

## “They Answer the Questions, When the Goal is to Ask Better Ones”: AI Dependency and the Crisis of Literary Education among Undergraduate Literature Students in Pakistan

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**ABSTRACT** AI dependency has significantly changed the ways students engage with academic work, especially in the discipline of literature that deeply depends upon close reading and interpretation. This study investigates to what extent literature students use AI and for what purpose, focusing on the impact of AI on critical thinking, reading habits, and creative expression. Using a mixed-method questionnaire administered to 51 undergraduate literature students from 6th and 8th semesters, the study finds that 78.4% of students use AI tools daily or several times a week, and 27.5% rely solely on AI summaries and never read original texts; they open ChatGPT before a book. Students acknowledge that AI has weakened their independent critical voice and made their writing more generic. Grounded in Paulo Freire’s banking model of education and Roland Barthes’s conception of the active reader, the study argues that AI dependency does not simply enable academic dishonesty; it systematically dismantles the intellectual and creative formation that literary education is designed to produce.

**Keywords:** AI dependency, critical thinking, literary education,

ChatGPT, Pakistan, banking model, active reader, academic integrity

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## 1. Introduction

When a literature student can pass an entire semester without reading a single original text of the syllabus, instead relying on AI-generated summaries and analysis, it highlights that something fundamental has been lost from the purpose of literary education (Farrokhnia et al.). One of the most widely used AI tools in education is ChatGPT, a large language model developed by OpenAI (Javaid et al.). In universities, AI tools have replaced books; students do not buy a single book because they have AI language tools such as ChatGPT in their pockets (Farrokhnia et al.). These tools help them, but they also cause serious damage not only to reading habits, but also to students’ creativity, critical thinking, and active engagement in class (Kasneji et al.). Students do not pay attention to their professors because they know they will find all the material from ChatGPT easily, and this attitude not only makes them passive but also damages their ability to speak and think independently (Kasneji et al.).

Literature is a discipline that is very different from other subjects because it demands personal voice and critical engagement of readers with texts (Castañeda and Selwyn). Literature allows readers to form independent arguments and develop a unique voice. Students have to analyse original texts to understand the genuine purpose of writing, because summaries alone cannot offer that kind of understanding (Cotton et al.). However, in the contemporary era of AI, ChatGPT has diminished this process; students completely depend on AI summaries and analysis, and do not engage with original texts (Kasneji et al.). Reading texts not only gives students the original purpose of writing, but also helps in creating many other capabilities, like interpreting texts according to their own experience. ChatGPT will always interpret a text according to its training data, but when students read by themselves, they can analyse texts according to their own lived experience, and that is actually the purpose of literature. ChatGPT does not just produce summaries and destroy reading habits, but also causes serious damage to academic research, as students copy and paste without even understanding what they are writing (Cotton et al.).

It has become an increasingly common observation that literature students rely on AI-generated summaries and analysis of canonical texts such as Shakespeare’s plays or Keats’s poetry, without reading the original works (Zhai et al.). Students have lost the depth of understanding that literature demands because of AI platforms. Similarly, research students are found submitting AI-generated arguments as their original analysis, without even engaging with the scholarly sources they have cited in their writing (Cotton et al.). Students even choose their research topics based on what AI suggests, without realising why

they are actually going to address that problem; they select a topic because AI identified a gap, not because they genuinely understand it. Several studies confirm that this kind of over-reliance on AI completely diminishes critical thinking and analytical performance among students and reduces their motivation for self-reflection and deep analysis (Zhai et al.). When students immediately turn to ChatGPT for assignments instead of finding and reading sources themselves, and accept AI content without evaluation, their critical thinking is actively harmed rather than supported (Zhai et al.).

In the context of Pakistan, this concern is highly significant. Pakistani universities operate under the Higher Education Commission (HEC), which mandates research quality, academic integrity, and the development of independent scholarly capacity. Yet students at both graduate and undergraduate levels are increasingly turning towards AI tools without any formal guidance on their ethical implications or cognitive consequences. In institutions where quality education and academic research facilities have been historically uneven, AI platforms can appear to be a solution, but they solve the wrong problem. They answer the questions, when the goal of education is to learn to ask better ones.

While many scholars have examined AI's impact on academic performance, integrity, and student behaviour, there is still a significant gap in research that specifically addresses humanities and literature disciplines, particularly in the South Asian and Pakistani educational context (Crompton and Burke). The unique cognitive and creative demands of literary education, such as close reading, creative interpretation, and critical argumentation, require dedicated scholarly attention in the context of AI dependency (Zhai et al.). This paper addresses that gap.

