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Research Article

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Generative AI in Omani Higher Education: An Exploratory Study of Practices, Ethics, and Training Needs at Sohar University's Faculty of Language Studies and Faculty of Law

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Abstract

Background*: Generative artificial intelligence is rapidly becoming ubiquitous in higher education. However, its legitimacy within academia depends on task fit in a specific discipline, students' knowledge of the technology, and responsible governance practices. This study explored the prevalence of artificial intelligence use, students' perceptions of its ethical use, and their training needs among undergraduate students of Language Studies and Law at Sohar University in Oman.*

Methods*: A comparative mixed-methods design was used, with two faculty-specific questionnaires (in English for Language Studies and in Arabic for Law) harmonized into a single dataset. After non-consenting respondents were excluded, the final sample included students from both faculties. Quantitative analysis involved descriptive statistics, Welch's t-tests, chi-square tests, and Cohen's d. Qualitative analysis used bilingual, keyword-assisted thematic analysis of three open-ended questions.*

Results*: Both faculties showed a high prevalence of artificial intelligence use; however, Language Studies students reported a wider range of applications, such as grammar checking, drafting, brainstorming, and translation. Law students showed a significantly better understanding of artificial intelligence and of the ethics of responsible use. Formal training was rare in both faculties, especially in Law.*

Conclusion*: Use of artificial intelligence is common among students, but its frequency and purposes vary by field: Language Studies students use it more and for more tasks, while Law students are better aware of its responsible use. Institutional management of artificial intelligence should therefore be field-specific and explicit about ethics, keeping authorship with students, requiring disclosure, and teaching verification.*

Keywords: artificial intelligence; generative artificial intelligence; higher education; language studies; responsible use of artificial intelligence.

Abbreviations:
AI - artificial intelligence
RQ - research question
SD - standard deviation.

1. Introduction

The rapid diffusion of generative artificial intelligence (AI) has changed higher education in both practical and normative ways. Being a new technology, AI appears to be associated with such activities as writing, summarization, translation, generation of ideas, information retrieval, and revision [1-3]. The key point here is not that AI will have some impact on higher education but how to differentiate between help and substitution.

Discernment in academic use of AI is important given the discipline-driven nature of its applications. Where disciplines involve language, generative AI is expected to overlap with academic work such as grammar assistance, paragraph formation, translation, vocabulary, and idea creation [4-8]. Conversely, where legal education and practice are concerned, some AI problems become obvious, such as the issue of false citations, fictitious authority, lack of jurisdictional relevance, and the professional risk of offloading interpretive reasoning to unexplainable machines [9-13]. A single institutional rule is therefore unlikely to capture the pedagogical and ethical complexity of AI use across fields.

The current investigation aims to tackle this problem through the lens of Sohar University in Oman.

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The education system in Oman and across the Gulf region is impacted by the digitalization of modern life, changes in educational technology, and high levels of expectation in terms of academic integrity, responsibility, and behavior [14]. However, there are currently not enough studies conducted in this area in terms of the Gulf region, let alone the bilingual and interdisciplinary student community of Sohar University. Research done in this area is usually restricted to one discipline only and is either exploratory or not located within the Gulf region [1,2,5,6,15].

This paper addresses this issue with a comparative analysis of two departments with contrasting task ecologies: The Department of Language Studies and the Department of Law. This analysis is particularly valuable for the following three reasons. First, it juxtaposes two disciplines where the application of AI technology has significantly different characteristics of task fit. Second, it allows determining whether higher rates of utilization of AI tools result from a better understanding of responsible AI use ethics or from increased permissiveness towards such use. Third, it considers a bilingual university setting whereby the harmonized criteria were used on Language Studies students who completed the survey in English and law students who completed the survey in Arabic.

Hence, this paper formulates four research questions (RQ). RQ1: To what extent is AI employed by students of the two departments, and for what purposes? RQ2: Is there any significant difference between the two departments in terms of harmonized metrics of knowledge, responsible-use ethics, and acceptability judgments in scenarios? RQ3: What are the major concerns expressed and training needs reported by students in open-ended answers? RQ4: What university policy framework is preferable for managing AI applications in higher education settings?

