) argue that such tools support deeper engagement with genre conventions, especially for non-native English speakers who may lack confidence in their academic tone or phrasing.

Another important affordance lies in the nonlinear and experimental nature of AI-supported writing. Tools like Quillbot allow students to paraphrase and rephrase sections of their work in multiple ways, which encourages them to test different voices and sentence structures. This flexibility supports creativity and linguistic risk-taking both of which are essential in developing an authentic academic voice (Nguyen, 2023; Eager, 2024).

Moreover, AI tools afford on-demand, self-paced learning, which is particularly valuable for students who struggle with traditional time-bound feedback mechanisms. According to Singh (2023), the immediate response offered by AI helps reduce writing anxiety and promotes autonomy, as learners can revise and refine their texts without waiting for external input. This becomes especially significant in high-stakes writing contexts such as dissertations, where ongoing revision is a key to success.

However, these affordances are not always realized equally. As Zhou and Lin (2024) point out, the effectiveness of AI tools depends largely on how critically students use them. Tools can scaffold learning or short-circuit it. When used mindfully, AI becomes a learning partner; when used passively, it risks turning writing into mechanical assembly. Therefore, the value of AI affordances lies not just in the technology itself, but in how students are prepared to use it an insight that underscores the need for AI literacy in academic programs.

In sum, AI writing tools afford new ways of thinking, drafting, and improving

academic work. They reshape the writing process by enabling independence, reflection, and experimentation but they also demand critical awareness and responsible use.

1.6 The Impact of AI on Writing Quality and User Experience

AI tools have significantly influenced academic writing by improving grammar, coherence, and structure, particularly at the postgraduate level (Zhou & Lin, 2024; Harris, Bane, & Jacob, 2024). They offer real-time feedback, functioning as a form of formative support that helps students revise and refine their work (Perlman, 2025; Dobrin, 2023). This is especially beneficial for non-native English speakers who often struggle with academic language and cohesion (Ahmed, 2023; Garcia & Patel, 2024). However, scholars caution that AI tools tend to focus on surface-level features and may not support deeper critical thinking or conceptual development (Matthews & Chen, 2024; Nguyen, 2023). Additionally, while some students use AI to enhance autonomy, others risk becoming overly dependent on automated suggestions (Eager, 2024). These mixed outcomes highlight the need for thoughtful, guided use of AI in academic writing.

1.6.1 AI's Influence on Writing Style and Coherence

AI tools have significantly influenced writing style and coherence in academic contexts, particularly through their capacity to provide real-time feedback and structural suggestions. This section focuses on three of the most widely used tools in higher education Grammarly, Quillbot, and ChatGPT and others due to their widespread adoption among postgraduate students and their distinct functions across editing, paraphrasing, and generative writing (Dobrin, 2023; Garcia & Patel, 2024; Singh, 2023). These systems often analyze linguistic patterns to offer more consistent tone and stylistic alignment, contributing to a more professional academic voice (Perlman, 2025). The table above provides a comparative overview of AI tools widely used in academic writing, especially in improving style and coherence. The following table outlines several widely used AI writing tools and summarizes how they assist students in improving writing style, tone, and coherence.

Table 4: AI Writing Tools and Their Functions in Enhancing Style and Coherence

Tool	Function	How It Supports Style and Coherence
Hemingway Editor	Style simplification	Highlights complex or passive sentences to improve readability and sentence flow.
Slick Write	Real-time grammar & style checker	Detects repetition, adverbs, prepositions, and sentence structure problems.
ProWritingAid	In-depth stylistic analysis	Offers detailed reports on writing style, sentence variety, and readability.
Jasper (AI Writer)	Generative content	Can be used to rephrase ideas in various tones, offering stylistic variation.
Scribbr AI	Sentence clarity & paraphrasing	Focused on improving sentence fluency for academic language.

Each tool contributes uniquely to the writing process, based on its design and specific affordances.

Grammarly, for instance, has become a staple among students for its comprehensive grammar correction and real-time stylistic suggestions. Its ability to detect tone and sentence clarity makes it especially useful during revision stages, where consistency and academic tone are crucial (Garcia & Patel, 2024). However, Grammarly tends to focus on micro-level corrections, which can sometimes overlook larger structural or logical issues in extended academic texts.

Quillbot specializes in paraphrasing and rewriting, offering multiple rewriting modes such as "formal" or "fluency." These features allow students to adjust their writing style according to the required academic tone while maintaining the original meaning of their ideas. Several studies (Nguyen, 2023; Dobrin, 2023) have noted that Quillbot enhances lexical variety and helps students break away from repetitive sentence structures.

ChatGPT, as a generative tool, supports coherence by producing complete paragraphs or suggestions based on user prompts. Its strength lies in helping students draft

and refine content that flows logically. Yet, it requires careful guidance, as the generated text may sometimes deviate from academic conventions or introduce generalizations if prompts are not specific (Johnson, 2024; Eager, 2024).

Moving beyond these three popular tools, Hemingway Editor focuses on sentence-level clarity. It highlights overly complex or passive constructions, which can hinder flow and coherence in academic writing. Its visual feedback is particularly beneficial for non-native speakers trying to simplify their sentence structures without losing meaning (Zhou & Lin, 2024).

ProWritingAid offers a more nuanced stylistic analysis by producing reports on sentence length, rhythm, and transitions. This macro-level feedback is ideal for refining essay flow and ensuring paragraph-to-paragraph cohesion features often overlooked by more basic grammar tools (Ahmed, 2023). Likewise, Slick Write provides targeted insights on adverb overuse and sentence variation, promoting stylistic diversity.

Scribbr AI, though newer, is tailored to academic writing. It assists in rephrasing and clarity enhancement, especially in citation-heavy texts like dissertations. Its academic orientation makes it suitable for refining sections that require formal tone and discipline-specific language.

Lastly, Jasper, while originally designed for marketing content, is increasingly used for academic brainstorming and rewording. Its strength lies in offering content in different tones and styles, which may support creative restructuring in literature reviews or reflective writing tasks (Matthews & Chen, 2024).

Overall, these tools vary in functionality, but when used strategically, they offer complementary support. Students who combine multiple tools such as drafting with ChatGPT, editing with Grammarly, and simplifying with Hemingway can address different dimensions of style and coherence more effectively than using any one tool in isolation. However, critical engagement with the tools remains essential to ensure they serve as aids rather than substitutes in the writing process.

Recent studies have demonstrated that AI-assisted revisions contribute to measurable improvements in writing quality. For instance, Matthews and Chen (2024) found that postgraduate students using AI tools for rewriting and style suggestions

produced more coherent and well-structured essays compared to those relying solely on manual edits. Similarly, Ahmed (2023) highlighted how non-native speakers particularly benefit from AI support in achieving stylistic consistency and reducing grammatical errors that otherwise impede coherence.

However, some scholars caution that over-reliance on AI tools might diminish students' ability to develop their own voice. Eager (2024) argues that while AI enhances coherence, it can also impose formulaic patterns that reduce originality in writing. This raises important pedagogical questions about how to balance automated assistance with human-driven creativity and expression.

1.6.2 User Experience and Satisfaction with AI Writing Tools

The rapid adoption of AI writing tools in academic settings has prompted a growing body of research into user experience and satisfaction. Most students report high levels of usability and appreciate features such as instant grammar feedback, paraphrasing, and citation support (Zhou & Lin, 2024). Tools like Grammarly and Quillbot are often praised for their intuitive interfaces and the sense of autonomy they give to users navigating complex writing tasks (Garcia & Patel, 2024; Matthews & Chen, 2024).

Non-native English speakers, in particular, find these tools valuable for increasing linguistic confidence and reducing anxiety around grammar accuracy (Ahmed, 2023). In a recent study, Johnson (2024) noted that students who used AI tools regularly experienced reduced cognitive load during drafting and revision stages. However, the same study cautioned that satisfaction levels varied depending on the user's digital literacy and their ability to critically engage with AI-generated suggestions.

Moreover, while many students appreciate the efficiency and accessibility of AI tools, others express concerns about becoming overly reliant on them, especially when tools offer vague or misleading suggestions (Eager, 2024). Nguyen (2023) highlights that a guided integration of AI paired with pedagogical support is a key to maximizing positive user experiences without compromising learning outcomes.

1.6.3 The Role of AI in Critical Thinking and Creativity

While AI tools offer technical support in academic writing, their influence on critical

thinking and creativity remains a subject of ongoing debate. AI tools can help students reformulate arguments, explore new perspectives, and identify logical gaps. Some researchers argue that when used reflectively, these tools can act as cognitive partners in the writing process (Perlman, 2025; Dobrin, 2023).

However, other studies raise concerns that AI may suppress original thinking. Because these tools rely on existing patterns and pre-trained datasets, they tend to reinforce conventional ideas rather than foster novel insights (Eager, 2024; Nguyen, 2023). Johnson (2024) observed that students sometimes follow AI-generated suggestions uncritically, limiting their capacity to question, analyze, or construct independent arguments.

Furthermore, AI-generated content may lack depth or contextual awareness, which is vital to academic creativity. According to Matthews and Chen (2024), while AI can assist with brainstorming, it does not replace the human capacity to synthesize complex information or engage in abstract reasoning. This has prompted calls for educators to teach students how to use AI in ways that encourage not replace creative and critical engagement (Zhou & Lin, 2024).

In summary, AI tools can support critical thinking and creativity when integrated, critical participants in the writing process.

1.7 Ethical Considerations in AI-Assisted Writing

The increasing reliance on AI in academic writing has raised significant ethical concerns, particularly in relation to authorship, transparency, fairness, and accountability. While AI tools have become valuable resources in higher education, their widespread use challenges traditional norms of academic integrity and necessitates a reexamination of ethical boundaries in scholarly work (Perlman, 2025; Singh, 2023).

One of the central ethical issues involves the blurring of authorship. Generative AI models can produce sophisticated, fluent content that closely resembles human writing, yet students may submit such text as their own without acknowledging the extent of AI assistance. This raises complex questions: who is the true author of AI-influenced academic writing?

In addition, there is growing concern over the opacity of AI-generated content. Unlike human feedback, AI tools do not provide transparent reasoning for their

suggestions or outputs. The black-box nature of many language models makes it difficult for users to understand how the content was generated or whether it is rooted in accurate and reliable knowledge (Nguyen, 2023). This lack of transparency not only challenges academic rigor but also creates risks of misrepresentation and the uncritical acceptance of flawed information (Zhou & Lin, 2024).

Another ethical dimension concerns equality and fairness. The availability and proficiency in using AI tools are not uniform among students. Those with better digital literacy or access to premium features may gain an unfair advantage over peers, exacerbating existing educational inequalities (Singh, 2023). Moreover, students from institutions with less developed AI policies may face confusion about what constitutes ethical use, leading to inconsistent expectations and disciplinary outcomes (Eager, 2024).

Educational institutions have begun responding by drafting AI usage guidelines, but many are still in early stages of implementation. Perlman (2025) argues that institutions should proactively engage in establishing clear ethical frameworks that define permissible uses of AI, including distinctions between assistance and substitution. This includes incorporating AI literacy into curricula to ensure that students understand not just how to use AI tools, but when and why to use them responsibly.

