

# Integration of Artificial Intelligence by Tertiary Education Students in Zimbabwe: A Case of Responsibility and Accountability in Academic Writing

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## ABSTRACT

*This study examined how students utilise various AI tools responsibly and accountably in their academic writing. The study adopted a qualitative approach with data collected using an electronic questionnaire from self-selected participants. The questionnaire was uploaded to Google Forms, and a total of twenty-five participants took part in the study until data saturation was reached. Atlas. ti was utilised for data analysis due to its robust analytical capabilities. The findings highlighted the importance of responsible and accountable use of AI tools, as these practices enhance students' intellectual capabilities and foster innovation. The findings also indicate that use of AI tools play a crucial role in the lives of tertiary education students by enhancing the quality of their academic writing. It improves grammar, structure, and coherence, making the content more readable. Additionally, the study uncovered several challenges that students face regarding the use of AI in education. The study provided recommendations on best practices for employing AI in academic writing for tertiary-level students in Zimbabwe. Additionally, it advocated for all tertiary institutions to invest in plagiarism detection software(s) to ensure that the use of AI tools is accompanied by accountability in all written coursework, thereby contributing to students' final degree classifications.*

## KEYWORDS

*Artificial Intelligence (AI); integration of AI; Zimbabwean tertiary education; responsibility and accountability in academic writing.*

## INTRODUCTION

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has significantly transformed the way students articulate their original ideas in academic writing. Tertiary-level students in Zimbabwe are embracing this global trend towards AI, which has gained momentum as they strive to meet the intellectual and innovation standards set by colleges and universities in developed nations. The adoption of AI in Zimbabwean tertiary education has become one of the most powerful tools utilized by students in their academic pursuits. However, it appears that the adoption of AI in academic writing has opened a "Pandora's box" of challenges, including an increase in plagiarism and a decline in creativity. These issues may stem from a lack of responsibility and accountability in the use of AI in this context.

This research examines the different ways students from Zimbabwe are using AI technology in their academic writing while stressing the importance of responsible and accountable use of these tools. By analysing the implications of AI on students' intellectual development and innovative capacities, this research underscores the importance of adopting best practices in the academic context. This analysis of the impact of AI on students'



intellectual growth and innovative ability further highlights the need to employ the best practices within the AI academic setting. According to Hlongwane, Shava, Mangena, and Muzari (2024), African countries continue to struggle with poverty due to their outdated and low-quality educational systems, which fail to produce 21st-century graduates equipped with the skills necessary to achieve the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This study was triggered by the recommendations of Mukuze and Ndhlovu (2024), who recommended the need to study the challenges in the adoption of AI in education in Zimbabwe.

### ***Definition of AI***

AI refers to the computer algorithms that imitate the human mind in solving problems. Ifenthaler et al. (2024) defined AI as a generic term to describe a wide collection of different technologies, algorithms, and related multimodal data applied in education's formal, non-formal, and informal contexts. There are various technologies hidden in AI, which include data mining, machine learning, natural language processing, Large Language Models (LLMs), generative models, and neural networks.

### ***AI tools used by tertiary students for academic writing***

Various AI tools are used in academic writing. Khalifa and Albadawy (2024) indicated that AI tools such as Zotero, Mendeley, and EndNote are used for generating citations and organising research materials. Further, Khalifa and Albadawy (2024) found that AI tools such as Grammarly and OpenAI's ChatGPT are very useful in checking grammar, which is crucial in developing clear and academic writing. Turnitin and Copyscape are used for checking plagiarism. In a study titled "The use of AI tools in English academic writing by Saudi undergraduates. Contemporary Educational Technology" that was carried out by Ozfidan, El-Dakhs and Alsalim (2024) found that the common AI tools used in Saudi Arabia included ChatGPT, Grammarly and Google Translate. However, Falebita and Kok (2024) found that ChatGPT is the more prevalent AI tool used by academics and undergraduates in their studies.

More so, Kessler (2024) indicated that Grammarly is used for is an AI-powered writing assistant that provides advanced grammar, spelling, plagiarism check and style suggestions. While Martinez (2025) indicated that the QuillBot AI tool is used by students for paraphrasing sentences while maintaining the original meaning, summarises texts and checking grammar. In addition, Aljuaid (2024) buttresses the fact that there are AI applications such as QuillBot, Typeset and AI Writer which are used for paraphrasing using synonyms and sentence modification. Another application used in academic writing is Ref-N-Write which provides phrase templates, vocabulary suggestions, and a plagiarism checker tailored for scholarly work. Further, Brown (2024) revealed that Turnitin is another AI application tool used in academic writing to check the originality of the document providing feedback on the quality of writing, and originality and helping students improve their work before submission. Additionally, Khalifa and Albadawy (2024) indicated that AI tools such as Zotero, Mendeley, and EndNote are used for generating citations and organising research materials.