The contribution of the research is empirical, theoretical, and practical. Empirically, it contributes to the development of a comparative dataset of Oman, which brings together two separate surveys conducted among students in two faculties into one analysis-friendly data file. The theoretical contribution is in the integration of three dimensions of scholarly work: task fit, AI literacy, and responsible use governance. Practically, this research contributes to a discussion on a policy framework that would promote transparency, verification, and perhaps even ethical practices of amanah (trustworthiness) in academic writing.

1.1 Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

Research on generative AI within higher education indicates that the current trend is one where AI has moved from experimental innovation to becoming institutionalized academic infrastructure [1-3]. However, the shift in the role of AI in academia goes beyond being a technical change in the use of AI technology. According to Zhao and Cox [3], when writing becomes digital, it alters the social context associated with the process of text production, thus raising questions about some of the existing notions related to writing such as authorship and revision. The qualitative studies conducted in the field of AI in higher education also demonstrate this trend [1,2].

However, the academic domain is not completely consistent regarding the methodology used in the research. Most of the research present in the literature is mainly exploratory, perceptual, and undertaken in particular educational contexts [1,2,6]. Interdisciplinary, interlingual, and comparative studies have been conducted very rarely until now. This is critical because the impact of AI in education varies from one discipline to another.

It is important to note that the areas related to language have become a key platform for the application of AI owing to the significant correlation between the mentioned technologies and linguistic task. It was shown in the literature that students know the importance of using AI for writing, giving feedback, improving vocabulary, generating drafts, and mediating language [4-6,8,16,17]. In the work by Gozali et al. [4], the possibilities of feedback literacy development through the critical application of AI were described. Lam & Le [5] found similar attitudes toward the use of ChatGPT in writing English.

Thus, the literature gives rise to a mixed image rather than a completely positive one. While the employment of AI could help to make the process more efficient and overcome various access barriers with regard to writing and editing, certain authors draw attention to such matters as dependency, voice lessness, and superficiality of cultural meanings [2,7,18]. It is especially important when considering translation and literary analysis due to the fact that a generated output could be competent but not suitable [8,18].

However, legal studies raise even stricter concerns regarding the use of artificial intelligence. Recent studies highlight both the value and the danger of AI for legal studies, focusing on the aspects of document preparation, information accessibility, and drafting [9,11-13]. Nonetheless, the literature keeps repeating the danger of AI's ability to create fake precedents and irrelevant materials, as well as misleading legal arguments [10-12,19]. In this way, legal studies are different from language support not due to the lack of application of AI but due to the cost of mistakes in such a domain.

These academic writings directly relate to educational contexts. If law students become used to using unchecked AI help, it may lead to replacing the method of work with the convenient way of doing it, which will mean neglecting source verification and responsibility [9,10,12]. Thus, proper AI usage for legal education needs not only digital literacy but also good checking and disclosure skills.

Across different disciplines, the literature has consistently refused the notion of a black-and-white approach to AI. AI should not be regarded either as inherently good or inherently illegitimate. The legitimacy of AI in academic settings is based on the purpose, visibility, change, and human factor associated with AI [1,18,20]. Therefore, scholars have paid attention to the significance of AI literacy, disclosure, and context-specific governance instead of outright banning the technology [1,2,15,18,21].

There are three major gaps indicated by the literature reviewed that drive the current research. Firstly, there is an insufficient number of studies focusing on comparing faculties with highly distinctive task ecologies. Secondly, regional studies regarding the application of generative AI in Gulf higher education are rare. Finally, little attention has been paid to the issue of translating AI governance into the local ethical language. This is why the current research interprets transparency and accountability of the application of AI technology as integrity.

This paper adopts a multidisciplinary responsible AI use theory, which combines three concepts. First, there is task-fit, under which students become more likely to embrace AI in their academic discipline as long as it matches their routine activities [4,5,11,12]. The second one relates to the idea of AI literacy, which refers to awareness about AI capabilities, weaknesses, and criteria for assessing AI's performance [2,4,18,21,22]. The third notion is that of responsible use governance, when institutions establish criteria for distinguishing useful assistance from covert substitution [1,15,18,20].

In general, this implies that the use of AI within higher education can be seen as an interplay between opportunity, judgment, and regulation. A faculty where the incorporation of AI is part of standard practices might exhibit greater use but not necessarily greater moral judgment. In contrast, a faculty where the disciplinary culture is characterized by caution and verification might reveal lower use but greater evaluative awareness. As such, this current study anticipates divergence among faculties rather than convergence to one pattern.

