

Artificial intelligence techniques in the methodological preparation and design of university theses and dissertations

تقنيات الذكاء الاصطناعي في التحضير المنهجي وتصميم الرسائل والأطروحات الجامعية

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Received: 02/01/2026 Accepted: 01/04/2026

Published:01/06/2026

Abstract:

The rapid integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in university research is reshaping the methodological preparation of theses and dissertations. This study examines how AI tools—such as ChatGPT, Elicit, Zotero, and Grammarly—can support topic selection, problem formulation, literature review, data analysis, and academic writing. While AI enhances efficiency and analytical precision, it raises ethical and methodological challenges regarding originality, critical thinking, and research integrity. Using a critical and integrative approach, the study explores AI's role as a cognitive partner, emphasizing that human oversight remains essential. Findings suggest that responsible AI use can improve research quality, accelerate processes, and foster innovative methodologies without compromising scholarly rigor. Recommendations include developing computational research literacy, supervising AI outputs critically, and promoting human-AI collaboration to ensure methodologically sound, ethically robust, and high-quality university research.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, University Research, Methodology, Theses, Academic Integrity

ملخص:

أدى دمج الذكاء الاصطناعي في البحث الجامعي إلى إعادة تشكيل التحضير المنهجي للرسائل الجامعية. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى البحث في كيفية استخدام أدوات الذكاء الاصطناعي مثل ChatGPT و Elicit و Zotero و Grammarly لدعم اختيار الموضوع، صياغة المشكلة، مراجعة الأدبيات، تحليل البيانات، والكتابة الأكاديمية. وبينما يعزز الذكاء الاصطناعي الكفاءة ودقة التحليل، فإنه يطرح تحديات أخلاقية ومنهجية تتعلق بالأصالة، التفكير النقدي، ونزاهة البحث. من خلال منهج تحليلي تكاملي، تستعرض الدراسة دور الذكاء الاصطناعي كشريك معرفي، مع التأكيد على ضرورة الإشراف البشري. وتشير النتائج إلى أن الاستخدام المسؤول للذكاء الاصطناعي يحسن جودة البحث، يسرع الإجراءات، ويدعم منهجيات مبتكرة دون المساس بالصرامة العلمية. توصي الدراسة بتعزيز الكفاءة الرقمية البحثية، الإشراف النقدي على مخرجات الذكاء الاصطناعي، وتشجيع التعاون بين الإنسان والآلة لضمان بحوث جامعية علمية وأخلاقية عالية الجودة.

كلمات مفتاحية: الذكاء الاصطناعي، البحث الجامعي، المنهجية، الرسائل الجامعية، النزاهة الأكاديمية.

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1. Introduction

In recent decades, the world has witnessed profound transformations driven by the rapid advancement of digital technologies and artificial intelligence (AI), which have directly impacted the structure of scientific thinking and the mechanisms of knowledge production across various academic fields, particularly in university-level research. Scientific research is no longer merely a traditional cognitive activity based solely on individual effort; it now occurs within an intelligent digital environment where human capabilities interact with advanced algorithmic tools.

These transformations have extended to the methodological preparation of university theses and dissertations, with AI emerging as an active component across various stages of the research process—from topic selection and problem formulation, to academic writing and reference management. Modern intelligent tools have reshaped research practices by accelerating access to knowledge, enhancing analytical accuracy, and supporting systematic thinking, thereby giving rise to new patterns in the design and execution of university research projects.

In this context, AI tools increasingly act as “cognitive partners,” assisting in text analysis, methodological planning, and literature exploration, while the researcher retains full control over critical thinking and originality.

However, this rapid technological development presents fundamental challenges concerning the extent to which university researchers can employ these tools consciously and judiciously, leveraging their technical capabilities without compromising methodological rigor or the principles of originality and personal creativity in scientific research. Unregulated use of AI may marginalize critical thinking or reduce the research process to automated procedures that lack analytical and interpretive depth.

Against this backdrop, this study aims to analyze the role that AI techniques can play in enhancing the methodological preparation and design of university theses and dissertations, through a critical approach that balances the opportunities offered by these technologies with the methodological and ethical challenges they present, thereby contributing to the advancement of research quality while preserving its sound scientific foundations.