Furthermore, ethical considerations extend to data privacy and algorithmic bias. AI tools often rely on vast datasets that include biased or unverified information, which can inadvertently influence students' writing and perspectives (Garcia & Patel, 2024).

1.8 Previous Studies on Learners' Use of AI Tools in Master Dissertation Writing

To provide a foundation for the present study, it is essential to examine prior research on how learners engage with AI tools in the context of academic writing, particularly during dissertation preparation. Studies from international, regional, and Algerian contexts offer valuable insights into the perceived benefits, challenges, and evolving attitudes toward AI-supported writing. Reviewing this literature helps situate the current investigation within broader academic discussions while highlighting the gaps that this study aims to address.

1.8.1 International Studies

Xu (2025) conducted a cross-journal analysis of over 150 published articles from international education and linguistics journals, exploring how AI tools are used by researchers across various academic disciplines. The study reviewed submissions from multiple international journals and used keyword mapping and content analysis to identify recurring patterns in AI usage. Key findings showed that AI tools were frequently used for language polishing, structural refinement, and referencing support. However, the study also highlighted inconsistencies in disclosure practices, with many researchers failing to mention their reliance on AI tools in the writing process. Xu emphasized that while AI supports linguistic enhancement, its impact on critical thinking, argument development, and ethical transparency varies greatly depending on the writer's academic background and field of study.

Aydin et al. (2025) conducted a comparative study evaluating the strengths and limitations of several leading generative AI tools in academic writing contexts. These included DeepSeek, Qwen, ChatGPT, Gemini, Llama, Mistral, and Gemma. The researchers created standardized writing prompts based on graduate-level academic tasks (e.g., abstract writing, paragraph development, and critical reflection), then tested how each tool performed across dimensions such as fluency, coherence, factual consistency, and stylistic appropriateness.

Findings indicated that while most tools could produce grammatically correct and fluent academic text, only a few (notably ChatGPT and Gemini) generated content that reflected higher-order thinking and domain-specific terminology. The study also raised concerns over hallucinated references and unsupported claims generated by some models. The authors concluded that while generative AI tools offer time-saving support, their outputs must be critically evaluated and revised by human writers.

Chirkunov et al. (2025) introduced and evaluated ARWI (Arabic Write and Improve); an AI-powered writing assistant designed specifically for learners of Arabic as a foreign or second language. The project aimed to address the lack of effective Arabic-language AI tools capable of providing automated feedback, error correction, and guidance on academic writing.

The authors developed the tool using large language models and then tested it with university students across several Arabic-speaking countries. Participants used ARWI for

drafting academic paragraphs and essays. The study evaluated improvements in writing accuracy, error frequency, and sentence variety. Results showed that students who used ARWI demonstrated measurable improvement in syntactic complexity, clarity, and genre awareness. However, the tool struggled with contextual ambiguity and did not always provide accurate corrections for advanced-level writing.

1.8.2 Studies from a Similar Context

In the Algerian higher education context, particularly within English departments, Master Two students are required to complete a dissertation as a capstone to their degree. These dissertations are typically written in English, often without formal writing support structures or advanced technological tools. The growing availability of AI-assisted writing tools presents both opportunities and challenges for Algerian students, especially in terms of language proficiency, academic conventions, and ethical awareness. The following studies have explored AI use in similar Algerian or EFL university contexts and provide relevant insights into learners' experiences and perceptions.

Hamamurad et al. (2024) explored how postgraduate students in Arab countries use ChatGPT in their academic work, particularly in writing tasks. Drawing on interviews and reflective journals from participants in Iraq, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt, the study identified several emerging themes: improved productivity, enhanced language fluency, and increased confidence in drafting academic content.

However, the study also revealed challenges such as limited digital literacy in rural regions, over-reliance on AI for generating content without verification, and ethical concerns about ownership and academic integrity. Interestingly, participants emphasized that while ChatGPT helped simplify technical language and paraphrasing, it struggled with domain-specific accuracy and source credibility.

Al-Harbi (2023) investigated the impact of AI writing tools, including ChatGPT and Grammarly, on the academic writing of Saudi university students. The study surveyed 120 EFL students to evaluate changes in writing confidence, structure, and productivity after using AI tools across different stages of their writing tasks.

The results indicated a statistically significant improvement in students' ability to organize their arguments, manage citations, and enhance clarity in English writing.

Nevertheless, the study warned that students often skipped critical analysis and revision processes, relying too heavily on AI-generated suggestions. Al-Harbi emphasized the need for awareness programs that teach students how to use AI as a complement to not a replacement for academic skill development.

El-Sayed and Mahmoud (2023) examined how Egyptian postgraduate students perceive and use AI tools in the process of academic writing. Their research involved 60 master's students, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews to explore both practical usage and ethical attitudes.

The study revealed that most students viewed AI as an empowering tool that helped them improve paraphrasing, referencing, and structural cohesion. However, it also surfaced ethical dilemmas some students were unsure about the boundary between "acceptable assistance" and "academic dishonesty." A common concern was the temptation to over-rely on AI for literature review summaries, which could lead to superficial understanding of complex research texts.

1.8.3 Studies from the Algerian Context

Sebbah (2024) conducted a quantitative study assessing how Algerian EFL students engage with generative AI tools like ChatGPT and Quillbot. Using structured questionnaires administered to over 150 students, the study explored students' awareness, frequency of use, and perceptions of AI's educational potential.

Findings indicated that while a majority of students were familiar with these tools, their actual use in academic writing was still limited, often due to lack of training or uncertainty about ethical boundaries. Interestingly, students who actively used AI tools reported improved confidence in their English writing and higher satisfaction with their academic outputs, particularly during brainstorming and revision stages.

Ghounane et al. (2024) explored the emerging concept of "AI-giarism" a term referring to plagiarism facilitated by AI tools among Algerian EFL master's students. The researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with 20 students to uncover their perceptions, ethical concerns, and experiences when using AI tools in their academic writing.

The study revealed mixed attitudes: some students believed AI helped them better understand complex texts and improve paraphrasing, while others expressed concern that

over-reliance on AI blurred the lines between their own intellectual work and machine-generated content. Importantly, the research underscored that most students lacked formal training on AI ethics, leaving them uncertain about proper use and citation practices.

Meroua and Hassani (2024) focused on how Algerian Master One students used AI tools to improve their academic writing, particularly in essay development and thesis chapter drafts. The researchers combined questionnaire data from 80 students with an analysis of submitted writing samples to assess improvements in grammar, coherence, and organization after AI use.

The findings indicated that while students reported noticeable improvements in surface-level accuracy (e.g., grammar and syntax), they continued to struggle with critical thinking, argument development, and disciplinary conventions. Notably, the authors stressed that without proper pedagogical guidance, AI tools risk reinforcing superficial corrections rather than fostering deeper academic skills.

Aidi and Smail (2024) surveyed 100 EFL students to explore their attitudes toward AI writing assistance tools, focusing on how these tools affected their academic writing practices, confidence, and self-perception as writers. The questionnaire assessed students' experiences using Grammarly, Quillbot, and similar applications across different writing stages, from brainstorming to revision.

The results showed that students overwhelmingly perceived AI tools as beneficial, particularly for grammar correction, vocabulary enrichment, and structural clarity. However, the study also highlighted students' uncertainty about the ethical limits of AI use, with many reporting they were unsure when AI-supported changes crossed into plagiarism. The authors recommended the integration of AI literacy workshops into university curricula to help students use these tools effectively and ethically.

Zougaret and Koriche (2024) investigated how AI tools affected both student learning outcomes and teacher pedagogical practices at the Master 2 level. Through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with students and faculty, the study examined the dual role of AI as a learning enhancer and a teaching aid.

The findings indicated that AI tools supported students by offering instant feedback on language accuracy, improving engagement in independent writing tasks, and reducing drafting time. For instructors, AI acted as a supplementary resource, helping to streamline assessment and feedback processes. However, both students and teachers expressed

concerns about over-dependence on AI, particularly in areas requiring deep conceptual understanding and original argumentation.

1.9 Discussing Gaps in the Literature

Despite the growing body of research on AI-assisted academic writing in Algerian universities, there remains a clear gap concerning how EFL postgraduate students use AI tools specifically during the process of writing their Master's dissertations. Existing studies have focused on general academic tasks (e.g., essays, assignments), surface-level improvements (e.g., grammar, coherence), or ethical concerns, without addressing the complex, multi-stage nature of dissertation writing. Moreover, few studies explore students' lived experiences in depth, particularly through self-narrative methodology. This study fills that gap by examining not only how students engage with AI tools throughout the entire dissertation process from planning to finalization but also how these tools affect their authorship, academic identity, and ethical awareness. It is also one of the first to integrate a self-narrative to offer a reflective, insider perspective.

Conclusion

This chapter provided a comprehensive review of the evolving role of Artificial Intelligence in academic writing, with a particular focus on master's dissertation contexts. The discussion began by exploring the foundational concepts and historical development of AI in writing, followed by a close examination of how these tools support personalization in academic expression. Key benefits such as increased efficiency, improved feedback quality, and enhanced accessibility were balanced with critical concerns regarding academic integrity, ethical use, and the risk of over-dependence.

Comparative insights into popular tools highlighted their growing influence on the academic writing process, especially for non-native English speakers. While these tools have significantly reshaped how students approach research, drafting, editing, and referencing, their role in supporting critical thinking and originality remains a topic of debate. The chapter also emphasized the importance of thoughtful integration, user training, and institutional guidelines to ensure AI serves as a tool for learning rather than a substitute for it.

Overall, this review established the theoretical and practical foundation for

understanding AI's potential and pitfalls in academic writing. These insights will guide the methodological and analytical choices in the following chapters, where the actual experiences of learners using AI in dissertation writing will be explored.

Chapter Two: Methodology

Introduction

A sound research design begins with the articulation of key theoretical choices that guide the inquiry. This chapter outlines the main components of the study's methodology, including the research paradigm, qualitative approach, sampling method, data collection tools, and the process of data analysis. Together, these elements provide the conceptual and procedural foundation for the research, ensuring alignment with the study's aim and research questions.

2.1.1 Research Paradigm

This study is grounded in the interpretivist paradigm, which views reality as socially constructed and subjective, emphasizing the importance of understanding individuals' experiences and meanings within their context (Cohen et al., 2018). Interpretivism prioritizes depth over generalization, seeking to uncover how people make sense of their world through qualitative exploration rather than relying on numerical measurements or predetermined hypotheses.

The choice of this paradigm is particularly relevant to the current research, which explores how our sample engage with AI tools during the dissertation writing process. Since the focus is on capturing personal insights, experiences, and ethical reflections, an interpretivist lens enables the researcher to explore participants' diverse perspectives and the meanings they attach to AI-assisted academic writing (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Rather than aiming to measure behavior objectively, the study seeks to interpret how learners understand and experience the integration of AI in a deeply personal academic task dissertation writing.

2.1.2 Research Approach

This research adopts a qualitative approach, which is appropriate for studies aiming to explore how individuals interpret and give meaning to their lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative research focuses on understanding processes, behaviors, and perceptions from the participants' point of view (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

In the context of this study, the qualitative approach allows for an in-depth investigation into our sample perceive and engage with Artificial Intelligence tools during

dissertation writing. This method supports the collection of rich, descriptive data that reveals participants' insights, motivations, and ethical considerations factors that would be difficult to capture using quantitative techniques.

