

## Students of Foreign Languages' Use and Perspectives about AI in their Academic Work: Between Ethicality and Cheating

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**Abstract:** The academic practices of foreign language students are increasingly shaped by the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools—such as translation devices, paraphrasing software, grammar checkers, and content generators. These tools are widely used for completing daily assignments, yet their growing presence raises important questions: Why do students use AI while completing their assignments? How should they use it? And what are the limits of AI use in academic life? This study seeks to address these questions through a mixed-methods approach involving 120 second-year BA students from the English Department at the University of Oran 2. Data were collected via questionnaires, individual interviews, and analysis of submitted assignments. The research focuses on students' awareness of ethical boundaries, institutional policies, and the cultural perceptions that influence their use of AI. Findings aim to contribute to ongoing discussions about responsible AI integration in language education and academic integrity.

**Keywords:** Artificial Intelligence, foreign language students, AI use, ethicality, academic dishonesty

**Résumé :** Les pratiques académiques des étudiants en langues étrangères sont de plus en plus influencées par les outils d'intelligence artificielle (IA), tels que les traducteurs automatiques, les reformulateurs, les correcteurs grammaticaux et les générateurs de contenu. Utilisés pour accomplir les devoirs, ces outils soulèvent des questions importantes : pourquoi les étudiants les utilisent-ils ? Comment devraient-ils les utiliser ? Et quelles sont les limites de leur usage académique ? Cette étude examine ces questions à travers une approche mixte impliquant 120 étudiants de deuxième année en licence d'anglais à l'Université d'Oran 2. Les données ont été recueillies via des questionnaires, des entretiens individuels et l'analyse de devoirs. L'objectif est d'explorer la conscience des étudiants concernant les enjeux éthiques, les politiques institutionnelles et les perceptions culturelles liées à l'IA. Les résultats visent à enrichir les débats sur

l'intégration responsable de l'IA dans l'enseignement des langues et le respect de l'intégrité académique.

**Mots-clés :** Intelligence artificielle, étudiants en langues étrangères, usage de l'IA, éthique, fraude académique

## Introduction

In recent years, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become an essential tool in the academic work of foreign language students, offering a range of applications such as translation software, grammar checkers, paraphrasing tools, and text generators. These technologies have streamlined daily academic tasks, from essay writing to research and language learning (Yuk-Chan, 2023; Zhang et al., 2023). However, with the growing dependence on AI, questions about its ethical use in education have surfaced. While AI offers significant educational advantages, it also poses risks related to academic integrity, particularly in terms of plagiarism and the potential for misuse (Godwin-Jones, 2024).

This study investigates how foreign language students engage with AI tools in their academic work, specifically focusing on their understanding of ethical boundaries (Ka-Yuk Chan, 2023). It examines student perceptions of AI, the extent to which its use aligns with academic integrity, and the influence of institutional policies on behaviour (Aljuaid, 2024). By exploring these aspects, the research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the ethical challenges posed by AI in education and how they might be addressed through clear guidelines and informed practices.

The article begins with a literature review covering the integration of AI tools in foreign language education and the ethical dilemmas they raise. This is followed by a detailed explanation of the research methodology, which applies a mixed-methods approach to collect data from second-year BA students at the University of Oran 2. The findings section presents insights into students' experiences, attitudes, and ethical awareness regarding AI use. A discussion then interprets the results within the broader academic context, and the article concludes with key takeaways and recommendations for responsible AI implementation in higher education.

## 1. Background to the Study

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has rapidly transformed various aspects of academic life, particularly for foreign language students. Tools such as translation software, grammar checkers, paraphrasing aids, and even text generation systems have become integral in assisting students with their academic tasks, ranging from

writing assignments to language learning (Yuk-Chan, 2023; Zhang et al., 2023). These advancements have proven to be advantageous, enhancing students' ability to complete assignments more efficiently and effectively. However, the rise of AI also brings significant concerns, especially regarding its potential misuse and its impact on academic integrity. While AI tools can facilitate learning, they also introduce risks such as plagiarism, cheating, and reliance on technology to the detriment of critical thinking and independent learning (Godwin-Jones, 2024).

The increasing prevalence of AI in academic settings has given rise to a critical question: how should AI be used responsibly by students in a way that does not compromise academic honesty? The unethical use of AI, particularly in the form of plagiarism or using AI-generated content without proper attribution, has become a pervasive issue in higher education (Aljuaid, 2024). A report from 2023 revealed a dramatic rise in students using AI for unethical practices, with over 50,000 applications flagged for suspected essay mills, illustrating the growing concern surrounding AI's role in academic cheating (Yuk-Chan, 2023). This has spurred calls for clearer institutional guidelines and ethical frameworks to regulate the use of AI in academic work.

Given these developments, the academic community is faced with the challenge of balancing the potential benefits of AI with the need to maintain academic integrity. This is particularly important for foreign language students, who may be more prone to using AI tools for tasks such as translation and essay generation, potentially circumventing traditional learning processes. However, these tools can also enhance learning if used ethically and in moderation, fostering creativity and independent critical thinking (Zhang et al., 2023).

This study aims to investigate how foreign language students at the University of Oran 2 Mohamed Ben Ahmed use AI tools in their academic work. It focuses on their awareness of ethical boundaries and the role of institutional policies in shaping responsible AI usage. Through a mixed-methods approach, including surveys, interviews, and document analysis, the research will explore the extent to which students understand the ethical implications of AI use and how they navigate the potential risks of cheating and academic dishonesty.

## **2. Methodology**

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to investigate how foreign language students engage with artificial intelligence (AI) tools in their academic work, with a focus on ethical practices, cheating risks, and cultural influences. Data collection spanned one academic semester and included three primary methods: surveys, interviews, and document analysis.