### ***Challenges of using AI in academic writing***

Although tertiary students leverage the use of AI in academic writing, some challenges emanate from its use which exposes their responsibility and accountability. This was also supported by Gupta cited by Chamba, Chikusvura and Zhou (2024), AI tools have several challenges. Further, Khalifa and Albadawy (2024) reveal the need for more research on the



challenges in integrating AI into education in African countries of which this study is based on Zimbabwe who is an African country. A study revealed that in using AI tools such as ChatGPT, tertiary students have challenges such as accuracy, reliability issues, lack of awareness and technological challenges among other challenges.

Further, various research has found out that a lot of tertiary students have challenges in academic writing as put forward by Mohale (2023), Sağlamel and Aydoğdu (2022). A Khalifa (2024) indicated that AI is now used for idea generation, content structuring, literature synthesis, data management, editing and ethical compliance. Meanwhile, Sharma (2024) indicated that the integration of AI in the higher education has sparked debate on the issue of academic integrity as most students in India were copying information on AI and use the information as their thinking.

### ***Academic dishonesty***

The use of AI has brought about academic dishonesty as many researchers tend to rely on AI for writing their assignments. However, reporting on University World News suggested that the use of AI in academic writing does not blatantly lead to academic dishonest since some AI tools such as ChatGPT are used to generate a draft of ideas by reluctant writers. In another view, Sharma (2024) reveals that students should use AI tools to improve their academic and skills development not a quick fix to success. For students to fully benefit from the use of AI, Khumalo (2022) indicated that there is need for educators to rigorously teach their students' academic integrity during this time of AI.

### ***Increase in plagiarism***

The findings indicated that the use of AI in education can lead to high plagiarism. Similarly, Johnson (2023) indicated that the originality of work is lost once students start using AI in their work and have a high risk of united plagiarism or over-relying on AI. There are also some unclear ethical issues which are associated with the use of AI (Patel, 2023). However, Garcia (2023) blamed the lack of technical skills among students that can hamper effective AI writing skills. Meanwhile, Smith (2023) found that a lot of students have grammar, generating citation challenges in how to effectively use AI tools for academic writing in checking grammar, generating citations and generating AI content. Brown and Green (2023) revealed that the overreliance of students on using AI affects the thinking skills of the students since AI produces a coherent text which might not need any editing. Nguyen et al. (2024) buttress the same point that the use of AI hinders the critical and creative thinking that is necessary for future careers. Wise advice from Jie and Kamrozzaman (2024) revealed that there is a need to balance AI and human involvement to foster the learning experience. However, discovered that AI tools are infested with serious errors and improper rephrasing and have raised serious questions about the overreliance on AI.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

The researchers adopted a constructivist paradigm, relying on the perspectives of participants, thus allowing for inductive data coding. A qualitative approach was employed, as constructivism is closely associated with qualitative methods. This approach was used to explore the challenges faced by students regarding plagiarism and content fabrication in their writing. Purposive sampling was utilized to collect data from twenty-five tertiary-level students in Zimbabwe. The researchers used Atlas.ti to code and analyze the qualitative data obtained through open-ended questions in e-questionnaires distributed via Google Forms which allowed participants the opportunity to express their views freely.

Questionnaires are a cost-effective method for data collection, enabling the gathering of insights from a large number of respondents efficiently. The preliminary literature review indicated that AI offers significant advantages in academic writing, particularly in the analysis of qualitative data through software like Atlas.ti, which facilitates more sophisticated data analysis compared to manual techniques. By employing Atlas.ti, the researchers aimed to implement the recommendations of Mastrobattista, Munoz-Rico, and Cordon-Garcia (2024), who noted that such tools enhance researchers' ability to analyze data effectively and improve the quality of findings.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following sections will discuss the research findings based on the code cloud image as extracted from Atlas-ti.



**Figure 1.** Extracted from Atlas-ti post inductive data coding

The image above illustrates the importance of accountability that students should maintain when engaging in academic writing. Accountability serves as the heart for producing high-quality and authentic work, emerging as a central code from the data. Additionally, assistive technology tools foster innovation in writing and emphasize the need for accountability among tertiary-level students as they utilize these tools in their academic writing. Students' research opinions can be transformed into innovation through written expression, which can be achieved with responsible use of AI tools.