Qualitative research is also flexible and adaptive, enabling the researcher to follow emerging themes as they arise through tools like semi-structured interviews and self-narrative. These instruments facilitate a nuanced exploration of students' experiences, which is essential in a topic that is both recent and context-specific, such as AI-assisted academic writing (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

2.1.4 Research Design

A research design refers to the overall plan that connects the research questions to the methods of data collection and analysis, ensuring that the inquiry is coherent, logical, and rigorous (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In qualitative research, a design is typically emergent and flexible, allowing the researcher to adapt as deeper insights unfold during the study (Flick, 2014).

This study follows a narrative inquiry design, situated within the interpretivist paradigm. Narrative inquiry allows the researcher to explore and interpret participants' lived experiences through the stories they tell, emphasizing personal meaning, context, and development over time (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and a researcher self-narrative, enabling a deep engagement with how students construct meaning around their use of AI tools in dissertation writing.

The selected design aligns closely with the aim of exploring how individuals interact with evolving digital technologies in academic writing, particularly focusing on artificial intelligence. It also supports inductive reasoning, allowing themes and patterns to emerge from the data rather than imposing predetermined categories (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Thus, the research design establishes a clear framework through which complex human experiences can be analyzed meaningfully.

2.1.3 Research Tools

In qualitative research, the selection of data collection tools is guided by the objective of capturing rich, in-depth understandings of participants' experiences (Flick, 2014).. For this study, two qualitative tools were employed: semi-structured interviews and the self-narrative. These tools were chosen based on their ability to generate detailed,

flexible, and context-sensitive data aligned with the interpretivist paradigm and qualitative approach.

2.1.3.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews are among the most widely used data collection tools in qualitative research. They are characterized by a flexible format where the interviewer follows a set of guiding questions while remaining open to exploring emerging ideas introduced by the participants (Cohen et al., 2018). This balance between structure and openness allows for both consistency across participants and the freedom to explore individual perspectives in depth.

According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2015), semi-structured interviews enable the co-construction of meaning between researcher and participant, making them particularly suitable for investigating perceptions, attitudes, and experiences. The guided conversational nature of these interviews facilitates the elicitation of narratives and examples, enhancing the richness of the data (Dicicco Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

In this study, semi-structured interviews were designed around the core research questions and key themes identified in the literature review, including AI use in planning, drafting, revising, and issues of academic integrity. The interview guide was developed to ensure coverage of these areas while allowing flexibility for participants to introduce personal perspectives. This format made it possible to probe into specific dimensions of AI use, such as dissertation structure, time management, language challenges, and ethical concerns. Moreover, follow-up questions enabled the researcher to clarify ambiguous responses and delve deeper into emerging themes.

2.1.3.2 Self-Narrative

The self-narrative is a form of auto ethnographic reflection in which the researcher draws upon their personal experiences as both a subject and observer within the study context. This tool acknowledges that the researcher is not an external entity but an embedded participant whose journey can offer critical insights (Ellis et al., 2011)

The self-narrative is particularly effective in interpretivist research, where subjectivity is not seen as a bias to be eliminated but as a source of valuable, situated knowledge (Chang, 2008). Self-narratives enable researchers to document emotional reactions, cognitive processes, ethical dilemmas, and evolving relationships with the research subject in this case, the use of AI in academic writing. As a reflective practice, it supports deeper introspection and a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon under

investigation (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

In the context of this study, the self-narrative was used to chronicle the researcher's lived experience using AI tools while composing the dissertation. It served to highlight the affordances, limitations, and internal negotiations involved in the use of technology for academic writing. As such, it complemented the interview data by offering an insider perspective and adding interpretive depth to the research findings.

This combination supports methodological triangulation a process that strengthens the credibility and trustworthiness of qualitative research by integrating multiple sources of evidence (Patton, 2015). Ultimately, these tools were essential for uncovering the nuanced, context-bound realities that define learners' interactions with AI-assisted writing technologies.

2.1.3.3 Development of the Interview Guide

Out of the fifteen post-Master Two students initially approached for this study, only ten responded positively and participated in the interview process. These ten participants met all inclusion criteria and were available for scheduling. The remaining five either declined to participate, could not be reached after multiple follow-ups, or did not meet the minimum AI usage requirement for inclusion in the study. As such, the final analysis is based solely on the responses of the ten consenting participants.

The interview guide was constructed based on the research questions and relevant themes emerging from the literature on AI in academic writing. It was structured into five parts:

1. Background Information (age, academic history, English writing competence)
2. Use of AI Tools (at various dissertation writing stages)
3. Perceived Benefits
4. Challenges and Concerns
5. Academic and Personal Reflection

The questions were open-ended to encourage narrative responses and deeper reflection, allowing students to share specific examples and experiences freely.

2.2 Sampling Strategy

This study employed a non-probability convenience sampling strategy, selected to

align with the qualitative and interpretivist nature of the research. The participants were chosen based on their accessibility and relevance to the research questions. Specifically, they were post-Master Two EFL graduates from the Department of English at the University of Bordj Bou Arreridj who had completed their dissertations during the 2023–2024 academic year. To ensure the sample's relevance, participants were required to have used one or more AI writing tools at different stages of their dissertation process. Their willingness to engage in in-depth reflection on their experiences with these tools was also a key selection criterion. This approach allowed the researcher to gather rich, detailed accounts from individuals who had firsthand experience integrating AI into their academic writing. The sample size of ten participants was deemed sufficient for thematic saturation within the scope of a qualitative study, where the emphasis lies in depth rather than generalizability. This strategy allowed the research to capture diverse yet focused insights into how AI tools are transforming the dissertation writing process in the Algerian EFL postgraduate context.

2.2.1 Research Setting

The study was conducted at the University of Bordj Bou Arreridj, a public institution in the east of Algeria. The focus was placed on the Department of English within the Faculty of Letters and Languages, where students engage in both undergraduate and postgraduate studies in English language, didactics.

Participants were drawn from post-Master Two graduates of the 2023–2024 academic year who had recently completed their dissertations and the researchers themselves as participants from the same department. The department's structured curriculum, which includes a dissertation as a graduation requirement, provided a relevant academic context for exploring how students interacted with AI tools during the writing process. The university's increasing exposure to digital practices and educational technology further supported its selection as the research site.

2.2.2 Participant Profile

The study involved a total of ten participants; all of whom were post-Master Two graduates from the Department of English at the University of Bordj Bou Arreridj. The participants had completed their dissertations during the 2023–2024 academic year and

were selected based on their confirmed use of AI tools throughout the dissertation writing process.

The group consisted of five male and five female students, with varying levels of academic performance and technological proficiency. All participants were EFL learners, and most reported moderate to frequent use of tools such as ChatGPT, Grammarly, and Quillbot for tasks including paraphrasing, grammar correction, and idea development. Their dissertations covered a range of topics within the field of English studies, allowing for diverse perspectives on the integration of AI in academic writing.

This participant profile provided a balanced representation of users in terms of gender, AI familiarity, and research interests, making them well-suited for exploring the pedagogical, cognitive, and ethical implications of AI use in dissertation writing.

2.3 Data Collection and Analysis

This section provides a comprehensive explanation of the data collection and analysis procedures employed in this study. Given the study's qualitative nature, data were gathered through two main instruments: semi-structured interviews and a self-narrative written by the researchers. These tools were selected for their capacity to yield rich, descriptive insights into the experiences of Master Two graduates who used AI tools during the dissertation writing process. The section begins by detailing how the interviews were prepared, piloted, and administered, followed by an account of how the self-narrative was constructed. It then explains the triangulation strategy used to integrate both data sources to enhance the depth and credibility of findings. Finally, it outlines the thematic analysis approach used to extract recurring patterns and themes, and closes with a discussion of how the research ensured trustworthiness and an acknowledgment of the study's methodological limitations.

2.3.1 Data Collection and Procedures

2.3.1.1 Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were the primary data collection tool in this qualitative inquiry. They were selected for their capacity to uncover the depth and complexity of participants' perspectives regarding their use of AI tools in dissertation writing. This

method allows flexibility for follow-up questions while maintaining consistency across interviews.

2.3.1.3 Pilot Study Process: Setting, Adjustments Made

Before initiating full data collection, a pilot study was conducted with one participant who shared similar academic and linguistic characteristics as the final sample. The pilot interview was audio-recorded and reviewed to assess question clarity, flow, length, and engagement. Based on feedback and observation, several changes were made:

- Some questions were reworded for clarity.
- Additional probes were added to explore ethical concerns and authorship.
- Redundancies were eliminated to streamline the guide.

The pilot helped ensure that the final version was both user-friendly and capable of eliciting the desired depth of responses.

Participant Recruitment and Consent Procedures

The participants were ten Master Two English graduates from the Department of English at the University of Bordj Bou Arreridj who had recently completed their dissertations in the 2023–2024 academic year. A convenience sampling strategy was employed to ensure participants had relevant experience with AI tools. Recruitment was conducted through direct communication, with emphasis on voluntary participation.

Prior to the interview, each participant received a Participant Information Sheet and a Consent Form, explaining the study purpose, confidentiality terms, the right to withdraw, and permission to record. Participants provided written consent, and those who declined audio-recording were allowed to submit written responses instead. Interview Administration (Setting, Duration, Tools Used, Anonymity)

Most interviews were conducted face-to-face in quiet university offices or classrooms, allowing privacy and minimal distractions. For participants who were unavailable in person, interviews were conducted via Google Meet, ensuring the same protocol was followed.

- Average duration: 20–30 minutes
- Tools used: Audio recorder (for consented interviews), notebook, consent form, printed interview guide.
- Language: Primarily English, with the flexibility to switch to Arabic for clarification.

- Anonymity: Participants were assigned codes (e.g., P1, P2) for data processing and reporting.

Participants varied in age (from 24 to 37), academic preparedness, digital literacy, and AI familiarity. Some were confident and tech-savvy; others were more hesitant but curious. These differences influenced the length and depth of the responses.

Interaction dynamics were generally positive, with students showing interest in sharing their experiences. Some exhibited reluctance when discussing ethics and authorship, requiring extra reassurance about confidentiality. The researcher adopted an empathetic, non-judgmental tone to build trust and encourage open responses.

Two of the ten interviews were audio-recorded with consent and later transcribed verbatim using a combination of manual transcription and AI-assisted transcription tools (e.g., Otter.ai), with human verification for accuracy. Eight participants preferred a written format and submitted the interview as a typed document. Transcriptions were anonymized, reviewed line by line, and coded for recurring patterns and expressions relevant to the themes.

Establishing rapport was essential, particularly for discussing AI, a topic some students associated with academic misconduct. Prior familiarity with participants helped reduce power dynamics and foster a conversational atmosphere.

- Some participants saw AI as a "secret weapon" they were hesitant to disclose.
- Others expressed guilt, conflict, or pride in their independence from AI.
- Many mentioned using AI but later modifying or rejecting its suggestions.
- The setting, tone, and pacing of the interview significantly influenced the depth of responses.

These observations were documented in field notes, later cross-referenced with transcripts during analysis.