2. Problem Statement

The methodological preparation of university theses and dissertations constitutes a fundamental pillar reflecting the researcher’s competence and ability for systematic scientific thinking. It is expected to adhere to principles of accuracy, rigor, objectivity, and compliance with established academic standards. However, the rapid transformations witnessed in scientific research under the digital revolution—particularly the remarkable development of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies—have raised fundamental questions regarding the nature and boundaries of scientific methodology in the contemporary university context.

Artificial intelligence techniques in the methodological preparation and design of university theses and dissertations

AI has enabled the integration of intelligent tools capable of automating several stages of the research process. This integration has contributed to improved efficiency, speed, and accuracy in research work. Nevertheless, despite these positive potentials, such developments also pose methodological and ethical challenges concerning the legitimacy of AI use, the limits of reliance on intelligent tools, and their potential impact on researcher autonomy, critical thinking skills, and the principle of originality, which is a core tenet of academic research.

These issues are particularly evident in the university environment, where a significant number of graduate students face methodological challenges in preparing their research. These challenges range from poorly formulated problem statements, confusion between methodological concepts, and inadequate literature reviews, to difficulties in academic writing. In this context, employing AI techniques emerges as a potential solution to these challenges; yet it simultaneously necessitates careful consideration of how to use such technologies scientifically, ensuring that research is not reduced to automated procedures and that fundamental academic values are preserved.

Accordingly, the central research question can be formulated as follows:

How can AI techniques be employed to enhance the methodological preparation and design of university theses and dissertations while preserving the principles of originality and scientific rigor that underpin academic research?

This central question is further divided into the following sub-questions:

1. What is the conceptual and methodological framework for both the methodological preparation of university research and AI techniques in the academic context?
2. What are the primary methodological and epistemological challenges faced by university researchers during the preparation of theses and dissertations?
3. What are the main AI techniques and tools that can be applied across different stages of the university research process?
4. What are the scientific and ethical boundaries for using AI techniques in the preparation of university theses and dissertations?

3. Study Objectives

- To define the conceptual and methodological frameworks for the systematic preparation of university research and the use of artificial intelligence (AI) techniques in academic research.
- To identify the primary methodological and epistemological challenges faced by university researchers during the preparation of theses and dissertations.
- To examine the main AI techniques and tools that can be employed across various stages of the university research process, highlighting their characteristics and methodological functions.

- To establish the scientific and ethical guidelines for using AI techniques in the preparation of university research, ensuring adherence to principles of academic integrity and originality.

4. Significance of the Study

Theoretically, this study aims to enrich the philosophical and methodological discourse regarding the relationship between humans and machines in knowledge production, and to assess whether AI can function as a supportive tool without replacing human critical thinking.

Practically, the study provides a methodological and operational framework that can assist researchers and graduate students in effectively and ethically employing intelligent tools during the preparation of their theses and dissertations.

Furthermore, the study contributes to promoting a culture of rigorous research within the university environment by advocating for the conscious use of AI as a methodological and cognitive support, rather than a substitute for human intellectual effort.

5. Scientific Methodology in Academic Research

Scientific methodology constitutes the foundation of rigorous academic research, serving as the organized framework that guides the researcher's thinking and regulates the course of the study through its various stages, from problem identification to interpreting results and drawing conclusions. Scientific methodology is not merely a set of procedural steps; it is an integrated intellectual system grounded in rational and logical principles that ensure the scientific validity and objectivity of the research (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

Scientific methodology refers to the systematic approach a researcher employs to acquire precise scientific knowledge about a specific phenomenon, using verifiable and replicable tools and techniques that allow for the production of reliable and examinable results (Mohammed, 2014). In this context, methodology serves a dual function: it organizes scientific reasoning and prevents unwarranted generalizations, while ensuring internal coherence by logically linking the research problem, objectives, methodology, and findings.