### **Academic Writing**

The research findings revealed that AI tools can enhance the quality of academic writing by improving grammar, structure, and coherence, making content more readable. These findings boost research efficiency and ensure accuracy and up-to-date information. Similarly, Khalifa and Albadawy (2024) found that AI tools such as Grammarly and OpenAI's ChatGPT are very useful in checking grammar, which is crucial in developing clear and academic writing.

The findings indicated that some ethical concerns about using AI in academic writing include plagiarism, but these can be addressed through educating students on responsible AI use and promoting integrity and originality. According to Turnitin (2024), one in every ten assignments submitted by tertiary students is an AI-generated assignment, which is plagiarism. The study disclosed that it is important to disclose the use of AI tools in academic



writing and enforce consequences for misrepresentation. However, Khalifa (2024) is against citing that AI cannot be credited as an author, though highlighting the importance of AI in academic writing.

Further, the data revealed that AI can enhance content quality by providing ideas and improving clarity, but critical thought and personal responsibility are still essential. The findings indicated that AI is crucial to educate learners on how to effectively use AI tools without plagiarism and to emphasize critical thinking and originality in assessments. Some AI tools may require payment for full benefits, and consequences should be enforced for misuse or unacknowledged use of AI. Similar sentiments were also put forward by Dube (2024) that some of the AI tools have free versions but to get premium features there is need to for payment. The researchers observed that was true especially with Grammarly AI that requires payment to get premium functions.

### **AI Ethics**

The study findings established that using AI as a supplementary tool can enhance the quality of content by providing ideas, improving clarity, and ensuring grammatical accuracy. In a study that was study by Khalifa and Albadawy (2024) revealed that AI tools such as Grammarly and OpenAI's ChatGPT are very useful in checking grammar, which is crucial in developing clear and academic writing. According to Kessler (2024) Grammarly is an AI tool used for checking grammatical mistakes, spelling mistakes, plagiarism and assist in writing by giving suggestions. In another study by Marzuki et al. (2023), they found out that tools AI tools such as Grammarly, QuillBot, Wordtune, and Jenni have been shown to greatly enhance students' writing abilities. However, Yang (2024) indicated that, AI – generated writing has its own weaknesses such as incorrect information, poor logical flow, factual errors, absence of originality and lack of critical analysis. But The University of Rhode Island (2025) indicated that students should learn to move the past merely using these tools; they need to grasp how to derive insights by validating information and comprehending the capabilities and limitations of technology.

However, the results suggested that responsible use of AI requires critical thought and personal responsibility for the work's accuracy and validity, as AI-generated work can have a high plagiarism score. Tools like Turnitin can help detect plagiarism, but users should still provide their insights. While AI tools like Grammarly can help in checking and correcting errors, policies and training on plagiarism should be available to improve content quality. Similarly, Kovari (2025) indicated that students need to be informed about the ethical use of AI tools and the importance of completely avoiding academic dishonesty. The findings indicated that AI can be beneficial if used appropriately.

### **Quality improvement**

The investigations established that clear policies, education on AI ethics, training on AI tools, disclosure requirements, and AI detection tools are essential to address plagiarism, lack of transparency, bias, dependence on technology, and accountability in academic settings. The same sentiments were put forward by Kovari (2025) that educational institutions establish clear policies, design assessment tasks that promote critical thinking, and offer training on ethical AI use to help educators leverage AI tools like ChatGPT effectively while reducing the potential for misuse. Further, the findings revealed that there is a need to promote integrity through emphasising critical thinking and originality in assessments is crucial. The findings indicated that educating students on academic integrity and the importance of originality encourages responsible AI use.





### **Accountability**

The findings suggest that developing clear policies for holding tertiary students accountable for AI-generated content by establishing guidelines for acceptable use and citation. Establishing clear policies around AI use, including ethical guidelines and legal responsibilities, will help students and staff navigate these complex issues. This concurs with findings concluded that there is need to develop policies on the use of AI, which encompasses the ethical guidelines so as to help students.

Further, the research findings indicated the need to invest in fast internet connections to reduce delays. Use content-specific AI tools. To ensure ethical use, institutions should make students disclose AI tools used and explain their role in assignments. This corresponds to the findings by Funa and Gabay (2025) that for academic integrity to be created, policies should be put in place so that students can disclose the AI tools that they used in writing up the assignments so that teachers can assess the learners properly.

Encourage transparency and accountability in reporting AI usage. Remember, the responsibility lies with the researcher to verify results and offer valuable interpretations. The findings revealed the be cautious of the potential for lazy academic habits if AI is incorrectly relied upon but also recognize its benefits in idea generation and enhancing academic writing quality. This concedes with the findings by Abbas, Jam and Khan (2024) revealed that the use of ChatGPT in academic tasks can cause laziness among the students and affect their cognitive skills. Additionally, Xie and Wang (2024) suggested that AI might weaken critical thinking skills by diminishing the necessity for students to participate in thorough analysis or problem-solving activities.