2.3.1.4 Self-Narrative

The self-narrative was employed as a secondary qualitative tool to deepen the study's reflexive engagement and support data triangulation. It captured the researchers' own journey of using AI tools during dissertation writing, thereby offering a unique insider perspective.

2.3.1.5 Purpose and Justification of the Self-Narrative Method

In qualitative research, especially within the interpretivist paradigm, the researcher is part of the social world they study. The self-narrative provided a first-person, reflexive account of how AI tools shaped the dissertation process, enhancing the emotional, ethical, and cognitive layers of the findings.

This method offered a critical complement to the interview data, revealing subtleties like internal dilemmas, writing behavior, and day-to-day AI interactions that might not emerge in participant responses.

2.3.1.6 Researchers' Positionality and Reflexivity

As the researchers are also a Master Two students writing a dissertation during the study, their positionality brought insider access but also required continuous reflexivity. A personal journal was kept throughout the writing process, noting:

- Motivation to use AI tools
- Frustrations and trust issues with AI-generated text
- Ethical concerns and internal debates
- Shifts in writing identity and agency

This reflective lens allowed for meta-analysis of the writing process, both cognitively and emotionally.

Reflections were recorded over several months during active dissertation writing. Entries were handwritten and later transcribed into a digital file. Prompts included:

- "How did AI assist me today?"
- "What part of my work did I trust AI with?"
- "What doubts or concerns arose?"
- "How much of this paragraph is 'me'?"

The narrative was constructed from these entries, capturing key moments, patterns, and dilemmas.

Types of Data Included

- Cognitive reflections (e.g., how ideas were shaped or blocked by AI)
- Emotional reactions (e.g., guilt, dependence, pride)
- Practical documentation (e.g., screenshots of AI inputs/outputs)
- Ethical tensions (e.g., originality vs. assistance)

The self-narrative was analyzed thematically and triangulated with the interview data. It provided supporting evidence for key themes, particularly in relation to authorship, critical thinking, and over-reliance on AI. The insights gained were also used to contextualize and interpret participants' reflections, helping to validate shared concerns or divergent views.

2.3.2 Data Analysis

The data analysis process in this research was guided by the principles of thematic analysis, a widely used method in qualitative research that enables the identification, analysis, and interpretation of patterns (themes) within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach was chosen due to its flexibility and its alignment with the interpretivist paradigm, which values participants' lived experiences and the subjective meaning they ascribe to events.

Thematic analysis was applied to both sources of data: semi-structured interviews and the self-narrative. The analysis process followed Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2022) six-step model:

1. Familiarization with the data: The researcher began by transcribing the interviews verbatim and repeatedly reading the transcripts and the self-narrative. Notes and preliminary observations were made during this stage to identify early impressions and meaningful segments.
2. Generating initial codes: The data was manually coded using descriptive and in vivo coding techniques. Segments of text that captured meaningful patterns or concepts related to AI use in dissertation writing were tagged with short phrases.
3. Searching for categories: Codes were examined for conceptual similarity and grouped into broader categories that reflected shared ideas. This stage served as a transitional phase between granular data points and more abstract thematic structures.
4. Reviewing categories and developing themes: The categories were refined, collapsed, or reorganized to ensure internal coherence and external distinctiveness. Themes were developed by identifying overarching patterns that cut across the data.
5. Defining and naming themes: Each theme was clearly defined to capture the essence of the experiences it represented. Naming was done in a way that reflected both analytical depth and accessibility for the reader.

6. Producing the final report: Themes were interpreted in light of the research questions, and illustrative quotes were selected to support analytical claims. The themes were further validated through triangulation with the self-narrative data.

The following table illustrates the process by which raw data from interviews was transformed into codes, categories, and ultimately, thematic findings:

Table 5: Sample Codes, Categories, and Emerging Themes from Thematic Analysis

Sample Code	Category	Theme
“It helped me organize ideas”	AI assistance in planning	Enhancing Productivity and Structure
“ChatGPT gave me quick drafts”	Speed and efficiency	Enhancing Productivity and Structure
“I just checked grammar with it”	Language correction and polishing	Language Support and Clarity
“I relied on it too much”	Overuse and dependence	Dependency and Limitations
“It’s not my own thinking”	Doubts about authorship and ownership	Impact on Academic Identity and Authorship
“I didn’t know if it was allowed”	Confusion about rules and expectations	Ethical Awareness and Academic Integrity

This table presents a simplified overview of the analytical trajectory followed in this study’s thematic analysis. It outlines the connection between raw participant responses (sample codes), the conceptual categories developed during coding, and the final themes that emerged. These themes served as the backbone for organizing and interpreting the qualitative findings in Chapter Three. The progression from concrete expressions to abstract thematic constructs reflects the depth and reflexivity of the analytical process, in alignment with Braun and Clarke’s (2006) framework for thematic analysis.

The thematic analysis not only enabled the researcher to construct a coherent narrative around the participants’ experiences but also supported the interpretive validity of the study by drawing connections between multiple perspectives.

2.3.3 Trustworthiness

To ensure the quality and rigor of this qualitative research, the study adhered to Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four criteria for trustworthiness: credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability.

Credibility

Credibility refers to the confidence in the truth of the findings. In this study, credibility was ensured through several steps: prolonged engagement with the data, including multiple close readings and coding iterations; member checking, where participants reviewed their interview transcripts for accuracy; and the use of direct quotations from participants to authentically represent their voices. These measures helped ensure that the findings reflected the participants' actual experiences and perspectives.

Dependability

Dependability relates to the consistency and stability of the research process. The researcher maintained a clear and traceable record of all data collection and analysis procedures. Interview questions, transcription methods, coding processes, and analytical decisions were documented in a research log, allowing for the research process to be followed and potentially replicated. This transparency supports the internal reliability of the study.

Transferability

Transferability concerns the extent to which findings can apply to other contexts. While the aim of qualitative research is not broad generalization, this study enhances transferability by offering rich, thick descriptions of the research setting, participant backgrounds, and the thematic results. This allows readers to assess the relevance of the findings to similar EFL or academic writing contexts.

Confirmability

Confirmability ensures that findings are shaped by the participants' input rather than researcher bias. The study maintained a reflexive stance throughout, with the researcher actively acknowledging and documenting their role, particularly in the self-narrative. Data

triangulation using both interviews and self-narrative helped reduce bias and validated the consistency of emerging themes across sources.

2.3.4 Limitations

Like any qualitative study, this research faced several limitations that may have influenced the depth and breadth of its findings. One of the primary limitations was time constraints, which restricted the duration available for participant recruitment, data collection, and iterative analysis. This may have limited the richness of some responses and the possibility of broader thematic exploration. Additionally, limited access to academic databases and scholarly literature posed challenges during the literature review phase, potentially affecting the comprehensiveness of theoretical grounding. Another limitation involved participant self-reporting; despite efforts to build rapport and encourage openness, there remains the possibility of social desirability bias, where participants may have overstated or understated their use of AI tools. Finally, the small and localized sample size, drawn exclusively from a single institution, restricts the generalizability of the findings beyond the studied context. While these limitations do not undermine the value of the research, they should be considered when interpreting its conclusions and implications.

Chapter Three: Findings and discussion

General conclusion

Introduction

This chapter presents the core findings of the study, which aimed to explore how participants engaged with AI tools during the writing of their master dissertations. The data was primarily collected through semi-structured interviews with ten post-graduate participants, complemented by the researcher's self-narrative to enhance reflexivity and offer further contextual depth.

To provide a clear and structured account of the data, the findings are organized thematically. This chapter presents five major themes that emerged from the analysis. The process followed a clear progression: initial coding, category development, theme construction, and triangulation using both interview data and self-narrative insights. Each theme is explored in depth through representative participant quotes and reflections from the researcher's experience. This structure ensures coherence and strengthens the credibility of the findings through methodological triangulation.

Theme 1: Enhancing Productivity and Structure

This theme explores how AI tools contributed to increasing the productivity of Master Two students and helped them build coherent dissertation structures. Participants frequently highlighted the role of AI in facilitating brainstorming, generating ideas quickly, and assisting in organizing chapter outlines and arguments. These tools served as catalysts that streamlined early-stage planning and expedited the drafting process. The findings demonstrate how AI's ability to scaffold writing made the initial phases of dissertation composition less overwhelming and more efficient.

The findings from the interviews reveal that AI tools were predominantly used to enhance structural organization, aid in brainstorming, and accelerate the drafting process. Participants consistently referred to AI as a planning assistant that improved the efficiency of their workflow.

Participant 1:

"AI helped me generate chapter outlines when I was unsure where to begin."

The participant used AI to overcome initial planning barriers.

Similarly Participant 2:

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"I found myself saving time by asking ChatGPT to propose different ways to structure my literature review."

AI served as a brainstorming partner and time-saver.

Participant 3:

"When I couldn't decide between different directions for my topic, ChatGPT gave me possible titles and breakdowns."

AI contributed to narrowing and shaping the research direction.

Participant 5:

"The productivity boost was huge. I used AI daily to keep my writing structured."

it is clear that AI facilitated writing continuity and reduced cognitive overload.

Participant 6:

"I struggled with what comes first methodology or lit review? ChatGPT showed me different formats."

it is apparent that AI provided examples that helped the participant resolve structural confusion.

The self-narrative reinforced this theme significantly. As researchers, we began this dissertation journey with little clarity or academic direction. Our writing process was cluttered, disconnected, and aimless in the early stages. We faced difficulties determining where and how to start writing the introduction, literature review, and subsequent chapters.

Feeling overwhelmed, we turned to ChatGPT as a last resort not with blind optimism, but out of practical necessity. Initially, we experimented by typing vague prompts such as:

"Help me plan a dissertation on AI in academic writing."

The output, though generic at first, was surprisingly helpful. It gave us logical chapter divisions, such as Introduction, Review of Literature, Methodology, "Findings," and Discussion, with bullet-point suggestions under each section. This structure offered a mental roadmap, and soon became the foundation of our actual table of contents. Later, when we were confused between structuring the literature chronologically or thematically, we returned to ChatGPT for more tailored guidance. One member asked:

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"What's the best way to organize a literature review for a Master's thesis?"

ChatGPT replied with well-explained options, helping us weigh and choose the best model for our study.