From a philosophical perspective, scientific methodology rests on three main principles (Popper, 2002):

- Scientific rationality, which assumes that phenomena can be understood and analyzed according to an organized causal logic.
- Experimentation and verification, which are essential to ensuring the credibility of scientific results.
- Criticism and review, meaning that scientific knowledge remains provisional and continuously open to refinement

In university research, scientific methodology is a primary criterion for evaluating the quality of theses and dissertations, reflecting the researcher's capacity for critical thinking, systematic analysis and methodological decision-making appropriate to the nature of the studied phenomenon. Consequently, methodology is not merely a formal element

Artificial intelligence techniques in the methodological preparation and design of university theses and dissertations

complementing the content but the structural framework that confers scientific value and credibility to the research (Kumar, 2022).

Preparing a university thesis or dissertation involves a series of interconnected methodological stages that collectively form a comprehensive scientific process aimed at addressing a research problem in an organized and verifiable manner. These stages should not be viewed as rigid linear steps but rather as dynamic, overlapping processes, with the possibility of returning to previous stages whenever methodologically necessary (Thomas, 2021).

(1). Topic Selection and Problem Formulation

The selection of a research topic and the formulation of the research problem constitute the actual starting point of any scientific study, largely determining its success or failure. The research topic should be relevant to the researcher's field and interests, feasible in terms of available references, data collection potential, and the time frame. The research problem, on the other hand, must be precisely and clearly formulated, reflecting a genuine knowledge gap that warrants study and analysis, and must be researchable and testable according to scientific methodology (Bryman, 2022). Ambiguity or excessive breadth in problem formulation is among the most common methodological challenges faced by graduate students, as it leads to confusion in subsequent research stages.

(2). Setting Objectives and Formulating Hypotheses

Defining research objectives and formulating hypotheses are essential methodological stages in academic research, serving as a bridge between the study's problem and its theoretical framework on one hand, and its practical procedures on the other. Objectives translate general aims into actionable, verifiable goals, while hypotheses provide the logical structure that directs the research toward systematic scientific testing.

Creswell (2023) emphasizes that clearly defined objectives are a key indicator of methodological maturity, enabling the researcher to delineate the scope of the study and identify relevant variables. They also ensure that data collection and analysis stages align with the research's knowledge objectives. Accordingly, objectives should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound.

Hypotheses represent preliminary assumptions intended to be confirmed or refuted through experimental or analytical methodology. They play a central role in quantitative research by guiding data collection, measurement, and statistical analysis. Although qualitative research is generally inductive in nature, hypotheses or proposition-like assumptions may also emerge to explore patterns, relationships, or theoretical expectations within complex human phenomena, particularly in mixed methods research designs (Fetters & Molina-Azorín, 2017).

Kumar (2022) emphasizes that a hypothesis is not merely a statistical device, but rather an intellectual construct grounded in theory, which directs scientific inquiry and supports the systematic generation of new knowledge.

In the university context, students often face difficulties in formulating hypotheses accurately, due to confusion between research questions and hypotheses, or between hypotheses and theoretical concepts. Recent studies (Kasneci et al., 2023) indicate that such confusion reflects a lack of structured scientific training and negatively impacts the quality of theses and dissertations. It is also observed that some students limit themselves to formulating general descriptive hypotheses that are not subjected to empirical testing or in-depth qualitative analysis, thereby weakening the scientific value of their research.

Setting objectives and formulating hypotheses are complementary processes; objectives define what the researcher aims to achieve, while hypotheses indicate how a phenomenon can be explained or predicted. Within this framework, researchers are advised to adopt a reflective approach in building their hypotheses, balancing theoretical frameworks with empirical data. Reviewing the scientific literature is also a crucial step in generating robust, knowledge-based hypotheses (Thomas, 2021).

Artificial intelligence has introduced a new dimension to this stage, as certain smart tools assist researchers in analyzing literature and extracting statistical or semantic patterns to generate precise hypotheses. For example, intelligent language systems such as ChatGPT, Scite, and Elicit can analyze thousands of scholarly articles and extract relationships between variables, supporting the generation of evidence-based hypotheses (Dwivedi et al., 2021). However, these tools do not replace the researcher's critical thinking; rather, they should be used as analytical aids within the framework of scientific methodology guided by human reasoning and academic rigor.