This study aims to investigate the nature and extent of AI dependency among literature students in Pakistani universities, with particular focus on its impact on critical thinking, close reading, and creative expression. This paper is theoretically grounded in two frameworks. The first is Paulo Freire's critique of the banking model of education in which students are treated as empty vessels who receive information passively from authority, rather than engaging critically with knowledge (Freire). The second is Roland Barthes's conception of the active reader as a producer of meaning, a role that AI-generated interpretation fundamentally displaces (Barthes). The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent do literature students in Pakistani universities rely on AI tools to read and understand literary texts?

2. How does AI dependency affect critical thinking and original analysis among literature students?

3. What are students' own perceptions of AI's impact on their literary education?

To address these questions, this study employs a mixed-method approach, combining a structured questionnaire with both closed and open-ended responses from undergraduate literature students.

## 2. Literature Review

Artificial intelligence has been part of university life for many years, but the way it is now used in universities has completely changed. Before the accessibility of tools like ChatGPT in universities in 2022, older tools were used to manage administrative work, keeping student records, tracking attendance, or suggesting learning materials based on a student's past performance. Zawacki-Richter et al. studied over 146 research studies on AI in higher education and found that no one asked a simple but important question: Is AI really helping students learn better, or is it just making some tasks easier? This early concern was significant because it highlighted how universities were adopting AI technology very quickly without even stopping to think about what it is really doing to human learning in higher education.

When ChatGPT arrived, everything changed dramatically and became urgent. Farrokhnia et al. explained that, unlike older AI tools, ChatGPT can now write long argumentative and critical essays, summaries of long texts and books, answer exam questions, and create quick notes on any topic. In other words, it can perform all jobs that a university assignment is designed for students to do themselves. There are also some positive aspects of using AI, like getting quick and easy explanations of difficult topics for which teachers are not available to students (Farrokhnia et al.). However, Farrokhnia et al. found that most universities have no proper guidelines or rules about how students should or should not use AI tools for academic tasks. Kasneci et al. agreed, showing that without proper guidance from teachers and institutions, students will naturally use AI to take shortcuts for studies rather than genuinely learn from them.

Critical thinking is a skill that makes humans ask questions before believing blindly and form their own opinions. It means being able to read, interpret, and form a unique voice or perspective and explain one's reasoning clearly. It is one of the fundamental abilities university education is supposed to build, and it is exactly the skill most researchers are worried AI is damaging. Kasneci et al. explained clearly that students miss the most important part of learning when

they ask questions to ChatGPT directly instead of working through a problem themselves. They do not take time to work on the task by themselves and miss the mental state that makes them creative. It is similar to a muscle that stops working and becomes useless with time; a mind that stops thinking critically also gradually loses its ability to think independently.

Research has shown this concern with actual evidence. Zhai et al. confirmed that when students depend heavily on AI tools, they have less motivation to reflect on what they have learned, and their ability to evaluate ideas critically becomes weaker. Zhai et al. found that the biggest danger is not using AI but accepting blindly what AI says without questioning whether it is right or actually true. It becomes harmful when students copy AI output; they are no longer thinking, they are only transferring. Yan et al. found that this problem is more serious in academic writing; students who use AI writing tools lose their own ability to write argumentative essays from scratch. Literary analysis is not just about finding the right answers; it is about reading closely and developing your own understanding from the text. When students let ChatGPT do that analysis for them, they do not just lose their ability to interpret the text; the true purpose of literary education disappears.

Long before ChatGPT was common in classrooms, researchers were already worried about the reading habits of university students. Hayles made a distinction between deep attention and hyper attention, the ability to focus on one long and difficult text for a sustained period, versus jumping from one thing to another, the style of reading that today's internet encourages. Hayles argued that digital culture was already training students to prefer quick and fragmented information over slow and deep engagement with complex texts.

Farrokhnia et al. noted that students now constantly ask ChatGPT for summaries, themes, and even character analysis tasks that students should perform by themselves by reading the books. The problem is not that students are being dishonest but that they are missing something that a summary cannot replace. When you read a novel, you do not just read the plot; you experience how language is used, emotional rhythm, ambiguity, and silences that make the novel meaningful. When you read an AI-generated summary, it gives you only points of plots or themes, and these are completely different things. Zhai et al. confirmed that AI tools that deliver pre-interpreted content reduce students' encounters with difficult or ambiguous material, and it is exactly this difficult material that builds literary judgement and sensitivity. In Pakistan, where students already struggle to access libraries or physical books, AI summaries appear as a convenient solution, but the consequences for literary education become serious.