### **Ethical Concerns**

The findings indicated the need on focusing on providing guidance rather than being solely reliant on AI for research output to avoid hindering independent thinking and creativity. Moreover, the findings indicated the need to minimize the general use of AI in writing but acknowledge its positive impact on enhancing research efficiency and accuracy. The same sentiments we put forward by Balalle and Pannilage (2025) that, proper use of AI in education can improve the quality of research and academic integrity. In support with these sentiments indicated that AI tools such as Wordtune, Grammarly and Quillbot assist students with language problems.

The finding revealed that, if AI is used properly in educational contexts, it can enhance academic integrity and quality at all levels. For example, Grammarly, Wordtune, QuillBot, and similar software are helping students with language matters (Yeo, 2023) while offering better support to protect the academic integrity of institutes. Chikozho and Moyo (2021) argue that AI can be used to analyse large datasets in social science, agriculture, and health. Furthermore, a study by Chauke, Mkhize, Methi, and Dlamini (2024) found that tertiary-level students in developing countries use AI tools, such as chatbots, to refine their research topics before final submission, identify grammatical mistakes in English using Grammarly, and paraphrase their work all of which are crucial for improving their academic writing and potentially leading to academic success. Mararike and Zinyama (2023) reveal that while AI is beneficial in research, challenges can arise during its use, including data privacy concerns, inadequate technological resources, and the need to adhere to AI guidelines in academic work. The researchers conducted a literature review and collected empirical data using e-questionnaires from tertiary-level students in Zimbabwe.

However, ethical concerns like plagiarism should be addressed through educating students on responsible AI use and promoting integrity. Similarly, Zhai, Wibowo and Li (2024) eight studies examining the role of AI in academic writing. The results show that AI



contributes positively; however, it also points out issues such as a lack of creativity, instances of plagiarism, and the presence of algorithmic bias.

The other findings that were put forward include the need to establish clear policies, provide training on AI ethics and tools, and encourage originality to ensure responsible and effective use of AI in academic writing. According to Kovari (2025) many universities are trying to curb plagiarism using AI by introducing AI- detecting tools and Turnitin has also introduced algorithms that can identify AI generated text.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the integration of AI tools in academic writing presents both significant advantages and challenges for tertiary students, particularly in Zimbabwe. While AI enhances writing quality and research efficiency, concerns regarding plagiarism, academic integrity, and overreliance on technology persist. The findings underscore the necessity of establishing clear policies and providing comprehensive training on ethical AI used to foster responsible practices among students. Educators must emphasize the importance of originality and critical thinking to mitigate the risks associated with AI dependency. As institutions navigate this complex landscape, promoting transparency and accountability in AI usage will be crucial for maintaining academic integrity. Ultimately, the responsible application of AI can enhance educational outcomes, provided it is coupled with a commitment to ethical standards and personal accountability.

## **Recommendations**

- a. The findings indicate that AI plays a crucial role in academic writing among students. Therefore, institutions should invest in reliable internet connections to ensure that students have access to AI tools whenever they need them.
- b. Educational institutions should establish policies governing the use of AI by tertiary students in completing assignments and conducting research to mitigate incidents of plagiarism. These policies should also outline penalties for those who abuse AI or engage in plagiarism.
- c. Institutions should invest in anti-plagiarism software, such as Turnitin, to manage AI-generated content and uphold academic integrity, as respondents indicated a high prevalence of plagiarism.
- d. Institutions should implement training programs, particularly through information literacy initiatives, for incoming university students. These programs should teach students how to use AI for academic enhancement and creativity without compromising academic integrity.
- e. Students should reference or acknowledge the AI tools used in preparing their assignments or research projects. This practice will enable lecturers to provide fair assessments of each learner's work.

## **Areas for Further studies**

- a. There is a need to explore ways to integrate AI into the education sector to enhance the quality of study without compromising the quality of learning.
- b. The researchers feel it is important to examine unethical practices, such as plagiarism, after training and the implementation of policy measures.
- c. It is necessary to conduct a study on the training needs of students so that information literacy courses address all areas where learners struggle with the use of AI in education.



- d. There is a need to investigate the effectiveness and limitations of plagiarism detection software, such as Turnitin, to eliminate cheating. The study should also outline the improvements required for the software.
- e. There is a need to evaluate the effectiveness of AI tools such as Grammarly, QuillBot, and ChatGPT in academic writing.

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