Such a structure allows for the consideration of the concept of human-in-the-loop as well. The academic application of AI tools is much more justified in cases where the student is personally responsible for the assignment, checks the results, critically reworks them, and acknowledges help from an AI when it is needed. In the context of this paper, scenario-based assessments and open-ended answers are analyzed in light of this approach.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Research Design

The study adopted a comparative mixed-methods survey approach. Data gathering was done by administering two questionnaires that targeted the two faculties, where identical constructs were used but harmonized for analysis. The design was comparative since it compared two faculties with different discipline requirements, mixed methods since it used closed and

open-ended questions, and was explanatory since qualitative data aided in explaining quantitative differences.

2.2 Setting, Sample, and Data Sources

This study was conducted at Sohar University by means of two surveys completed independently by different students. The first survey came from the Faculty of Law, while the second came from the Faculty of Language Studies. The verification of the source files indicated that there were 88 participants from the Faculty of Law and 112 participants from the Faculty of Language Studies, making 200 respondents prior to exclusions. However, after excluding those who did not give consent and null responses, the number of respondents became 197, with 88 from the Faculty of Law and 109 from the Faculty of Language Studies (Table 1).

Table 1: The verified analytical sample and the main descriptive indicators used in the comparative analysis.

Faculty	Analytical sample (*n*)	AI use prevalence (%)	Formal AI training (%)	Knowledge mean (SD)	Ethics mean (SD)	Scenario mean (SD)
Language Studies	109	98.2	25.7	3.088 (0.888)	3.479 (0.734)	2.950 (1.039)
Law	88	92.0	5.7	3.929 (0.748)	3.907 (0.660)	2.644 (1.072)
Note: n = number of students in the analytical sample after exclusions; SD = standard deviation. Knowledge, ethics, and scenario values are composite means on a 1–5 scale. AI = artificial intelligence.						

2.3 Instrument Structure and Harmonization

Despite the two surveys being tailored to the faculty and having different languages, they had identical structures. Both surveys had items on demographics, AI awareness and use, Likert scale items on AI knowledge, Likert scale items on ethics of responsible use, judgment items based on scenarios, and three open-ended items.

The data analysis was done through a harmonized data file that comprised the following categories. First, the demographic data comprised faculty, questionnaire language, year of study, program, gender, and technological comfort level. The second data comprised exposure to AI tools, where the participants were asked about their knowledge of AI tools and the academic tasks performed with the use of AI. The knowledge category comprised data on the knowledge of students about the capabilities and limitations of AI in their respective fields. Ethics data comprised data on disclosure, authorship, boundary identification, and assessment of the contribution of AI. Lastly, judgment data comprised the judgment by the participants on whether some practices related to AI tools are morally acceptable or unacceptable.

Matching of the two questionnaires in terms of language was done by the way of asking similar questions which could fall under the same categories of analysis. Furthermore, the five questions for knowledge, five questions for ethics, and three scenarios were scored using numbers ranging from 1 to 5 and then averaged for each respondent. Open-ended responses contained more than one idea.

2.4 Quantitative Analysis

The process of quantitative analysis consisted of three steps. The first one involved the calculation of descriptive statistics for prevalence of AI use, formal training experience, and three harmonized composite scales. The next step entailed testing of differences between faculty in terms of continuous composite variables through the implementation of the Welch's independent-samples t-test, which is used in case of unequal samples with no equality of variance assumption. The last step was the testing of differences in categorical variables through chi-square tests of independence.

To facilitate interpretation, Cohen's d was also computed for each of the three continuous tests. In the manuscript, exact p-values are reported when meaningful, with values that rounded to zero in the output files conservatively treated as $p < 0.001$.

2.5 Qualitative Thematic Analysis

The qualitative part of the analysis involved the three open-ended questions. They were coded semantically and bilingually using a keyword-assisted thematic approach. The codes were assigned to the perception of value, issues and concerns, as well as training needs. This was performed based on the explicit content of the answers and not the latent meaning.