Academic integrity means doing your own work honestly and taking responsibility for what you submit, but AI creates a new challenge to it. It has now become very hard to distinguish between human and AI writing because AI writes in such a way that, on the surface, it totally looks like human writing. Dergaa et al. examined this problem closely and explained that AI writing is often impossible to distinguish from human writing using traditional detection tools like Turnitin, which was designed to catch copied human texts. It means universities have no reliable safety net because such tools were not designed to identify machine-generated original content. For literature students, this ethical confusion has more severe consequences than for students of other disciplines. When students generate AI essays on a poem or novel and claim that machine interpretation is their own emotional and intellectual response to a text, it destroys the relationship between the reader and the work of literature, and that relationship is the primary foundation of literary education.

Most of the research discussed so far comes from universities in North America, Europe, and East Asia. Zawacki-Richter et al. noted that developing countries, including those in South Asia, are almost completely absent from the existing literature on AI in higher education. This is a serious problem because the conditions in Pakistani universities are very different from those in developed countries, which shape how and why students use AI.

Pakistan’s higher education has historically followed what Brazilian educator Paulo Freire called the banking model of education, in which students are trained to receive information, then store it and repeat it with little encouragement of original thinking or critical questioning (Freire). In this context, AI tools do not introduce passivity; they simply provide a more efficient mechanism for it. Students who were already trained to receive and repeat information now have a tool that does the receiving and repeating for them. What is missing from the existing literature is any study that has examined the effect of AI on students of literature whose foundation totally depends upon developing the capacities for independent reading, creative interpretation, and critical thinking that AI dependency most directly undermines. This absence is a research gap that this study is designed to fill by collecting data from BS English Literature students at multiple Pakistani universities. This study contributes original empirical evidence to a conversation that has, until now, been conducted entirely without the Pakistani literary classroom in view.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

This study is grounded in two frameworks that together explain how AI dependency harms the intellectual and cognitive development of literature students. The first framework is Paulo Freire’s banking model of education, and

the second is Roland Barthes's conception of the active reader. These frameworks explain exactly the process of literary education that AI undermines, the act of learning, and the act of reading.

### **3.1 Freire's Banking Model of Education**

Paulo Freire introduced the concept of the banking model of education in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). Freire contends that the banking model of education is not only ineffective, but harmful, because students only reproduce what they were given and cannot think beyond that. They are merely trained to receive, not to question. In the context of this study, AI dependency does not introduce a new problem; it only deepens the existing one. When a student asks ChatGPT for a summary, themes, or what a poem is about, they are not depositing it from a teacher, but withdrawing it from a machine to store temporarily and then submit without intellectual engagement. The result is identical. In Pakistani universities, it has become common that literature students do not engage with texts, only read pre-packaged AI content, and appear in exams. They do not ask what they are reading, and cannot think by themselves about it, which leads them toward becoming less motivated students who cannot even reflect on what they are arguing because they are passively using AI wording.

### **3.2 Barthes's Death of the Author and the Active Reader**

This framework is especially relevant to understanding what AI dependency does to literary education. When a student reads a poem or novel by themselves, they create their own meaning and understand the text according to their own unique interpretation, shaped by their own life and thinking. The interpretation is unique and genuinely theirs. That is what literature encourages in students, because no voice can be wrong; everyone has their own way of living and experiencing life. However, when a student asks ChatGPT about the same poem, it gives an interpretation according to its trained data. That interpretation belongs to no one. It is not the student's emotional response, not their lived experience, not their critical voice. Barthes argued that the reader must be born through the act of reading. AI dependency kills the reader before that birth even happens. The students never enter into the text; they only read the prepared content. In literary education, this is not a shortcut; it is the elimination of the entire educational experience that literature is designed to provide.

### **3.3 How Both Frameworks Work Together**

This study uses both frameworks in different directions. Freire argues that passive reception of knowledge destroys critical thinking, and Barthes contends that passive reception of interpretation destroys the reader's creative voice. AI

dependency activates both failures at the same time. It makes the student a passive receiver of knowledge in the Freirean sense, and it eliminates the active reader in the Barthesian sense. AI dependency is not only an academic integrity issue but a serious educational crisis that strikes at the core of what literary study is for. This study uses both frameworks as analytical lenses to examine what literature students in Pakistan are losing when they replace reading and thinking with AI-generated content.