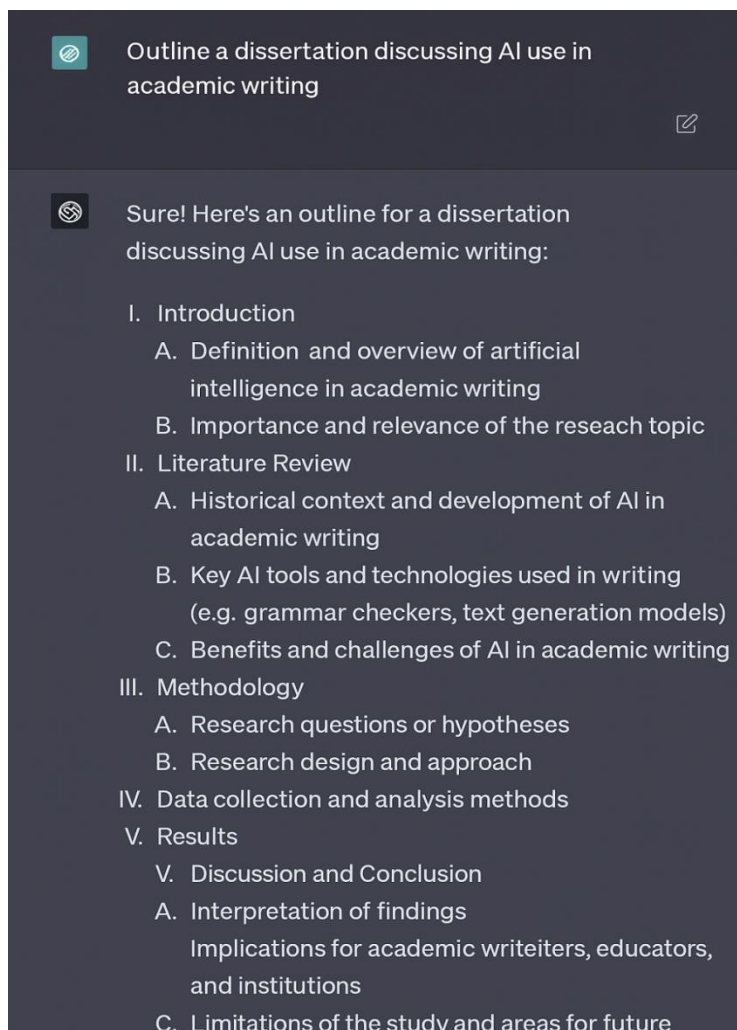
In addition, the tool was used to create subheadings, especially for sections like 1.4 (Implications of AI in Academic Writing) and 2.1 (Research Paradigm). It allowed us to build a flexible skeleton for our arguments before diving deep into content generation.

This stage also saw heavy use of Grammarly and Quillbot, not for content generation, but to polish sentence flow and refine transitions between sections.

Through these interactions, our writing began to feel more structured and intentional, and the pressure of having to figure it all out alone slowly diminished. This stage transformed AI tools from being “helpers” to co-designers in shaping our academic roadmap.

Screenshot of ChatGPT Output Suggesting Dissertation Outline

General conclusion



Both participant responses and our self-narrative confirm that AI tools were instrumental in scaffolding early-stage productivity. They did not replace thinking but instead facilitated structured progression. Participants and researchers alike leaned on these tools not for answers but for orientation, using them to visualize the roadmap of their dissertations and reduce time lost in indecision. This theme directly affirms the first research question by demonstrating how AI contributes to structure, clarity, and personalized planning in academic work.

Theme 2: Language Support and Clarity

Another prominent theme that emerged was the role of AI tools in improving linguistic accuracy, grammar, and overall clarity in students' writing. Participants

General conclusion

consistently reported using tools such as Grammarly and Quillbot to correct grammatical mistakes, rephrase awkward sentences, and enhance vocabulary usage. This theme represents students' focus on producing grammatically polished and academically appropriate content, often using AI to support surface-level language correction rather than deep conceptual change.

The data from the interviews indicate that AI was regularly employed to correct grammatical mistakes and enhance clarity in academic writing. Participants described these tools as "language correctors" that helped them sound more academic and polished.

Participants frequently described AI as a "language coach" or "grammar checker," emphasizing its utility in cleaning up surface-level mistakes.

Findings: Participant Responses and Interpretations

- Participant 1: *"I used Grammarly to fix errors and improve my writing level."*

It is apparent that AI supported grammar accuracy and increased student confidence in academic expression.

- Participant 4: *"Quillbot helped rephrase paragraphs that sounded weird."*

Rewriting tools were used to enhance clarity and fluency in students' drafts.

- Participant 6: *"Grammarly showed me repeated words and helped vary my sentences."*

Students used AI tools not only for correctness but also for stylistic variation.

- Participant 9: *"AI helped paraphrase complex sentences to improve clarity."*

Undoubtedly AI functioned as a linguistic simplifier for enhancing readability and coherence.

In the early drafting phases of the thesis, the research team encountered difficulties in maintaining a consistently academic tone across chapters. Sentence structure often lacked variation, and certain passages contained repetitive or vague language. Seeking to elevate the linguistic quality of the work, we turned to tools such as Grammarly and Quillbot.

Initially, we would draft paragraphs manually, then run them through Grammarly's interface to detect punctuation errors, tense mismatches, and awkward constructions. For example, we noticed that our transition sentences between paragraphs were often flagged as unclear or abrupt. Grammarly suggested smoother connectors, while simultaneously pointing out overuse of certain verbs or phrases. This iterative process became a routine

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step in polishing every chapter draft.

Furthermore, in dealing with paraphrasing academic literature, we often drafted rough rewordings of key ideas from journal articles, but the language occasionally felt forced or unnatural. At that stage, Quillbot was used to help rephrase these ideas more fluently, ensuring the academic tone was maintained without veering into plagiarism. In these instances, the AI tools didn't replace our writing but refined and clarified it like a second set of editorial eyes.

An example included a sentence from the literature review:

"AI tools are widely used in education due to their wide accessibility and potential to automate tasks."

Grammarly flagged this for redundancy and suggested:

"AI tools are popular in education because they are accessible and automate tasks efficiently."

Similarly, Quillbot helped turn a clunky sentence such as:

"Many students encounter difficulties in the dissertation phase, mainly because of lack of time and skills."

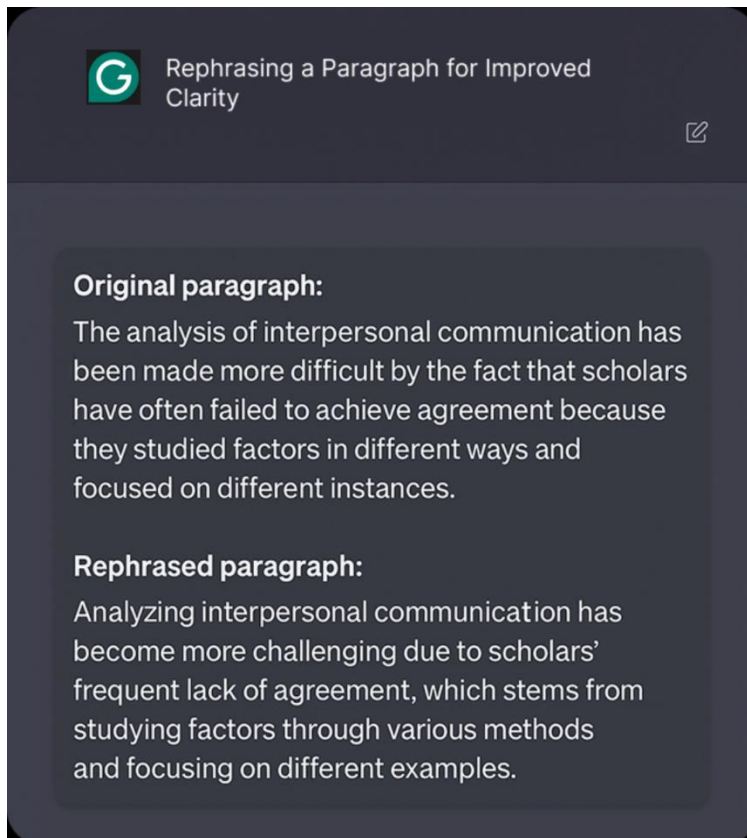
Into a more polished version:

"Dissertation challenges are often linked to time constraints and limited academic skills."

This process dramatically improved our flow, readability, and coherence throughout the research. Over time, we began to anticipate the feedback of the AI tools and adjusted our writing preemptively. This not only enhanced our final draft but contributed to our own linguistic awareness.

Screenshot of Grammarly Drafting and Editing Paragraphs (Language Refinement)

General conclusion



The findings from both the participant interviews and the researcher's self-narrative reveal a consistent pattern: AI tools such as Grammarly and Quillbot served as valuable linguistic assistants. While participants used these tools to enhance grammar and expression, the researchers found them indispensable in refining tone, structure, and fluency. Importantly, both groups used AI tools not as content creators but as writing editors—amplifying clarity without compromising authorship. This suggests a shift in academic writing where students become collaborators with AI in the editorial phase, while maintaining control over meaning and voice.

Theme 3: Dependency and Limitations

While many participants acknowledged the benefits of using AI in their academic writing, several also expressed concerns about becoming overly dependent on these tools. Dependency emerged as a nuanced issue: AI tools were seen as helpful, but their excessive use often led to a reduction in critical engagement, self-reliance, or independent problem-solving during the dissertation writing process.

Participants frequently described feeling "trapped" or "lazy" when using AI tools

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too frequently, emphasizing how convenience sometimes replaced creativity and personal initiative.

The data from both the interviews and the self-narrative reveal a growing sense of dependence on AI tools, with some participants expressing concern that excessive use hindered their personal engagement, creativity, and sense of academic authorship.

- Participant 3: *“I relied too much on ChatGPT... it made me feel like I didn’t write the paper myself.”*

obviously Overuse of AI blurred the participant’s sense of authorship and intellectual ownership.

- Participant 5: *“At one point, I was just copying what AI gave me. I didn’t feel involved.”*

obviously, AI convenience led to disengagement from the research process.

- Participant 7: *“AI is good, but it should not replace thinking. I used it for help, not to think for me.”*

While acknowledging its benefits, the participant warned clearly against over-reliance.

- Participant 10: *“The more I used it, the less I trusted myself.”*

it is clear that Heavy AI use undermined the participant’s confidence in their academic capabilities.

It is clear that during the initial phase of writing this thesis, we began using AI tools primarily to clarify structure and polish grammar. However, as deadlines approached and pressure mounted, our reliance on AI tools increased sometimes unconsciously. At one point, particularly during the drafting of complex sections such as the Literature Review, we found ourselves asking ChatGPT to generate whole paragraphs based on summarized notes. While the content was relevant, it lacked the unique analytical touch and personal voice we aimed to maintain.

This shift became especially visible in how we interacted with our own writing. Rather than drafting first and refining later, we began by feeding ideas directly into the AI and editing its output. Though this saved time, it made us question the authenticity of the process. It felt like the AI was driving the structure not us. One instance involved a full subsection on “The Ethical Implications of AI in Writing.” We had bullet points, but instead of developing them manually, we typed them into ChatGPT, asking it to “turn these

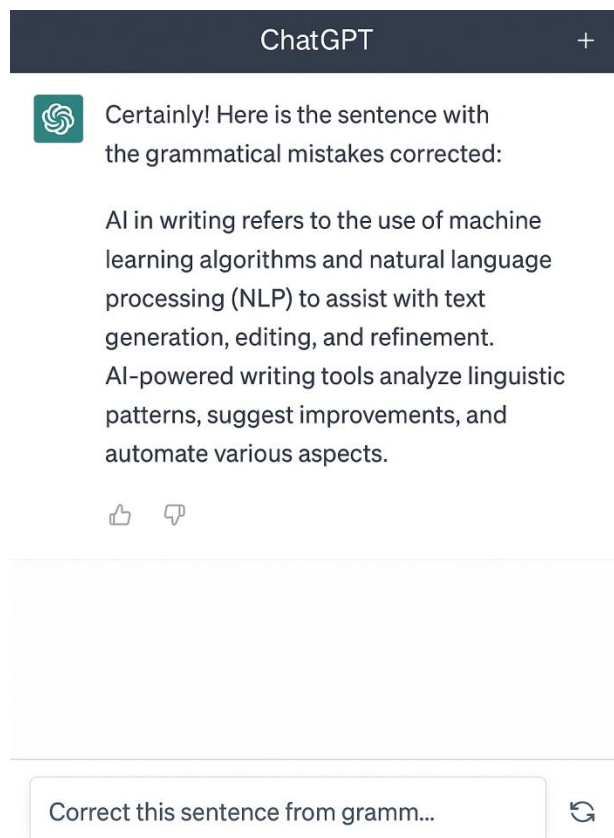
General conclusion

ideas into a paragraph.” The result was polished, but mechanical. It lacked depth and nuance, prompting us to later rewrite it entirely from scratch.