There were several categories into which the answers were coded, including task support and productivity, comprehension and ideas, accuracy and reliability issues, overreliance and competence depletion, integrity issues and plagiarism concerns, ethics and policies, and practical skills training. The frequency of themes was counted and analyzed by faculty, with sample quotes included.

2.6 Ethical and Analytical Considerations

Records that were believed to represent instances of either non-consent or empty consent were excluded from the analysis. It is important to emphasize that the data used is the result of the student's self-reports and that the data is not backed up by any independent verification of actual usage patterns. The approach taken in harmonizing the data was aimed at maintaining the same concept across both the Arabic and English questionnaires; however, this does not mean that psychometric equivalence has been established.

3. Results

3.1 AI Use and Training Prevalence

AI use was prevalent in both faculties. Although reported use was higher in Language Studies (98.2%) than in Law (92.0%), the chi-square test was not statistically significant. AI use was therefore widespread in both faculties.

Formal AI training also differed substantially. 25.7% of Language Studies participants received some form of AI training, while 5.7% of participants in Law did the same. This difference was statistically significant.

3.2 Discipline-Specific Purposes of AI Use

Purpose categories reflected the most distinct division between disciplines in the data set. The students of Language Studies used AI more extensively to assist them with grammar and language issues, drafting, brainstorming, translation, and research. The students of Law used AI for summarizing and some aspects of research, but significantly less for language generation.

Table 2: Percentage of students in each faculty reporting use of AI for each purpose category.

AI use purpose category	Language Studies (%)	Law (%)
Grammar/language help	80.7	0.0
Writing/drafting	67.0	23.9
Ideas/brainstorming	56.0	9.1
Research support	46.8	12.5
Summarizing	32.1	26.1
Translation	20.2	0.0
Note: Purpose categories were not mutually exclusive, so percentages do not sum to 100. AI = artificial intelligence.		

The trend shown in Table 2 supported the task-fit thesis put forward previously. The highest use of AI occurred in those areas that corresponded to the primary activities in a particular subject area. In the case of Language Studies, these involve drafting, language editing, and translation.

3.3 Comparative Scale Results

Comparison of faculties in relation to harmonized composite scales yielded three significant insights (Table 3). First, Law students performed significantly better in AI knowledge. Second, Law students performed significantly better in responsible-use ethics. Finally, Language Studies students were marginally more permissive in their scenario-based acceptability judgments. For the sake of making the inferential data clear and explicit within the body of the core article, Table 3 contains the full data analysis, whereas Figure 1 summarizes the key differences in terms of magnitude and direction.

Table 3: Inferential comparison of Law and Language Studies students across harmonized scales and selected categorical indicators.

Measure	Language Studies mean	Law mean	Test statistic	*p*-value	Effect size/interpretation
Knowledge composite	3.088	3.929	t = -7.0669	< 0.001	Cohen's d = -1.02, large difference in favor of Law
Ethics composite	3.479	3.907	t = -4.2161	0.000039	Cohen's d = -0.61, moderate difference in favor of Law
Scenario composite	2.950	2.644	t = 2.0009	0.046895	Cohen's d = 0.29, small difference in favor of Language Studies
AI-use prevalence	107 users	81 users	χ^2 = 2.8966	0.088768	Difference not statistically significant
Formal training prevalence	28 trained	5 trained	χ^2 = 12.5771	0.000391	Significant difference in favor of Language Studies
Note: Welch's independent-samples t-tests were used for the composite scales and chi-square tests of independence for the categorical indicators. t = t statistic; χ^2 = chi-square statistic; d = Cohen's d; negative t and d values indicate higher scores among Law students. Composite scales are means on a 1–5 scale. AI = artificial intelligence.					

Concerning the policy of institutions, it is very important not to develop an approach based solely on making access easier but also to include verification and training in the process. That is why a small discussion of Table 3 and Figure 1 provides support for the central idea of this paper. There is no need for standard policies related to AI governance in colleges and universities, and each faculty must be analyzed independently. The faculties characterized by high compatibility of tasks and artificial intelligence would require more guidance concerning setting limits and authorship, while others would need more verification training.

3.4 Thematic Analysis of Perceived Value

In both cases, the most significant open-ended question answer was in relation to task facilitation and efficiency (Figure 1). AI helped the students explain, simplify, compose, summarize, and complete their tasks more efficiently. The second most significant answer in relation to understanding and creativity indicates that many of the students did not use the technology merely to help them finish their tasks faster but to think through their ideas.