#### **4. Methodology**

##### **4.1 Research Design**

This study uses a mixed-method approach with quantitative closed-ended questions and qualitative open-ended responses. It was chosen because the research questions demand both numerical data to show how widespread AI dependency is among students and personal responses to understand how students themselves feel and think about what AI is doing to their education. A purely quantitative approach would have produced only numbers without meaning, and a purely qualitative approach would have produced only reasons without evidence. Together, both approaches give a detailed and honest picture of the problem this study addresses.

##### **4.2 Participants**

The participants of this study are 51 undergraduate students enrolled in BS English Literature programmes at four public sector universities in Punjab, Pakistan: Government Graduate College for Women Daska (affiliated with University of the Punjab, Lahore), GC University Lahore, University of Central Punjab, and Khwaja Fareed University of Engineering and Information Technology (KFUEIT). Participants were specifically selected from the 6th and 8th semesters because they are at an advanced level of their degree and have been engaging with literary texts, critical analysis, and academic writing for several years. Therefore, they are more likely to have direct and meaningful experiences of how the use of AI has affected their thinking, creativity, reading, and academic writing in the discipline of literature. The participants participated completely voluntarily, and all responses were kept completely anonymous to encourage honest and open answers.

**Table 1**

**Personal Information**

<b>Detail</b>	<b>Information</b>
Institution	Four public sector universities, Punjab, Pakistan
Affiliation	GGC Women Daska (UoP), GCU Lahore, UCP, KFUEIT
Programme	BS English Literature
Semesters	6th Semester and 8th Semester
Total Participants	51 students
Participation	Voluntary and anonymous

**4.3 Data Collection Instrument**

The data was collected through a structured questionnaire that was distributed among students online via Google Form. They were given enough time to participate voluntarily, and the form was shared with them through WhatsApp.

The questionnaire was divided into four sections, and each section asked about a different dimension of how students actually feel about the problem this study argues.

<b>Section</b>	<b>Focus/ Question Type</b>
Section 1	AI Usage Habits in Literary Studies - Closed-ended (multiple choice)
Section 2	Attitudes Toward AI and Critical Thinking - Closed-ended (Likert scale)
Section 3	Impact on Creative and Critical Thinking - Closed-ended (Multiple choice)
Section 4	Personal Experiences and Observations - Open-ended (written responses)

#### 4.4 Data Analysis

The collected data from closed-ended responses was analyzed by calculating percentages. The percentage shows how many students reported a particular behaviour, attitude, or experience. This approach was useful because, for this small sample, percentage calculations show an honest picture of collected data without overstating statistical significance. The responses from open-ended questions were read carefully, recurring ideas and concerns were identified, and these were grouped into themes that reflected the patterns emerging from students’ own words. These qualitative themes were then connected to the quantitative findings to build a complete understanding of how AI dependency is experienced by literature students in this specific context.

#### 4.5 Ethical Considerations

All students were informed about the purpose of the research before filling out the form. All participants voluntarily filled out the form without any kind of pressure from the researcher. The identity of all participants is completely anonymous, ensuring that students feel no shame or fear in expressing their honest experiences.

### 5. Results

This section presents the findings from all four sections of the questionnaire. The results are presented section by section, moving from AI usage habits to students’ open-ended and personal responses. The data is clearly mentioned with an accurate percentage and proper observation of students’ thoughts and opinions.

#### 5.1 Section One: AI Usage Habits in Literary Studies

The first section examined how frequently students use AI in their daily lives and for what purposes. Their responses are recorded carefully and are given below with proper percentages:

Question	Key Finding
How frequently do you use AI tools for literature coursework?	39.2% use AI several times a week. 39.2% use it daily. 17.6% use it occasionally. 3.9% rarely use it.

Question	Key Finding
For what purposes do you primarily use AI?	56.9% selected all of the above - summaries, vocabulary, ideas for analysis, and critical themes. 17.6% use it specifically for getting summaries of literary texts.
How often do you read the original/primary text before an exam or assignment?	27.5% rely solely on AI summaries and analysis. 29.4% sometimes read the original. 7.8% rarely read it. 31.4% usually read it.
When you need to understand a literary text, what do you do FIRST?	33.3% search for an AI-generated summary or analysis first. 52.9% read the original text first. 5.9% read critical articles.
When writing a research paper, how often do you read original academic articles?	35.3% read abstracts only. 17.6% copy AI-generated responses directly. Only 21.6% always read full articles.