We also noticed that with constant use, our writing rhythm changed. Instead of trusting our linguistic instincts, we began second-guessing our sentences and defaulting to what “AI would say.” Grammarly, for instance, was helpful for grammar but often flagged academic expressions as “wordy” or “unclear,” encouraging simplifications that sometimes-diluted meaning. After a while, we realized this feedback loop was shaping our style streamlining it, but also homogenizing it.

We eventually made a conscious decision to limit AI usage to editing and planning, ensuring that the substance came from us. This restored a sense of control and creativity. But the period of over-reliance was a wake-up call: AI can be a support system, but it can also quietly become the driver of the academic process.

Screenshot of ChatGPT Correcting Grammar in Academic Sentence



Findings across both interviews and self-narrative highlight a critical tension in AI-

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assisted academic writing. While students initially use AI to assist and enhance, many find themselves depending on it for core tasks—compromising personal engagement and academic confidence. The convenience of automation often replaces the effortful, reflective nature of writing, potentially weakening students' ownership and critical thinking. This theme cautions that while AI tools can enhance the writing process, unmoderated use may result in passive authorship and intellectual disengagement—turning writing into mere assembling rather than constructing knowledge.

Theme 4: Impact on Academic Identity and Authorship

This theme explores how participants perceived their academic identity when using AI tools and how they negotiated the boundary between assistance and authorship. While many students valued AI's ability to support and enhance their writing, they also expressed discomfort with the blurred lines between their own intellectual labor and machine-generated content.

The data from the interviews reveals that students experienced a tension between using AI as a helpful support tool and maintaining a sense of personal authorship over their academic work.

Participant: *"It's not my own thinking. Sometimes I had to stop and ask myself, did I write this or did ChatGPT help too much?"*

It is clear that this participant felt a disconnection from their own ideas, signaling a loss of control over the intellectual process.

Participant: *"The content was there, but it felt like the voice wasn't entirely mine anymore."*

This suggests that even when students generated the ideas themselves, AI's rewriting capabilities interfered with their sense of personal expression.

Participant: *"Using AI made my writing look better, but then I wondered, is this still my dissertation?"*

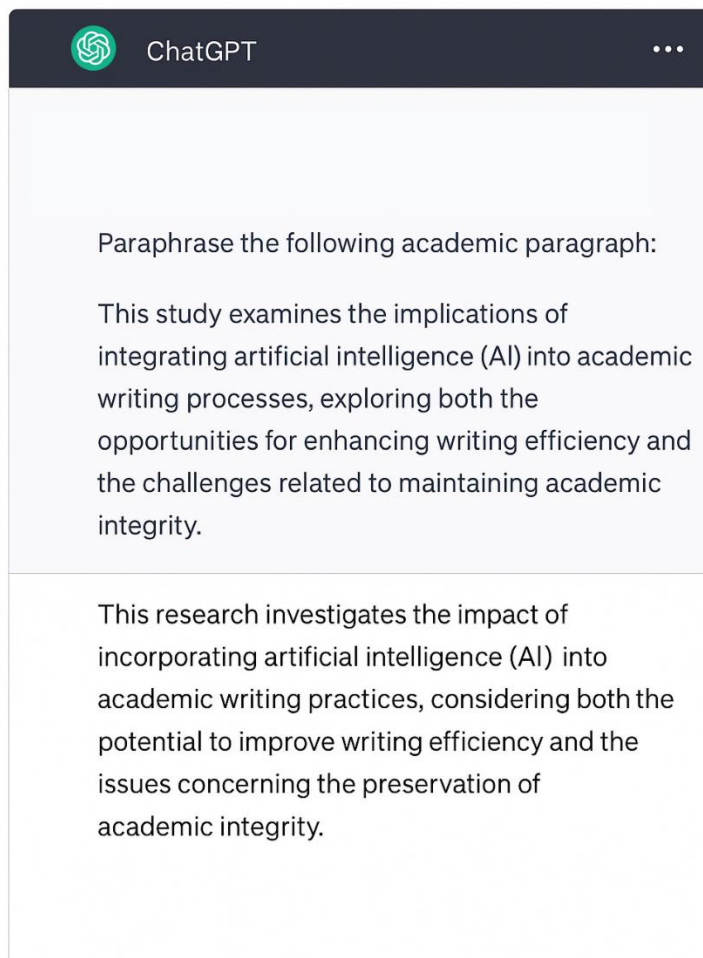
It is evident that improvements in form and clarity sometimes came at the cost of academic ownership, leaving students questioning the legitimacy of their own work.

The self-narrative reflects a similar internal struggle. During the writing of this very thesis, there were moments when AI tools especially ChatGPT were used to help paraphrase, restructure, or even generate transitions between ideas. Initially, this felt like a powerful

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advantage, especially when ideas were difficult to articulate clearly. However, as sections became increasingly refined by AI, a creeping doubt settled in: was this still an authentic representation of the writer's academic identity, or was it becoming a polished artifact shaped by a machine's linguistic patterns? The clearest instance of this occurred while rewriting a particularly complex paragraph in the literature review. After ChatGPT rephrased it with impressive fluency, it no longer felt like something personally written. The tone, rhythm, and even the vocabulary seemed foreign. There was a moment of hesitation before accepting the paragraph, and it left behind a lingering discomfort. This moment forced a deeper reflection not only about the limits of using AI in academic writing, but also about the importance of preserving one's own academic voice, even if it is flawed or unpolished. These personal dilemmas became central to how this research was designed and interpreted.

Screenshot of ChatGPT Paraphrasing Academic Content (Authorship Identity)



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The combined data suggests that AI's role in dissertation writing introduces a subtle but significant disruption to academic identity. While it enhances fluency and structure, it also creates uncertainty about authorship especially when students begin to feel like editors of machine-generated content rather than creators of their own work. In this way, AI challenges traditional notions of authorship and scholarly contribution, making students reconsider what it means to "own" their academic voice.

Theme 5: Ethical Awareness and Academic Integrity

One of the most frequently cited concerns surrounding AI use in academic writing relates to ethics particularly around issues of plagiarism, proper attribution, and the boundaries between assistance and misconduct. Within the context of dissertation writing, participants revealed that while AI tools significantly facilitated aspects of the writing process, they also introduced uncertainty regarding academic integrity. This theme captures the ethical dilemmas, confusions, and perceived responsibilities associated with using AI tools during the research and writing journey.

The data from the interviews reveals that students experienced a lack of clarity regarding what constituted acceptable use of AI tools in their academic work.

Participant: *"I didn't know if it was allowed. I kept using ChatGPT to help me paraphrase, but I wasn't sure if I should cite it or not."*

It is clear that this student was caught between the convenience of AI and the fear of academic misconduct, reflecting a broader uncertainty about ethical boundaries.

Participant: *"Even though it helped me with clarity, I was worried that using too much of it would count as cheating."*

This suggests that students recognized the usefulness of AI, but remained cautious about overuse and its implications for fairness and originality.

Participant: *"There was no formal guidance from the university. I had to guess what was right or wrong."*

It is evident that institutional silence contributed to ethical confusion, leaving students vulnerable to misjudgment or unintentional misconduct.

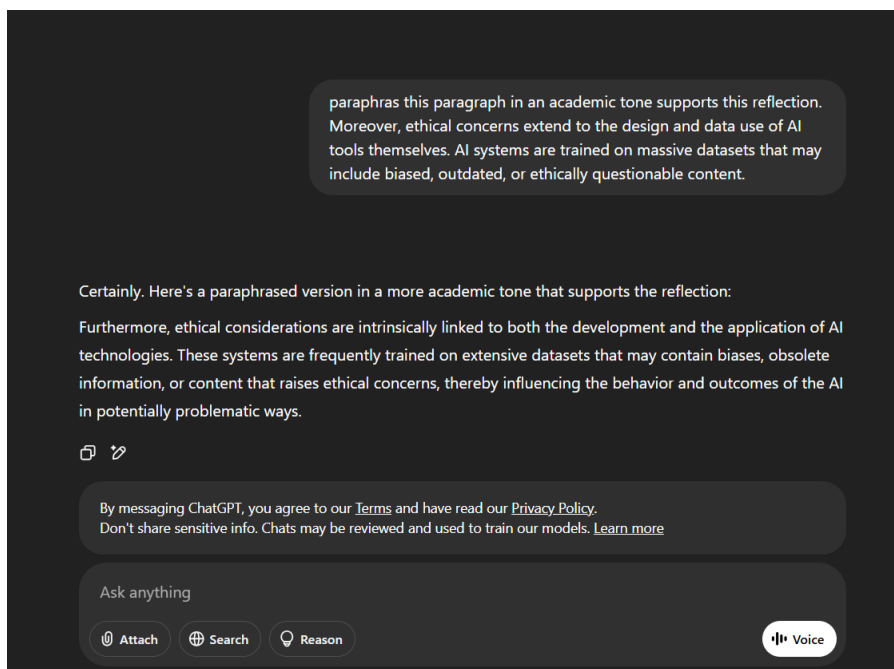
Some participants tried to self-regulate, using plagiarism detectors or limiting AI involvement to avoid violating undefined rules. The lack of consistent policies led to inconsistent practices, ranging from cautious paraphrasing to outright avoidance of AI for

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certain sections.

The self-narrative strongly mirrors these concerns. Throughout the thesis process, the researcher frequently reflected on whether AI assistance was ethically justifiable. Although ChatGPT was used for paraphrasing and brainstorming outlines, there was a persistent feeling of uncertainty: how much is too much? One particularly revealing moment came when a paragraph was paraphrased using AI, producing an impressively academic tone. While the content was technically accurate, the voice felt slightly off. More importantly, a question arose: if the structure and flow were created by AI, does that still count as the researcher's intellectual work? This question was never fully answered during the writing process, and each time AI was used, the researcher made sure to rephrase and revise it again, not out of habit, but out of ethical discomfort. The entire experience created a tension between efficiency and responsibility, between technological affordance and moral agency. That tension ultimately shaped the writing process itself, slowing it down, forcing more deliberate decisions, and adding emotional labor that was not originally anticipated.

Screenshot of ChatGPT Interface Clarifying Ethical Guidelines (Academic Integrity)



The general pattern emerging from this theme is that students are navigating ethical terrain without a map. While AI tools offer useful shortcuts and improvements, they also introduce hidden risks risks that are intensified when institutions fail to provide clear

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guidance. As a result, students rely on their own judgment, which is often shaped by fear, uncertainty, and a desire to remain academically honest. This puts the responsibility of ethical discernment entirely on the student, revealing an urgent need for universities to establish transparent, AI-specific integrity policies that reflect the realities of modern academic work.