(3). Literature Review and Previous Studies: From Manual Documentation to Intelligent Analysis

The literature review is one of the most important methodological stages in academic research, forming the foundational infrastructure upon which the theoretical framework is built. It allows researchers to situate their study within the existing body of knowledge, identify research gaps, and justify their choice of topic, methodology, and research tools (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). A researcher unfamiliar with previous studies is akin to constructing a knowledge project in a vacuum, as the literature review represents the cumulative memory of human knowledge.

Traditionally, literature reviews relied on manual searches through books and printed journals, with personal effort devoted to summarization and comparative analysis. This process was time-consuming and dependent on the researcher's material and cognitive resources, which often limited its comprehensiveness and currency. With digital transformation and the emergence of global academic databases (e.g., Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, PubMed), literature review has become an advanced digital process relying on electronic search and systematic review methods that allow for the classification of studies according to precise quantitative and qualitative criteria (Okoli, 2022).

Using modern smart tools, researchers can access thousands of scholarly articles within minutes and analyze them statistically and semantically to identify trends and

Artificial intelligence techniques in the methodological preparation and design of university theses and dissertations

research gaps. According to Dwivedi et al. (2024), generative AI tools such as Elicit, ResearchRabbit, and Semantic Scholar have transformed literature review from descriptive summarization to conceptual analysis based on knowledge mining and extracting semantic patterns among concepts.

These tools enable researchers to conduct AI-driven systematic reviews using text classification algorithms and conceptual network analysis to detect relationships between concepts or identify emerging research trends in a specific field (Zhai & Du, 2023). For instance, natural language processing (NLP) algorithms can analyze thousands of articles in the field of “Artificial Intelligence in Education” to extract the most common concepts and inter-variable relationships, thereby constructing an accurate knowledge map of the domain. Additionally, automatic summarization techniques allow the extraction of central ideas from long texts without losing the underlying conceptual structure, enhancing both time efficiency and analytical quality. AI systems can also assess the reliability of scientific sources using algorithms that verify citations and evaluate the scientific impact of authors and journals (Shneiderman, 2022).

However, this technological progress is not without cognitive and ethical challenges, the most prominent being the risk of over-reliance on automated summarization, which may reduce critical reading and personal analysis—essential skills in academic research (Floridi, 2023). Some AI systems may also produce algorithmic biases in selecting or classifying studies, potentially threatening the objectivity of the literature review. Consequently, the OECD (2024) emphasizes that AI should remain a supportive tool rather than a replacement for human scientific critique, as contextual understanding of knowledge cannot be fully replicated by machines.

Thus, literature review in the era of artificial intelligence represents a transition from documentation to intelligent analysis. It is no longer merely the process of collecting references, but an exploratory, knowledge-based process combining automated analysis with human critical understanding. AI expands the scope of research and accelerates access to information, yet it does not replace the researcher as an interpretive agent who gives meaning to data and integrates it within a coherent knowledge structure.

(4). Selection of Methodology and Tools: From Traditional Foundations to Intelligent Analysis

Selecting the scientific methodology represents a central step in designing academic research, as it translates the researcher’s philosophical and epistemological vision into organized practical procedures that determine how to address the problem and test hypotheses. The methodology is not merely a technical tool; it reflects a specific epistemic stance regarding the nature of the studied phenomenon and the ways to reach scientific truth (Kumar, 2022). Therefore, the accuracy of methodology selection is a fundamental condition for research validity and objectivity, connecting theory with practice and concept with observation.

A. Traditional Foundations for Selecting Methodology and Tools

In the classical framework, researchers rely on specific criteria to select the appropriate methodology for their subject. For example, the experimental method is used to uncover causal relationships, the descriptive-analytical method to study social phenomena, and the qualitative method to deeply understand human experiences. Tools are also chosen according to the methodology, such as questionnaires, interviews, observation, statistical analysis, or discourse analysis.

Creswell & Plano Clark (2023) emphasize that the choice of methodology and tools should align with the research objectives and questions, rather than personal preferences or formalistic considerations.

Digital developments and artificial intelligence (AI) have expanded the concept of methodology and tools. The methodology now includes the use of intelligent analysis algorithms, machine learning, and advanced statistical modeling, opening new horizons in data analysis and uncovering hidden patterns in research phenomena (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2022).