The results from this section clearly establish a pattern that the majority of students use AI frequently for academic tasks. According to the data, 78.4% of students are using AI tools like ChatGPT daily or several times a week for generating AI summaries and analysis. More significantly, 27.5% of students reported that they rely solely on AI summaries and analysis and do not read original texts at all, while a further 29.4% read originals only sometimes. These findings directly answer the research question that was raised in the literature review: AI is not being used as a supplement to reading, but it is replacing reading altogether for a significant proportion of literature students.

## **5.2 Section Two: Attitudes toward AI and Critical Thinking**

The second section used 12 Likert scale statements to measure students' own thoughts about how AI is actually affecting their skills of creative and critical

thinking, reading habits, academic integrity, and engagement with literature. Different students answered differently according to their experiences, which are summarized below:

**Table 4**

Statement	Dominant Response
S1: AI tools make it easier to understand literary texts without reading them in full.	70.6% Agree or Strongly Agree
S2: Using AI summaries reduces the need to engage deeply with original literature.	58.8% Agree or Strongly Agree; 23.5% Disagree or Strongly Disagree
S3: I feel less motivated to read original texts since I started using AI.	47.1% Agree or Strongly Agree; 37.3% Neutral - a notably divided response
S4: AI helps me think more critically about literature.	52.9% Agree or Strongly Agree; 27.5% Neutral - students divided on whether AI aids critical thinking
S5: Students who rely on AI produce weaker literary analysis than those who read originals.	51.0% Agree or Strongly Agree; 35.3% Neutral - most contested statement in section
S6: AI use has reduced my ability to form independent opinions about literary works.	54.9% Agree or Strongly Agree - students acknowledge loss of independent voice
S7: I feel guilty when I submit AI-generated content as my own work.	54.9% Agree or Strongly Agree; 29.4% Neutral - guilt acknowledged but contested

<b>Statement</b>	<b>Dominant Response</b>
S8: My teachers can tell when students use AI instead of original analysis.	66.7% Agree or Strongly Agree - majority believe teachers can detect AI use
S9: Using AI for summaries is acceptable as a study tool.	66.7% Agree or Strongly Agree - AI summaries widely accepted as study tools
S10: AI dependency is harming the quality of literary education in Pakistan.	60.8% Agree or Strongly Agree - students recognise harm to literary education quality
S11: Literature requires personal engagement that AI cannot replace.	82.4% Agree or Strongly Agree - strongest agreement in entire section
S12: I would perform worse academically if AI tools were suddenly banned.	56.9% Agree or Strongly Agree - clear majority acknowledge AI dependency

Several findings and patterns emerge from section two that are significant for this study because they directly respond to the research questions this study asks. First, students largely agree with the argument that AI dependency reduces their motivation to read original texts and their ability to form independent opinions, as shown through the broad agreement with statements 3 and 6, with 47.1% and 54.9% agreement, respectively. Second, students are genuinely divided about whether AI helps critical thinking because statement 4 produces notable uncertainty, with 27.5% remaining neutral. Third, and perhaps most importantly, statement 11 recorded the highest agreement of the entire section at 82.4%, where students agree that literature requires personal engagement that AI cannot replace - even students who regularly use AI agree with it. This contradiction - knowing that personal engagement is irreplaceable but still relying on AI at the same time - is one of the most important findings of this study. Finally, statement 12 shows that most students acknowledge that they would perform worse without AI, which is the core and most measurable sign of AI dependency.

### 5.3 Section Three: Impact on Creative and Critical Thinking

The third section examined specific impacts of AI use on students’ writing, critical habits, and perceptions of which skills are most at risk.