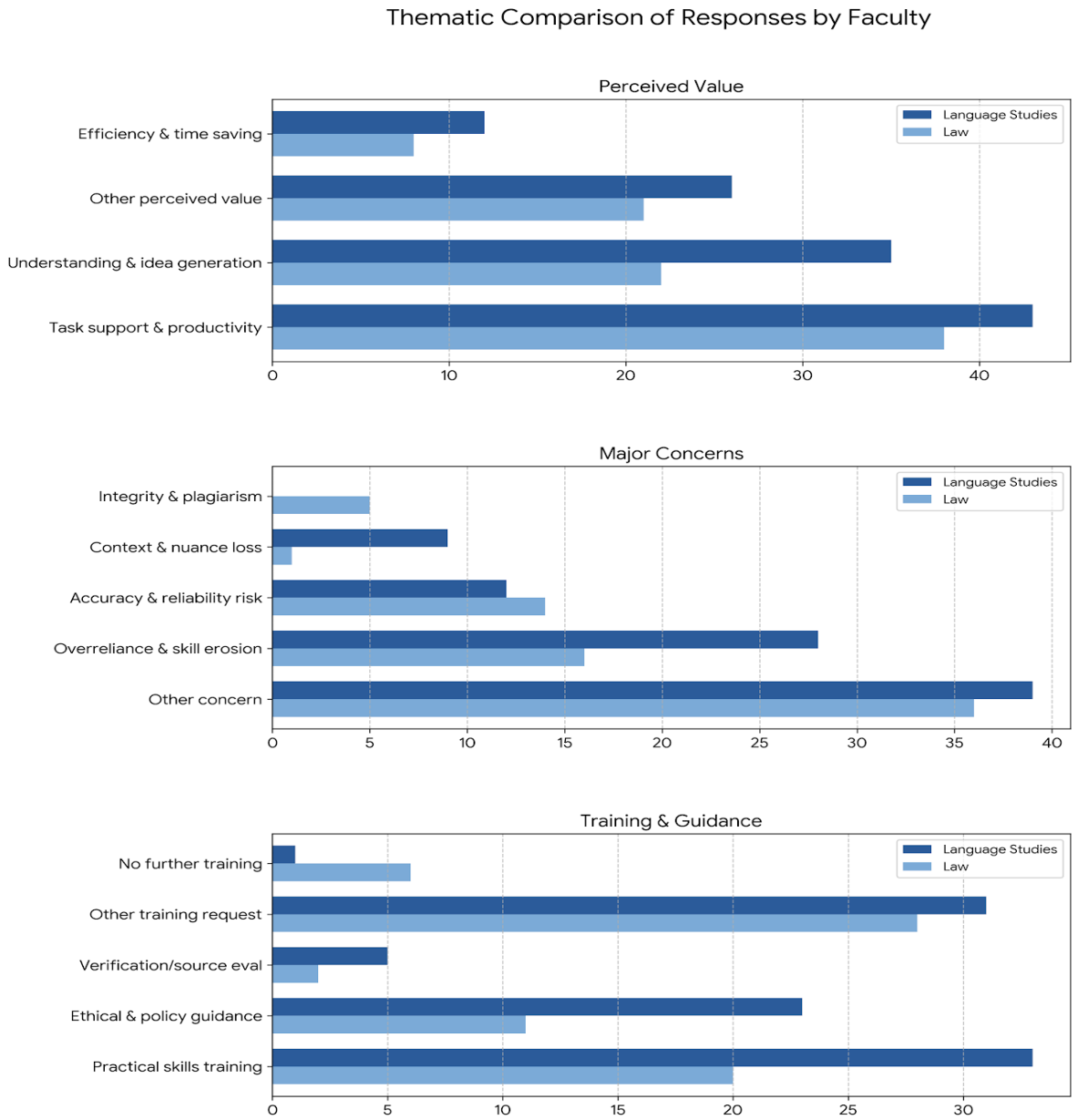


Figure 1: Thematic comparison of coded open-ended responses across the two faculties. Bars show coded frequencies for perceived value, major concerns, and training or guidance needs.