B. Transition to Intelligent Analysis

With the emergence of AI in scientific research, an “intelligent analytical methodology” has arisen, integrating advanced technical tools throughout research stages, from sample design to result analysis. AI systems can process massive amounts of data quickly and accurately, allowing researchers to move from limited descriptive analysis to predictive analysis based on algorithmic models.

For instance, machine learning techniques are used in social research to analyze digital interactions and detect behavioral patterns in networks, while classification and clustering algorithms are employed in educational research to identify student learning patterns (Jordan & Mitchell, 2015). In psychological studies, tools such as SPSS Modeler, RapidMiner, and Orange Data Mining generate predictive models based on field data, broadening the scope and statistical accuracy of experimental research.

Dwivedi et al. (2024) refer to this evolution as “AI-supported methodological design,” where analytical tools are no longer mere execution instruments but cognitive partners that contribute to hypothesis generation, model evaluation, and result interpretation.

C. Integration of AI and Human Methodology

Integrating AI requires advanced critical awareness, as algorithms rely on the structure of input data. Intelligent analysis does not replace the researcher’s critical judgment but requires careful scientific oversight to ensure objective results and prevent interpretive biases arising from algorithms or over-analysis (Floridi, 2023).

Recent studies (Kasneci et al., 2023; OECD, 2024) stress that contemporary university researchers need dual competencies: methodological proficiency for critical thinking and technical competence in handling intelligent systems. Tools acquire value only through the

Artificial intelligence techniques in the methodological preparation and design of university theses and dissertations

researcher's guidance, and methodology achieves its goals only when subjected to scientific and ethical rigor.

Integrating AI must also respect the value dimension of research; analytical algorithms cannot be used independently of principles such as integrity, transparency, and data privacy.

The interaction between scientific thought and AI has produced what can be termed a "hybrid methodology," combining the experimental rigor of quantitative research with the interpretive flexibility of qualitative research, while leveraging automated intelligent analysis. This approach does not aim to replace humans with algorithms but to expand the researcher's capabilities through collaboration between human judgment and AI in understanding complex phenomena.

Consequently, AI becomes part of modern scientific methodology, not as a substitute for the researcher's intellect but as a cognitive resource that enhances analytical objectivity, supports result quality, and shortens research time without compromising academic rigor. This highlights the importance of training university researchers in "methodological intelligence," combining critical thinking and technical analysis.

The methodological future of university research is moving toward deeper integration of AI at all stages of design and analysis, provided that such integration remains guided by scientific authenticity and ethical responsibility. Thus, in the AI era, scientific methodology is no longer limited to logical organization of thought but has become a domain for creative interaction between humans and machines in the pursuit of truth and knowledge.

(5). Data Collection and Analysis: From Classical Statistics to Intelligent Cognitive Analytics

Data collection and analysis constitute the lifeblood of any academic study, translating theoretical hypotheses into testable and interpretable results. Methodological rigor is manifested through the precise organization of tools and objectivity in analysis. For decades, researchers relied on traditional statistical methods such as frequency analysis, linear regression, and variance analysis. AI has reshaped this phase by integrating algorithms and predictive cognitive intelligence (Dwivedi et al., 2021).

A. Data Collection in the Digital Era

Previously, data were collected through direct field instruments such as questionnaires, interviews, and observations. Today, data also include large-scale digital datasets extracted from educational platforms, social networks, and open electronic sources. Such data offer unprecedented opportunities to understand complex phenomena in education and human behavior by analyzing millions of records in a short time (Jordan & Mitchell, 2015).

In universities, AI algorithms can automate and organize data collection from multiple sources via intelligent data mining. This process extracts knowledge from big data using machine learning, natural language processing, and pattern analysis. Tools like Google

Dataset Search, Kaggle, and DataRobot enable researchers to gather reliable, controlled datasets in record time.

However, collecting data with AI systems requires ethical considerations regarding privacy, confidentiality, and informed consent. Automation may expose personal data to unauthorized use or sampling bias,

B. From Statistical to Intelligent Cognitive Analysis

AI has transformed data analysis by shifting focus from simple linear relationships to exploring complex, multivariate patterns. Instead of relying solely on traditional statistical tools like SPSS or AMOS, modern analyses utilize machine learning and deep learning algorithms that dynamically process data beyond pre-defined models.