**Table 5**

#### Section Three Results: Impact on Creative and Critical Thinking

Question	Key Finding
Has your ability to write original literary analysis changed since using AI?	43.1% improved slightly. 21.6% improved significantly. 19.6% declined slightly. 2.0% declined significantly. 13.7% reported no change. Majority perceive improvement, though a significant minority report decline.
Do you think AI use affects the development of your writing style?	39.2% say AI has made their writing more generic or formulaic. 29.4% say it has improved their writing. 19.6% say no effect. 9.8% are not sure.
When you receive essay feedback, how often do you reflect on it critically?	49.0% always use feedback to improve. 37.3% sometimes reflect. 9.8% rarely engage. 2.0% never engage with feedback.
Which skill is MOST at risk due to AI dependency in literature students?	41.2% selected all of the above. 27.5% identified close reading specifically as the most endangered skill. 15.7% named creative writing ability. 9.8% named research skills.

The findings of section three present that 39.2% of participants believe that AI has made their writing more generic and formulaic, which means that AI writing assistance causes students to lose their ability to construct independent arguments (Yan et al.). A further 29.4% report that AI has actually improved their writing, suggesting a divided perception that masks the deeper concern. The finding on skill endangerment is one of the most significant findings of this study, where

students themselves claim that their skills are at risk while using AI. 41.2% of students say that all literary skills are at risk, while 27.5% of students specifically name close reading as the most endangered skill. Through this finding, students themselves are confirming the central argument of this study. Furthermore, the divided findings on whether writing ability has improved or declined suggest that students may confuse producing more polished text with developing genuine analytical skill, a distinction that goes to the heart of what literary education is for.

#### **5.4 Section Four: Open-Ended Responses**

##### **5.4.1 How Students Prepare for Literature Exams and Assignments**

When asked to honestly describe how they actually prepare for literature exams or assignments, the majority of students explain their process of learning in which AI tools play a central and dominant role. Many students mention tools like ChatGPT or Claude and describe preparing exclusively through AI-generated summaries, with responses such as:

- “By reading summary and analysis generated by AI”
- “Right, a day before exams or a few hours, I open an AI app and ask it to give me summaries of literary works along with their exam-related content themes, symbols, title significance, etc., and read them out. And just after reading that, I appear in my exams.”
- “I use AI like ChatGPT and Claude to create notes about summaries, critical analysis, themes, and historical background of all the outline topics of my literature subjects.”

Only a minority of students describe a preparation process that began with reading the original text carefully. One student notably explained a thoughtful and independent approach: “For exam preps, I make sure I have read the original text carefully, marking and highlighting important elements such as literary devices, symbolism, irony, etc., and the key quotations and statements that I can later use in my assignments. After that, I create mind-mapping styled notes for themes, characters, and other possible questions related to the text. Also, I keep on adding relevant information, interpretation, and critical insights to my notes from academic websites and AI sources to make my answers more comprehensive”. This response clearly stood out in the data, representing the kind of engaged literary preparation that the discipline is designed to produce. Another student described a hybrid but still text-centred approach: “After reading text and collecting data from AI, I make my own notes and then revise them for

preparation,” - suggesting that even among students who use AI, a portion retain some meaningful engagement with original sources.

#### 5.4.2 Is AI Helpful or Harmful for Literature Students?

The open-ended responses to this question revealed something that cannot be captured through closed-ended questions. Students themselves acknowledge that AI is both helpful and harmful, simultaneously appreciating its convenience while also identifying its intellectual costs. Several responses were particularly thoughtful:

- “I think AI has been helping a lot in securing good grades academically... But it is harmful too, in a way that literature is not meant to be read and printed on paper - it is beyond that. It teaches life and the tactics to survive in the world by giving an understanding of the world from multiple perspectives. This can only be completely understood when we read texts ourselves and analyse them. To read and learn literature in an actual sense is totally independent of AI.”
- “Yes, I think it's harmful because most of the students use AI rather than read original text, and at the end, when someone asks a critical question to students, they have no answers.”
- “It is helpful and Harmful as well because it reduces the close study of Text and lacks original arguments”

Several new responses from the expanded sample further deepen this picture. One student offered a particularly precise observation about the limits of AI in literary education: “I think AI can be harmful for literature students if they rely on it too much. Literature requires deep reading, critical thinking, and personal interpretation of texts. When students depend on AI for explanations or analysis, they may not fully engage with the text themselves. Over time, this dependency can weaken their creativity and independent thinking. Students might complete their education, but they may struggle to form original ideas or interpretations without assistance.” Another student captured the structural problem with striking clarity: “AI is both helpful and harmful. It helps in providing critical insights and summaries to make understanding easy. But it actually reduces the habit of actual text reading in students, making them rely on summaries instead of original texts. AI should be used as a supportive tool, not as a replacement for reading original works.” These responses reflect a level of self-awareness that is

significant: students understand the damage they are doing to their own education even while continuing to do it. This contradiction between knowing and doing is one of the most important qualitative findings of this study.