3.2 Discussion of the findings

This section presents a comprehensive discussion of the main findings drawn from both the semi-structured interviews and the researcher's self-narrative. Anchored in the study's three research questions, the discussion explores how EFL postgraduate students at the University of Bordj Bou Arreridj engage with AI tools during dissertation writing, the benefits and challenges they encounter, and the impact of these tools on their academic identity and integrity. The integration of participant voices with literature-based insights reveals not only the functional use of AI in academic tasks but also the deeper cognitive and ethical dilemmas students face. By situating these findings within existing scholarship, this chapter offers a nuanced interpretation of how AI is reshaping the dissertation writing experience in a non-Western EFL context.

3.2.1 The use of AI tools during dissertation writing

This section addresses the first research question: *How do EFL postgraduate students use AI tools during dissertation writing?* The finding revealed a variety of ways in which students integrated AI tools like ChatGPT, Grammarly, and Quillbot into their academic writing process. Their use was not limited to editing or correcting language, but extended to generating ideas, building structure, and managing the overall workflow of dissertation writing.

Participants often described AI as a "starting point" during the early writing stages. Many turned to ChatGPT to generate dissertation outlines, draft topic proposals, or rephrase introductory sections. Grammarly was used consistently throughout the writing process to ensure accuracy in grammar and punctuation. Quillbot was often employed to simplify dense paragraphs and to rephrase previously written content. It is clear that

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participants utilized each tool for different purposes, forming a kind of personalized AI toolkit that evolved based on their writing stage and individual needs.

In the self-narrative, the researcher recounts using AI tools at various points to accelerate progress during moments of writer's block. For example, ChatGPT was helpful in brainstorming sub-sections for the literature review, while Grammarly was used to fine-tune formal tone in the final draft. This personalized and adaptive use of AI tools became essential to keeping momentum throughout the dissertation process. However, there was also an awareness that these tools were being used selectively, not as a replacement for writing, but to assist and support the workflow in specific ways.

These findings are consistent with recent literature. Xu (2025) highlighted that students use AI tools in different phases of writing, depending on their needs for clarity, structure, or productivity. Similarly, Aydin et al. (2025) found that generative AI tools such as ChatGPT were particularly valued during the planning and drafting stages, while Grammarly was more frequently used during editing. In the Algerian context, Meroua and Hassani (2024) observed that students integrated AI tools across various academic tasks, including research organization and paraphrasing. This study reinforces those insights by offering a closer look at how students actively manage multiple tools and make choices about when and how to rely on AI assistance during the dissertation journey.

3.2.2 Perceived benefits and challenges of AI use in dissertation writing

This section explores the second research question: *What benefits and challenges do EFL postgraduate students perceive in using AI tools during the dissertation writing process?* The finding revealed a dual perception: AI tools were embraced as useful writing aids that helped students improve clarity, save time, and reduce stress yet students were also aware of the risks of over-reliance, reduced critical thinking, and uncertainty over the quality and accuracy of AI outputs.

The most frequently mentioned benefit was improved productivity and time management. Many participants explained that AI tools helped them overcome writing blocks, especially in the early drafting phase. For instance, ChatGPT was praised for quickly generating outlines, introductions, and transitional paragraphs. One participant mentioned how starting with AI-generated structure gave them the motivation and clarity

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to continue writing on their own. It is clear that AI helped reduce the cognitive load of planning and gave students a sense of direction, which they found particularly valuable during high-pressure stages of the dissertation.

Another notable benefit was language enhancement. Participants often turned to Grammarly to correct grammatical errors, adjust tone, and improve coherence. This was especially appreciated by non-native English speakers who lacked confidence in their academic language skills. Quillbot also played a role in simplifying dense sentences and rephrasing awkward structures. It is evident that these tools boosted participants' confidence in meeting academic standards and helped them feel more in control of their expression.

However, alongside these benefits, participants expressed several concerns and limitations. A major challenge was overdependence. Some participants admitted that they began relying too heavily on AI tools, particularly for rephrasing or content generation. This raised personal doubts about whether their work truly reflected their own academic efforts. One participant explained how they struggled to separate their own ideas from AI-rewritten content, especially when the suggestions were polished and convincing. It is clear that for some participants, convenience led to hesitation and self-questioning about authenticity.

Another concern was the inconsistency and unpredictability of AI outputs. While some suggestions improved clarity, others were too generic, off-topic, or even grammatically incorrect. Participants expressed frustration with having to filter through multiple AI-generated responses to find something useful. This added extra work and sometimes confused their writing rather than clarifying it. It is obvious that although AI was meant to simplify the process, it sometimes introduced more decisions and second-guessing, especially for students who lacked confidence in judging academic quality.

In the self-narrative, we experienced similar contradictions. At times, AI tools were a source of real support Grammarly's real-time corrections caught mistakes that had been missed, and ChatGPT provided alternative formulations when ideas felt blocked. However, the overuse of AI in certain parts led to a mechanical tone that didn't match our intended style. In one particular case, after generating three different paragraph rephrasings using ChatGPT, none were selected. Although each version was linguistically correct, they felt too distant from our thinking. That moment became a reminder that productivity should not come at the expense of personal voice or academic intention. It reinforced the idea that AI

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should be a support not a substitute for the writing process.

These experiences are echoed in recent literature. Singh (2023) found that AI tools improved surface-level accuracy but had little effect on deeper engagement with content. Dobrin (2023) and Nguyen (2023) both warned that excessive reliance on AI can diminish learners' critical engagement, particularly when students stop questioning or revising AI outputs. In contrast, Johnson and Patel (2023) observed that students who used AI selectively and reflectively gained the most from it, suggesting that value lies not in the tool itself, but in how it's used. In Algeria, Aidi and Smail (2024) similarly reported that while AI tools improved grammar and style, students lacked the awareness to critically evaluate AI-suggested content. The current study reinforces and extends these insights, showing how students are often caught between AI's efficiency and their own academic development.

3.2.3 The Impact of AI Tools on Academic Identity and Integrity

This section addresses the third research question: *What impact do AI tools have on EFL postgraduate students' academic identity and integrity?* The data reveals that while students appreciated the assistance provided by AI in refining their dissertations, they also experienced significant tensions regarding authorship, intellectual ownership, and ethical responsibility. The blurred boundary between machine support and human creativity created emotional, academic, and moral ambiguity for many.

Participants described a growing sense of detachment from their writing as AI tools took on greater roles in paraphrasing, structuring, and even idea development. Some admitted questioning whether they were still the true authors of their work. One participant reflected on how polished AI-generated text made them doubt their own contribution, explaining: *"It's not my own thinking... did I write this or did ChatGPT help too much?"* It is clear that this participant struggled to maintain a sense of ownership when AI began shaping the content in ways that felt indistinguishable from their own efforts.

Others shared discomfort with how AI altered their writing voice. Although the content remained factually correct, the tone often shifted into something unfamiliar. As one participant noted, *"The content was there, but it felt like the voice wasn't entirely mine anymore."* This suggests that the stylistic consistency and academic identity students try to

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build across their work may be disrupted when external tools begin rewriting significant portions of the text.

Ethical confusion was another central concern. Participants frequently reported uncertainty over what constituted appropriate use. While many used ChatGPT for paraphrasing and brainstorming, they were unsure whether this needed to be acknowledged or cited. A few avoided using AI altogether for fear of being accused of cheating. One participant explained: *“There was no formal guidance from the university. I had to guess what was right or wrong.”* It is obvious that in the absence of institutional policies, students were left to navigate the ethics of AI use based on personal judgment or peer opinion creating stress, self-doubt, and inconsistent practices.

The self-narrative mirrors these internal conflicts closely. We recalled multiple points in the writing process where ChatGPT offered rewordings or structural revisions that were effective but alienating. In one notable case, the AI rewrote an entire paragraph on literature review themes with such fluency that it no longer sounded like ours. Although it was tempting to keep, the paragraph was eventually deleted and rewritten by hand. That decision, while slower and less polished, helped us reclaim a sense of authorship. The experience highlighted a recurring struggle: balancing the efficiency of AI with the need for authenticity and ethical clarity. Moreover, it revealed that academic identity is not just built through ideas, but through our process of laboring with those ideas struggling, shaping, and owning them.

These findings resonate strongly with existing literature. Dobrin (2023) and Eager (2024) both warned of AI’s potential to flatten students’ academic voices, resulting in writing that is grammatically correct but intellectually distant. Garcia and Patel (2024) observed that students often overestimate the originality of paraphrased AI content, leading to unintentional ethical violations. In the Algerian context, Ghounane et al. (2024) reported that students viewed AI-generated content with skepticism, but lacked clear criteria to determine its acceptability. Similarly, Meroua and Hassani (2024) noted that while AI improved surface-level fluency, it weakened student engagement with argumentation and self-expression. This study reinforces those insights and adds depth by revealing how students emotionally and ethically negotiate their relationship with AI how they protect their academic voice while navigating an uncertain digital landscape. Ultimately, it reveals the urgent need for both ethical guidance and pedagogical support that preserve integrity

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without rejecting the tools students now rely on.

3.3 Limitations

While this study offers valuable insights into how AI tools are used by Master Two graduates during their dissertation writing, it is important to acknowledge several limitations that may have affected the scope and interpretation of the findings.

Firstly, the sample size was relatively small, consisting of only ten participants from a single department at the University of Bordj Bou Arreridj. Although qualitative research prioritizes depth over breadth, the limited number of voices may not fully capture the diversity of experiences that exist across institutions, disciplines, or regions in Algeria.

Secondly, this study relied heavily on self-reported findings, including interviews and the researcher's own self-narrative. While this approach allowed for in-depth, personal insights, it also introduced the risk of subjective bias, memory limitations, or social desirability effects. Participants may have underreported or exaggerated their use of AI due to uncertainty about academic norms or fear of judgment.

Another limitation concerns the lack of institutional documentation or official policy on AI use during the dissertation writing process. This made it difficult to evaluate the students' practices against a formal ethical framework and limited the analysis to their personal interpretations of what was acceptable or not.

In addition, while the triangulation of interview and self-narrative findings improved the credibility of findings, the study did not incorporate perspectives from supervisors or institutional stakeholders. Their input could have enriched the discussion on academic integrity and ethical standards.

Finally, the study was conducted during a period when AI tools were rapidly evolving. As such, the results reflect a specific moment in the technological landscape, and ongoing developments may change how students interact with these tools in future academic contexts.

Despite these limitations, the findings offer a timely and meaningful contribution to the growing discussion on AI in academic writing, especially in under-researched settings such as Algerian higher education.

General conclusion

3.4 Pedagogical Implications

The findings of this study have important pedagogical implications for EFL academic writing instruction in the age of AI. While students benefited from the use of tools, it was clear that many lacked guidance on how to use these tools critically, ethically, and productively. This suggests that educators must play a more active role in shaping students' digital writing practices.

First, it is essential to integrate AI literacy into writing pedagogy. Rather than treating AI tools as external or optional, instructors should help students understand how to use them responsibly not as shortcuts, but as aids that support learning. Classroom activities should include critical evaluation of AI-generated text, reflection on authorship, and awareness of when AI assistance becomes overuse.