In quantitative research, these techniques allow researchers to build predictive models identifying variables with the greatest impact on studied phenomena, such as Random Forest and Support Vector Machines in psychology and education (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2022). In qualitative research, AI-powered tools like NVivo 14, Atlas.ti AI Hub, and Transkribus analyze texts, perform semantic classification, and extract key themes from interviews and field notes, enhancing analytical accuracy and interpretive depth.

Kasneci et al. (2023) note that AI contributes to “Cognitive Analytics,” combining computational statistical capabilities with human contextual understanding. While algorithms analyze data quantitatively and semantically, the researcher interprets results and situates them within theoretical frameworks, making AI a partner in scientific reasoning through “AI-augmented analysis.”

C. Integration of Quantitative Analysis and Cognitive Intelligence

The true value of AI lies in enabling researchers to move from analysis to understanding. While traditional statistics focus on quantitative relationships, intelligent analysis allows exploration of deep conceptual structures and hidden interconnections.

For instance, sentiment analysis algorithms detect individuals’ emotional trends through textual data, while AI neuroimaging techniques track brain activity and link it to cognitive processes during learning (Jordan & Mitchell, 2015). This interplay between quantitative data and cognitive patterns exemplifies the methodological transformation in contemporary university research.

Thus, the future of data collection and analysis lies in integrating statistical analysis and AI within a scientific approach combining computational speed and methodological rigor, digital objectivity, and human critical awareness. When used ethically and scientifically, AI does not diminish the researcher’s role but enhances their ability to extract meaningful insights from data.

(6). Academic Writing and Documentation: Between Scientific Rigor and Intelligent Assistance

Academic writing represents the final stage of the methodological process in university research, translating all previous operations—from theoretical framing and

Artificial intelligence techniques in the methodological preparation and design of university theses and dissertations

methodological design to data analysis—into a coherent scientific text characterized by rigor, precision, and objectivity. This stage is particularly important as it reflects the researcher's maturity and ability to communicate scientifically. Universities and journals emphasize adherence to academic integrity, transparency in reporting results, and the use of established citation styles such as APA (2020).

Academic writing is not merely the transmission of information or reformulation of knowledge; it is an interpretive cognitive act reflecting the researcher's engagement with the problem and ability to construct a coherent scientific discourse (Hyland, 2021).

The recent surge in AI language systems has introduced a new generation of academic writing assistants using advanced natural language processing (NLP) algorithms to provide linguistic and methodological support. Notable tools include:

- * Quillbot and Wordtune: Academic paraphrasing without altering meaning, preventing plagiarism and preserving conceptual coherence.

- * Zotero and Mendeley: Reference management and automated citation formatting according to modern styles (APA, Chicago, Harvard).

- * Turnitin and iThenticate: Plagiarism detection by advanced textual comparison with millions of published documents

- * ChatGPT, Gemini, and Claude: Generative systems assisting in summarizing studies, formulating research questions, and text analysis under ethical constraints.

These tools represent a revolution in academic writing practices, enhancing style, accuracy, and coherence, reducing formal and linguistic errors, and allowing researchers to focus on analytical and critical aspects. Their use, however, should be supportive rather than substitutive, as academic writing fundamentally relies on human creativity and critical thinking (Floridi, 2023).

From Human Drafting to Human–AI Interaction

Generative AI systems can produce nearly complete research texts, including introductions, analyses, and recommendations, raising debates about the boundaries between legitimate assistance and intellectual plagiarism (Nature Editorial, 2023). Recent studies (Kasneci et al., 2023; Dwivedi et al., 2021) indicate that AI is most effective in pre-writing stages, such as planning, idea organization, and reference analysis, but problematic if used to produce the final text without human critical oversight. Universities therefore call for clear regulatory and ethical frameworks to ensure proper use of AI in academic writing.