Responses to Language Studies topics generally mentioned grammar assistance, vocabulary support, translation, and idea generation. Responses from the Law faculty generally focused more on the explanation of difficult legal concepts, summarization of long legal documents, and understanding assistance. The qualitative nature of the results can easily be seen in Figure 1 where it is clear that the most common qualitative value between the two faculties regarding the use of AI technology is its productivity-related value; however, students in the Language Studies faculty have more focus on the aspect of idea generation, whereas the Law faculty focuses relatively more on the aspects of reliability and integrity.

3.5 Thematic Analysis of Major Concerns

The issues of greatest analytical significance were overdependence and loss of skills, inaccuracy and unreliability, and, for a subset of the Law respondents, integrity and plagiarism concerns. The Language Studies students were particularly sensitive to the issue of nuance loss in translating and interpreting literary texts, whereas the Law students had worries about the provision of wrong legal data and personal reasoning weakening (see Figure 2).

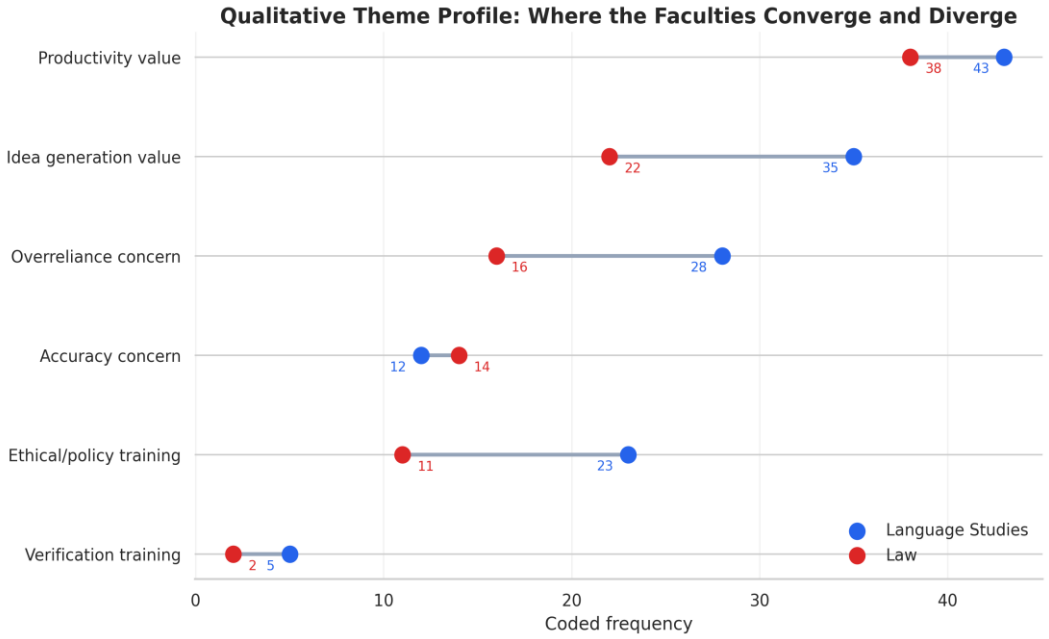


Figure 2: Qualitative theme profile comparing analytically important coded frequencies between Language Studies and Law students.

These themes revealed that the students' anxieties were not purely theoretical but rather very much connected to the educational weaknesses in their respective fields. For Language Studies students, the topics of focus included understanding, nuances, and voice; for the Law students, the topics of focus included correctness, legal relevance, and intellectual dependence. As can be seen from Figure 2, the most significant cross-faculty distinctions included the fact that Language Studies students were more concerned with AI being related to idea generation and dependency.

3.6 Thematic Analysis of Training and Guidance Needs

As evident from the above-mentioned Figure 3, there was a noticeable level of interest in the practical aspect of learning as well as in the policies. For Language Studies, the most prevalent demands from the students included practical training and policies. As regards Law, the demands included correct usage, practical training, and proper limitations.

Qualitative findings provided support for one of the core conclusions drawn in the paper, namely that not only is the availability of the technologies important for the students but also institutional guidance on proper use of these technologies.