#### 5.4.3 Submission of AI-Generated Work

When asked confidentially whether they had submitted AI-generated content as their own work, several students responded yes directly with a wide range of justifications, including time pressure, lack of understanding, and the absence of teacher consequences:

- “Yes, almost all of my assignments are AI-generated... I do this because it feels convenient, and teachers do not care. Actually, we do it because it is acceptable and nobody cares, and we are too lazy to bother ourselves to ponder.”
- “Yes, because I don't know how to write a poem independently, so I took help from AI to structure my ideas into poetry.”
- “Yes, I have submitted many times because of a shortage of time and not having enough understanding from teachers.”

These responses are significant for two reasons. Firstly, they confirm that the submission of AI-generated content is not a single incident but a regular practice for several students in this group. Secondly, they give reasons that due to time pressure, lack of understanding, inadequate teacher guidance, and absence of institutional consequences, students take help from AI and submit AI-generated work as original. It is not a moral failure but a systematic failure because students are not simply lazy; they are operating in an environment where AI submissions carry no real risk, and the conditions that might encourage literary engagement, such as accessible texts, engaged teaching, and clear ethical expectations, are not present.

#### 5.4.4 What Universities Should Do

Student recommendations for how universities should address AI dependency were varied, but several responses showed genuine critical thinking about the problem. The most substantive responses pointed toward assessment reform, institutional policy, and the quality of teaching rather than outright banning of AI:

- “Universities should create clear guidelines for the responsible use of AI in academic work. Teachers can also design assignments that require textual evidence and personal analysis. If a task is clearly AI-generated without the student's own effort, teachers should give lower marks so that students are motivated to produce more original work.”

- “Universities should not completely ban AI, but they should teach students how to use it in a responsible way. Teachers can also design assignments that require personal analysis, class discussion, and in-class writing, so students rely more on their own thinking. At the same time, universities should ensure that literature is taught by capable and passionate teachers.”

## **6. Discussion**

The findings of this study reveal a pattern that is more widespread, conscious, and structurally embedded than existing literature has fully documented in the context of Pakistan. This section discusses what the results mean in relation to the research questions and the theoretical framework.

### **6.1 The Extent of AI Dependency in Reading and Understanding Literary Texts**

The first and foremost question of the study is to what extent literature students use AI tools to read and understand literary texts in Pakistani universities. The answer based on this study’s data is extensive and concerning. With 78.4% of students using AI tools daily or several times a week, and 27.5% of students reporting that they rely solely on AI summaries and analysis and never read original texts, the data paints a picture of AI dependency that has replaced the primary activity of literary education: reading.

This finding directly confirms what Farrokhnia et al. described as the central danger of generative AI in education: the tools that are capable of performing tasks assigned to students will be used to perform those tasks instead of the students themselves. When 33.3% of participants report that when they encounter a literary text, their first action is to search for an AI-generated summary rather than read the text, the reading habit that literary education depends upon has been structurally interrupted. Zhai et al. found that over-reliance on AI occurs when students accept AI output without questioning, and the preparation method of students for literature exams described in section four of this study confirms that this is precisely what is happening: students are reading AI content about literary texts without raising any questions, considering it as their primary and often sole form of literary engagement.

### **6.2 The Impact of AI Dependency on Critical Thinking and Original Analysis**

The second research question asks how AI dependency affects critical thinking and original analysis among literature students. The data from this study reveal that the impact is both measurable and self-acknowledged. Statement 6 of Section Two that AI use has reduced students’ ability to form independent

opinions about literary works recorded dominant agreement. Statement 3, that students feel less motivated to read original texts since using AI, also recorded one of the highest agreement responses in the section. Most directly, statement 12, that students would perform worse academically if AI were suddenly banned, was confirmed by a strong majority, which is the clearest quantitative measure of cognitive dependency this study produced.