Academic integrity remains the cornerstone of scholarly writing. With AI, maintaining intellectual honesty is more challenging, as generative systems may produce texts compiled from multiple sources without explicit attribution. OECD (2024) emphasize the researcher's full responsibility for all content, whether produced manually or with digital assistance. Researchers must document AI contributions transparently and encourage students to

develop AI-ethical writing skills, balancing technical use with intellectual originality and personal creativity.

Towards an Integrated Model of Academic Writing

The future of academic writing is moving toward an interactive, integrated model combining AI's analytical capabilities with human interpretive skills. Modern academic practices do not reject technology but aim to guide it within an ethical framework that ensures quality without compromising truth and credibility. AI can act as a “methodological editor,” reviewing organization and linguistic consistency, while the researcher remains the author and thinker, giving meaning and guiding logical flow (Dwivedi et al., 2021).

Academic writing in the twenty-first century is no longer merely a linguistic skill but a multimedia cognitive practice, with AI serving as an analytical assistant, while creativity, rigor, and critical awareness remain intrinsic human intellectual traits.

6. Ethical and Scientific Challenges

Despite the substantial benefits of intelligent analysis, overreliance on it raises ethical and methodological concerns. Intelligent systems may produce implicit biases in sample selection or in interpreting relationships, especially when the original data are not representatively balanced. Moreover, some complex algorithms operate as “black boxes,” making their results difficult to interpret and threatening scientific verifiability (Floridi, 2023).

Another risk is what is known as the “statistical illusion,” i.e., the tendency to treat automated results as absolute truths, whereas they are the product of a mathematical model based on implicit assumptions. Consequently, OECD (2024) emphasizes the importance of maintaining the human researcher's role in overseeing the analysis process and interpreting results within the theoretical framework.

The use of intelligent analysis also requires advanced technical skills, including mastery of statistical programming tools and a deep understanding of algorithmic logic. Without such skills, these tools may become mere “closed boxes” producing meaningless numbers. For this reason, Dwivedi et al. (2024) advocate integrating the concept of Computational Research Literacy into graduate training programs.

7. Conclusion

Contemporary university research is undergoing a profound methodological transformation, integrating traditional human knowledge with the analytical capabilities of artificial intelligence. From defining objectives and formulating hypotheses, through literature review, methodology and tool selection, to data collection, analysis, and academic writing, the researcher remains the central agent directing all processes within a strict critical and methodological framework.

Artificial intelligence has demonstrated enormous potential to accelerate procedures, analyze large datasets, and provide linguistic and methodological support. However, its role remains that of an assistant, not a substitute for human critical thinking and creativity. The

Artificial intelligence techniques in the methodological preparation and design of university theses and dissertations

main challenge lies in achieving a balance between scientific precision and interpretive flexibility, between technical speed and critical awareness, and between automated analysis and human understanding.

In this context, responsible use of AI represents a tool for enhancing the quality and scope of university research, producing accurate and reliable results while preserving academic integrity and scholarly honesty. Therefore, the future of university research will not merely involve adopting technology, but will embody an innovative cognitive interaction between human intellect and machines, where critical thinking and intellectual creativity remain the foundation for generating renewed and trustworthy scientific knowledge.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the effective and responsible use of artificial intelligence (AI) techniques in the preparation and design of university theses and dissertations:

1. Use AI as a Supportive Tool: Researchers should employ AI to assist in tasks, while maintaining active engagement in critical thinking and intellectual reasoning.
2. Enhance Computational Research Literacy: Graduate programs should integrate training on AI applications to equip students with the necessary technical skills for ethical and effective use of intelligent systems.
3. Ensure Methodological Rigor: AI-generated outputs should be critically supervised, with results interpreted within the theoretical and methodological framework.
4. Maintain Academic Integrity: Researchers should clearly document AI contributions, avoid plagiarism, and uphold originality and transparency in all aspects of research production.
5. Apply Ethical Data Practices: The use of AI in data collection and analysis must comply with ethical standards.
6. Foster Human–AI Collaboration: Universities should encourage a culture where AI functions as a cognitive partner, enhancing researchers' analytical capabilities without replacing human judgment, creativity, or interpretive authority.

By following these recommendations, university researchers can leverage the advantages of AI while preserving the core principles of scientific integrity, methodological rigor, and critical thinking essential for high-quality academic research.

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