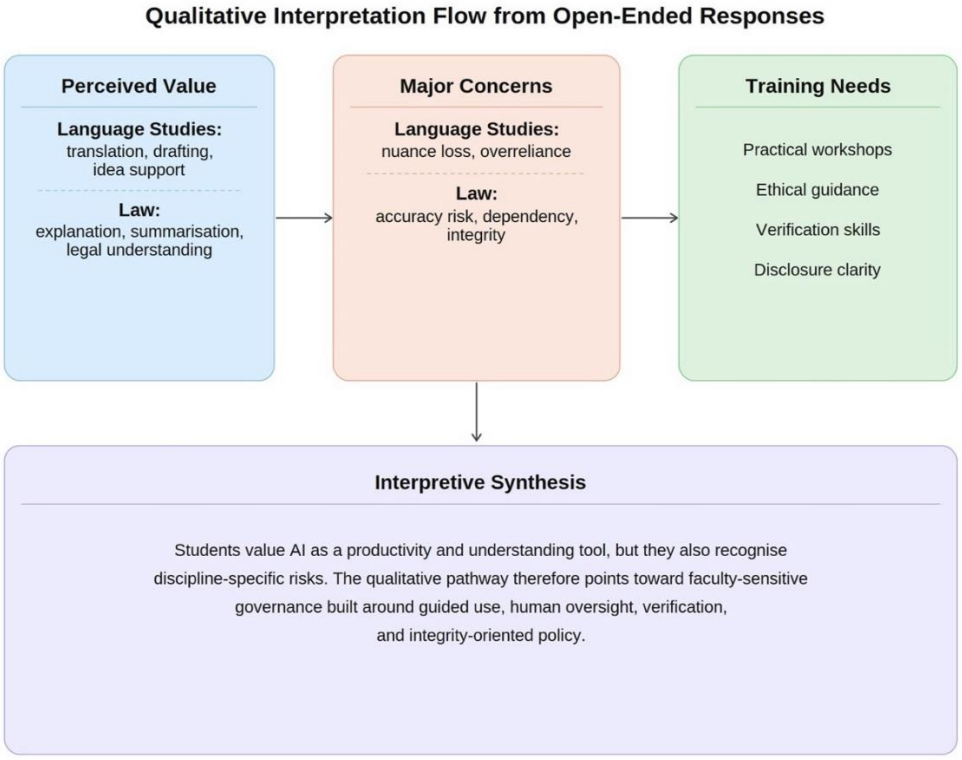


Figure 3: Qualitative interpretation flow showing how students' perceived value of AI leads to discipline-specific concerns and, in turn, to demand for guided use, verification, and integrity-oriented governance.

When combined, Figures 1-3 elevate the thematic analysis from being an appendix to the paper into being an integral part of its interpretation. The images demonstrate clear steps: first, the students understand the instrumental value of AI within an academic context; second, they identify field-specific dangers; third, they call for a structured approach. These steps prove the point made in the paper: successful policy cannot be about restrictions or free adoption, but must be about supervision of AI usage in education.

4. Discussion

The results also confirm the core argument that the application of AI in higher education cannot be considered an out-of-task fit in each respective discipline and its culture of responsibility. The students of Language Studies applied AI to a greater number of tasks and employed AI to produce more kinds of generative writing. The trend corresponds to other studies, which have found language-learning tasks to be highly compatible with the application of AI [4-6,8].

However, frequency of use does not mean enhanced knowledge and ethical standards of responsible use. Law students performed better in terms of knowledge and responsible use ethics. There are certain dangers associated with legal education because of false citations, miscontextualizations, and false sources. Therefore, it is possible for students of legal education to obtain a more critical perspective on the ethical standards of AI use regardless of its lower frequency of use in academia [9-12].

This is confirmed by the results from the scenario exercise. The participants from Language Studies were somewhat more lenient in terms of accepting these AI-powered exercises. This does not mean that they were less ethical. On the contrary, the open-ended responses suggest that these students are well aware of the problem of lost nuances and lack of authenticity, and even risks of over-reliance. What emerges here is thus the problem of converting frequent use into actual rules regarding disclosure and human responsibility.

The results regarding training are similarly concerning. As noted above, Language Studies students received more training than Law students, but even among these groups, the training was quite rare given the universal use of such services. Law students have an especially big gap here. This pattern is echoed across the literature: as Liu et al. [2], Isiaku et al. [1], Rezaei et al. [18], and Yitages & Kasai [15] note, students tend to start using AI before there are proper policies regarding their use.