These findings support Zhai et al.'s systematic review that heavy AI dependency reduces students' self-reflection and weakens their motivation to create their own opinions, because when students skip the stage of mental process and immediately ask ChatGPT for the solution to a problem, no ideas emerge in their minds. They also support Yan et al.'s finding that AI writing assistance causes students to lose their ability to write argumentative essays from scratch, a finding reflected in the qualitative data of this study, where students describe submitting AI-generated essays, poems, and analyses as routine practice. What is particularly significant, however, is the contradiction revealed by statement 11: the same students who rely on AI most heavily for academic tasks also agreed most strongly that literature requires personal engagement that AI cannot replace. This gap between what students know and what they do reflects exactly the condition that Freire described in the banking model: students who have been trained to receive and reproduce rather than think and create will continue to do so even when they understand the cost, because the educational environment they inhabit has not given them a genuine alternative.

### **6.3 Students' Own Perceptions of AI's Impact on Their Literary Education**

The third research question asked students about their own perception of using AI, and what students themselves perceive about AI's impact on their literary education. The qualitative data of this study reveal an honest and self-aware picture where multiple students believe that AI dependency is harmful, identifying with clarity and depth the loss of personal interpretation, the weakening of creative voice, and the replacement of genuine understanding with exam and grade-oriented retrieval as core problems. Several responses describe literature not just as a discipline but as a way to understand the meaning of life. One student's response clearly says that literature is beyond what can be printed on paper, that it teaches life from multiple perspectives, and that this can only be understood by reading texts independently. It captures the genuine purpose of literary education more precisely than any academic statement.

The data on academic integrity confirms what Cotton et al. documented about AI and academic honesty: that when boundaries are unclear and consequences are absent, students will use AI to complete assessed work, even students who feel uncomfortable doing so. Several participants in this study confirmed that they

submit AI-generated content such as essays, poems, and analysis regularly, with justifications ranging from time pressure to teacher indifference to the simple absence of institutional consequences. Dergaa et al. showed that traditional detection tools like Turnitin cannot reliably identify AI-generated text, and the students in this study are aware of this.

From the perspective of Barthes, this problem goes deeper than academic integrity because he argued that the meaning of a literary text is produced by the reader through personal interpretation, emotional engagement, imagination, and critical perspectives. When students give this task of reading and interpretation to ChatGPT and never produce their own meaning from a poem or novel, they are never born as readers in the Barthesian sense. The AI becomes the reader, and the student becomes the passive recipient of that reading. They receive a machine’s report about a text rather than developing their own relationship with it. The purpose of literary education to develop a critical voice, personal and creative relationships with language and human experience, is not diminished by AI dependency. It is cancelled. The data from this study confirms this cancellation is not a future risk. For a significant proportion of the students surveyed, it has already happened.

The study draws on a sample of 51 undergraduate students from four public sector universities in Punjab, Pakistan, and while its findings cannot be generalised to all Pakistani universities, the multi-institutional scope strengthens the credibility of the patterns identified. The consistency and depth of the data - the qualitative awareness of harm, the quantitative confirmation of dependency, and the structural conditions students described across different institutional contexts suggest that the patterns documented here reflect a broader reality in Pakistani undergraduate literary education that has not yet been systematically studied. The most urgent implication is institutional: universities must develop clear policies on the responsible use of AI, especially in the humanities, must redesign assessments to require in-class analysis, oral discussion, and personal engagement with original texts, and must invest in the quality of literary teaching that gives students a reason to read beyond what AI can provide for them. Mollick and Mollick offer a practical framework for how educators can design AI-integrated assignments that preserve rather than replace students’ intellectual agency, and their recommendations for structured, guided AI use rather than unrestricted dependency are directly applicable to the literary classroom in Pakistan.

## **7. Conclusion**

This study set out to investigate how AI dependency is affecting English Literature students in Pakistan, and the findings are both clear and concerning.

The consequences of a loss of close reading ability, a weakening of independent critical voice, and a growing inability to engage with literary texts on a personal and intellectual level are not abstract risks. They are conditions that the students themselves described, acknowledged, and in many cases accepted as normal.

Grounded in Freire and Barthes, this study argues that what is at risk is not simply academic integrity but the entire purpose of literary education. When students never read and never interpret, they are never formed as readers, thinkers, or critical voices. Universities in Pakistan must respond with clear AI policies, assessment designs that require genuine personal engagement, and a quality of literary teaching that gives students a reason to read beyond what any AI tool can offer them.

This study draws on 51 students from four public sector universities in Punjab, and while its findings cannot be generalised across all Pakistani universities, the consistency of responses across different institutional contexts adds meaningful weight to the patterns identified. Future research should further expand the sample, include teacher perspectives, and examine how different pedagogical approaches shape students' relationships with AI tools in literary education..

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