Second, writing instruction should explicitly address the concept of voice and ownership. Students must be taught how to maintain their academic identity even when using digital tools. This includes learning how to revise AI suggestions in ways that reflect their own thinking and how to recognize when AI outputs compromise the originality of their work.

Finally, supervisors and institutions should provide consistent ethical guidelines regarding AI use. When students are left to guess what is acceptable, uncertainty and anxiety increase. Pedagogical efforts should therefore be matched with institutional clarity, fostering a supportive environment where students can engage with AI meaningfully and without fear of misconduct.

3.5 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be made to enhance the responsible and effective integration of AI tools into academic writing practices at the postgraduate level:

1. Integrate AI Literacy into Academic Curricula:

Students should be formally introduced to AI tools through workshops or modules integrated into research methodology or academic writing courses. These sessions should focus not only on the functionality of tools, but also on ethical use, citation practices, and potential limitations. Increasing students' critical digital literacy would enable them to

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navigate AI-assisted writing more confidently and responsibly.

2. Establish Clear Institutional Guidelines:

Universities should provide transparent policies regarding the acceptable use of AI in academic writing. These guidelines should clarify what constitutes ethical support versus misconduct (e.g., AI-giarism), how to cite AI-generated content, and when its use is permitted or discouraged. A lack of guidance, as revealed in this study, left students unsure about how to ethically integrate AI into their work.

3. Encourage Human-AI Collaboration, Not Substitution:

Students should be encouraged to view AI tools as complementary aids rather than replacements for critical thinking and personal expression. Educators should promote a hybrid writing approach where students first attempt independent drafts before turning to AI for feedback or refinement. This balance can help preserve authorship integrity while enhancing writing quality.

4. Include Supervisors in the Conversation:

Academic supervisors must be informed and involved in discussions around AI use. Training programs or departmental discussions can prepare them to provide informed support and detect potential misuse. Their role is crucial in guiding students toward ethical and effective AI integration during the dissertation process.

5. Foster a Reflective Approach to AI Usage:

Encouraging students to keep reflective logs about how and when they use AI tools as demonstrated through the self-narrative in this study can help them become more mindful of their academic choices. This practice promotes autonomy, self-awareness, and ethical responsibility.

6. Conduct Broader, Multi-Perspective Studies:

Future research should expand the sample to include multiple institutions and stakeholders, such as supervisors and administrators. Comparative studies could also explore variations across disciplines, gender, or digital literacy levels to produce more generalizable and nuanced insights.

By adopting these recommendations, universities can ensure that AI tools become assets to academic writing rather than threats to its integrity, helping students to develop both strong writing skills and ethical awareness in an evolving technological landscape.

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3.6 Suggestions for Further Research

While this study provided valuable insights into how EFL postgraduate students use AI tools during dissertation writing, several areas remain open for further investigation. Given the limited sample and specific context, future research could expand the scope to include students from different disciplines and universities across Algeria. A larger and more diverse sample would allow for broader generalizations and reveal potential disciplinary differences in AI tool use.

Additionally, future studies could adopt a longitudinal approach to observe how students' use of AI evolves over time, particularly from the proposal stage to the final submission. Tracking these changes may offer deeper insights into the shifting role of AI in the academic writing process and its long-term effects on writing development.

It would also be useful to explore the perspectives of dissertation supervisors and faculty members regarding AI use. Understanding how educators perceive and respond to students' integration of AI tools could inform the development of institutional policies and pedagogical frameworks.

Finally, future research could investigate the direct impact of AI-supported writing on academic performance or writing quality through mixed-methods approaches. Combining qualitative insights with textual analysis or rubric-based assessments would offer a more comprehensive view of how AI contributes or potentially detracts from academic achievement.

General conclusion

The present study explored the integration of AI tools into the academic writing practices of post Master Two students (2023-2024) at the University of Bordj Bou Arreridj, with a specific focus on dissertation writing. Through a qualitative approach that included semi-structured interviews, a self-narrative, the research investigated how AI technologies have reshaped students' writing journeys, the benefits and limitations associated with their use, and the evolving perceptions of authorship, integrity, and support.

Findings across the different data sources revealed that AI tools offer considerable

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advantages, especially in improving efficiency, assisting with language issues, and helping students organize their thoughts more clearly. Many students appreciated the accessibility of these tools and reported increased confidence in managing different writing stages. At the same time, the findings also raised concerns about over-dependence, superficial engagement with academic tasks, and a lack of institutional guidance on ethical use. Participants expressed a strong need for clearer frameworks and training to ensure responsible integration of AI into academic workflows.

The study also confirmed that AI is not a monolithic force it is shaped by how students interact with it. While some used AI to supplement their thinking, others leaned on it more heavily, sometimes at the cost of critical engagement. The self-narrative and document analysis added a personal and practical layer to this understanding, offering firsthand insight into how AI alters the writing process not only at the surface level of grammar and structure, but also in deeper processes of planning, argumentation, and reflection.

Ultimately, this research underscores that AI can be a valuable academic partner when used responsibly. Its impact depends significantly on the user's awareness, autonomy, and the presence of institutional structures to guide ethical practices. As AI becomes more prevalent in academic environments, it is essential to foster a culture of critical, informed, and balanced engagement one that upholds the principles of academic integrity while embracing innovation.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Semi-Structured Interview Guide for Master Two Graduates

Research Title: Exploring Learners' Use of AI Tools in Writing Master Dissertation

This guide outlines the structure of the semi-structured interviews conducted with Master Two graduates from the Department of English at the University of Bordj Bou Arreridj. The aim was to explore their perceptions, experiences, and challenges in using AI tools during their dissertation writing process. The interview was divided into five parts:

Part 1: Background Information

1. Can you please tell me your age?
2. How would you describe your English writing skills?
3. Can you briefly describe your experience with academic writing before using AI tools?

Part 2: Use of AI Tools in Dissertation Writing

1. Did you use any AI tools during the writing of your dissertation?
2. Which AI tools did you use during the following stages:
 - Topic Selection and Brainstorming
 - Planning and Outlining the Dissertation Structure
 - Formulating Research Questions or Hypotheses
 - Conducting the Literature Review
 - Drafting Chapters and Sections
 - Paraphrasing and Rewording Content
 - Grammar Checking
 - Citation and Reference Management
 - Feedback
 - Plagiarism Checking
 - Final Proofreading and Submission Preparation

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Part 3: Perceived Benefits

1. In what ways did AI tools improve your academic work?
2. Do you feel that these tools enhanced your writing skills?
3. Which part of your dissertation writing did AI help you with the most, and how?
4. How did AI support you during the literature review stage?
5. Do you think AI tools adapted to your personal writing needs or style? How so?
6. Would you say that AI made you more independent in your writing? Why or why not?

Part 4: Challenges and Concerns

1. Did you face any challenges while using AI tools during your dissertation writing (e.g., technical issues, confusion, access)?
2. What limitations did you notice in the AI tools themselves (e.g., shallow content, inaccuracy, ethical concerns)?
3. How did you ensure your work remained authentic and respected academic standards while using AI?
4. Did your university or supervisor provide any guidelines on ethical AI usage in academic writing? If not, what kind of support would have helped?

Part 5: Reflection and Academic Impact

1. How do you perceive the impact of AI tools on the overall quality of your dissertation?
2. How do you view your authorship in a text that was partially supported by AI?
3. After using AI in your academic writing, how do you feel about your own writing process?
4. Do you notice any changes in the way you approach writing or your thought process?
5. What advice would you give to future Master students about using AI in academic writing?

Appendices

Appendix B – Participant Consent Form

Research Title: Exploring Learners' Use of AI Tools in Writing Master Dissertations

Participant Information Sheet

You are invited to participate in a research study that explores how Master Two graduates used AI tools during the process of writing their academic dissertations. This research aims to understand your experience, perceptions, and challenges related to AI-assisted writing. Participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any point without consequence. Your responses will be kept strictly confidential, and no identifying information will appear in any published results. The interview will last approximately 20 to 30 minutes.

Consent Agreement

Please read the statements below and tick (✓) or cross (X) where appropriate:

1. I have read and understood the purpose of the study.
 Agree Decline
2. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.
 Agree Decline
3. I understand that I can withdraw at any time without giving a reason.
 Agree Decline
4. I understand that all information provided will be treated as confidential and used only for academic purposes.
 Agree Decline
5. I give my consent for anonymous quotations from the interview to be used in the final dissertation.
 Agree Decline
6. I understand that this interview may be recorded for transcription and accuracy purposes.
 Agree Decline
7. You (agree / decline) to the interview being audio-recorded for accuracy purposes.
(Please cross out what you do not want)

Appendices

Participants Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: ___ / ___ / _____

Researcher's Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: ___ / ___ / _____

Summary

Summary

الملخص (Arabic)

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف كيفية استخدام خريجي السنة الثانية ماستر من قسم اللغة الإنجليزية بجامعة برج بوعريبيج لأدوات الذكاء الاصطناعي أثناء إنجاز مذكراتهم الأكاديمية. اعتمدت الدراسة على منهج نوعي ضمن المنظور التفسيري، باستخدام المقابلات شبه المهيكلة والسرد الذاتي كأدوات رئيسية لجمع البيانات. أظهرت نتائج التحليل الموضوعي خمس موضوعات رئيسية: تعزيز الإنتاجية والتنظيم، دعم اللغة والوضوح، الاعتماد والقيود، التأثير على الهوية والملكية الأكاديمية، والوعي الأخلاقي والنزاهة الأكاديمية. توصلت الدراسة إلى أن الذكاء الاصطناعي يقدم دعمًا كبيرًا للطلبة، إلا أنه يثير تحديات تتعلق بالأصالة والتفكير النقدي والضوابط الأخلاقية. واختتمت الدراسة بجملة من التوصيات لفائدة المعلمين والمؤسسات الجامعية لتعزيز التكامل الأخلاقي والفعال لهذه الأدوات.

الكلمات المفتاحية : الذكاء الاصطناعي، الكتابة الأكاديمية، مذكرة التخرج، البحث النوعي، الأخلاقيات، دعم اللغة، الهوية الأكاديمية

Résumé (French)

Cette recherche examine comment les étudiants diplômés de Master 2 du Département d'Anglais de l'Université de Bordj Bou Arréridj ont utilisé les outils d'intelligence artificielle (IA) dans la rédaction de leurs mémoires. Adoptant une approche qualitative fondée sur le paradigme interprétatif, l'étude s'est appuyée sur des entretiens semi-directifs et un récit de soi comme instruments de collecte de données. L'analyse thématique a permis d'identifier cinq thèmes majeurs : amélioration de la productivité et de la structure, soutien linguistique et clarté, dépendance et limites, impact sur l'identité et l'auteur académique, et conscience éthique et intégrité académique. L'étude montre que l'IA offre des avantages pédagogiques notables tout en posant des défis en termes d'originalité, de pensée critique et de respect des normes académiques. Des recommandations sont proposées afin de promouvoir une intégration éthique et efficace de l'IA dans le contexte universitaire.

Mots-clés : Intelligence artificielle, rédaction académique, mémoire de Master, recherche qualitative, éthique, soutien linguistique, identité académique