It should also be noted that the thematic analysis provides an interpretation of the data. Most of the respondents from both faculties viewed the use of AI as a tool for supporting the learning process, increasing efficiency, and completing tasks. In addition to that, the respondents voiced their worries about dependence on AI, untrustworthy verification of information, and losing expertise. The comparison of these points of view demonstrates that the respondents did not perceive AI either positively or negatively. This combination means that institutions must develop a more complex attitude towards AI than simple permission/rejection.

For Sohar University, the most defensible regulatory approach is to formulate a discipline-specific, integrity-centered governance framework. Such a framework would differentiate among acceptable use, acceptable conditional use, and unacceptable substitution. Acceptable use would consist of brainstorming, language editing, summary writing for comprehension purposes, and help with drafting when combined with critical analysis and reporting when necessary. Acceptable conditional use would include applications that depended on such factors as course level, assessment format, or instructor approval.

This framework also corresponds to a culturally intelligible ethic of academic amanah. Within this framework, appropriate conduct when using AI involves more than just doing whatever it takes to avoid punishment. Instead, it means conducting oneself ethically through submitting one's work responsibly, confirming any outside help obtained, and being responsible for the accuracy, integrity, and authenticity of one's submission. The terminology of amanah may be useful in local policy discourse.

4.1 Implications for Policy and Practice

These findings suggest four key implications for university policy (Table 4). First, Sohar University should establish an institution-wide AI principles statement that makes it clear what constitutes disclosure, verification, and the question of authorship as minimum requirements. Second, every faculty must have its own discipline-specific guidelines on the use of AI tools and the distinction between appropriate and inappropriate use in terms of the most common tasks performed in the discipline. Third, the university should provide systematic training programs that provide guidance in using AI and drawing boundaries on its use from an ethical perspective. Fourth, instructors must encourage assessment approaches that highlight the importance of human reasoning.

Table 4: Translation of the main empirical findings into concrete policy directions.

Empirical finding	Interpretation	Policy response
AI use is widespread in both faculties	AI is already normalized among students	Regulate use explicitly rather than relying on silence or informal norms
Language Studies shows broader AI-assisted task use	AI strongly fits language-learning and writing tasks	Provide faculty-specific rules for drafting, translation, brainstorming, and citation
Law students show higher knowledge and ethics scores but very low training	Caution exists, but institutional preparation is weak	Offer legal-domain workshops on source verification, hallucination risk, and disclosure
Training rates are low overall	Adoption has outpaced support	Build mandatory or embedded AI literacy sessions in core courses
Open responses emphasize overreliance and accuracy risk	Students themselves recognize the need for boundaries	Promote human-in-the-loop workflows and verification practices
Note: The table links each main empirical finding to its interpretation and to a recommended policy response. AI = artificial intelligence.		

4.2 Limitations

Limitations of the study must be taken into account. First, the data collection is restricted to self-reporting surveys administered at only one university. Second, despite the effort in making the two sets of questions equivalent, the study does not provide evidence that there was full measurement invariance between the two measures. Third, the qualitative data were collected by means of keyword searches rather than interpretative analysis or interviews using qualitative data analysis tools or processes. Finally, the study is cross-sectional, and it does not allow conclusions about the stability of cultural tendencies or their dependence on cohort characteristics or duration of contact.

Despite these limitations, the findings provide useful comparative institutional evidence for policy development and for future, more robust research.

5. Conclusion

It is clear that while the use of AI is fairly common among the students, the frequency and purposes depend on the field. In Language Studies, AI is used more often and for multiple tasks, whereas students of Law are better aware and knowledgeable of the responsible use of AI.

The key takeaway from these findings is that the institution's management of AI should be field-specific, data-driven, and explicitly outline ethics and responsibilities. The realistic approach to dealing with AI is to maintain authorship with the students, allow the use of AI in limited amounts, disclose the AI use where needed, and teach students how to verify machine-written work.

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Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

During the preparation of this manuscript, the author(s) used ChatGPT (OpenAI) for language editing, readability improvement, and checking the manuscript against the target journal's formatting criteria. Following the use of this tool, the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as necessary and take full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, integrity, and scholarly content of the published work.

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