A 20-item online survey was distributed to 120 BA (L2) students enrolled in English Department at Oran 2 university. The survey aimed to quantify the frequency of AI tool usage (e.g., ChatGPT, DeepL, Grammarly...), perceptions of ethical boundaries, and awareness of institutional policies. Questions included Likert-scale items such as “How often do you use AI tools for writing essays?” and open-ended prompts like “Describe a situation where AI use felt unethical.”

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 participants selected from the survey respondents. These interviews explored personal experiences with AI tools, ethical dilemmas encountered, and cultural attitudes toward technology. Each interview lasted approximately 15–30 minutes and was transcribed for thematic analysis. Additionally, 30 AI-assisted assignments were reviewed to identify patterns in AI reliance, such as verbatim translations or paraphrasing. This document analysis provided tangible evidence of how students integrated AI into their work.

Quantitative data from surveys were analyzed using descriptive statistics in SPSS, while qualitative interview transcripts were coded thematically using NVivo to identify recurring ethical concerns and cultural themes. The study received ethical approval from the head of department of English Language (university of Oran 2 Ahmed Ben Ahmed) and all participants provided informed consent. Anonymity was ensured through pseudonyms (e.g., “Student 1”).

### **3. Participants**

The study involved 120 undergraduate students (60% female, 40% male) aged 18–24, enrolled for a B.A. degree in English Department. Participants were divided by language proficiency: 49% Pre-intermediate, 43% intermediate learners, and 8% advanced students.

Recruitment occurred through departmental announcements in language courses and online forums (Google classroom and Moodle) for English language students. Selection criteria required participants to be actively enrolled in English language department for a B. A. degree (L2 level).

### **4. Results and Analysis**

Generally, students told that they used AI in doing many tasks. They, all, agreed on the use of AI to look up words they could not remember or know while trying to translate, write, or read a text, to check the grammaticality of a written piece they were unsure of, and to start writing a summary on the text they would be tested in. Additionally, students told that they used AI to generate a text that they would modify for assignments or researches’ submission, and to prepare a title, conclusion, summary, course, or even notes. Furthermore, about half of the students revealed that

they used AI to complete their assignments at least once per day. This is to say that students have all their assignments and research done using AI. However, few of them avoid it in academic life in belief of dishonesty and frauding learning process.

Interestingly, Students' perspectives about the use of AI in academic life varied from one students to another. Yet, the results revealed four different students' perspectives about the use of AI. These students' perspectives are grouped beneath in four cases as showed in the chart:

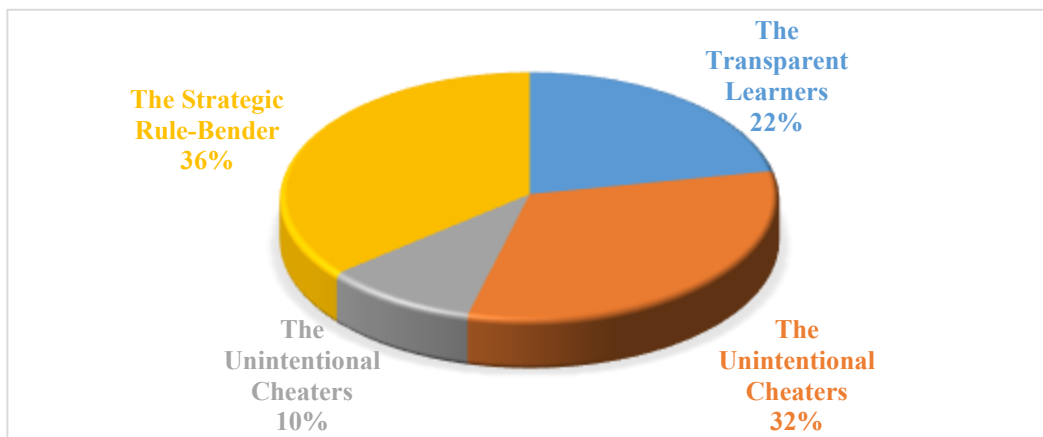


**Figure 01: Students' perspectives about AI use in academic work**

### **Case 1: The Transparent Learners**

A total of 22% of the students utilized ChatGPT for brainstorming essay outlines and Grammarly for grammar checks. They consistently revealed the use of AI in assignment and submitted draft iterations to instructors for feedback. They state that AI helps them organize ideas, but they never let it write for them". One of them stated "My professor says clarity matters, not perfection." The transparent approach earned by these students is worth praise for "innovative yet ethical" work, and they faced no academic penalties.

### **Case 2: The Unintentional Cheaters**

Almost 32% students, relied on AI to translate paragraphs. Unaware of institutional plagiarism policies, they submitted translated text as original work. "I thought translation tools were allowed. Nobody told me it's cheating!" few of them similarly admitted.

### Case 3: The Cultural Sceptic

Only 10% of the students avoided all AI tools in their studies due to cultural beliefs about intellectual dishonesty. They relied solely on textbooks and peer study groups, some of the students stay that they believe that using machines for learning is destroying learning process and disrespectful to teachers. Though their grades were lower than peers who used AI.

### Case 4: The Strategic Rule-Bender

The majority of 36% students used ChatGPT to generate essay drafts, write email, and make research which they lightly edited before submission. They exploited arguing “Why do we waste time? Everyone does this.”

To wrap up, the cases revealed three critical themes. First, transparency determined ethical outcomes: students thrived by openly communicating AI use, whereas others faced consequences due to policy ignorance. Second, institutions struggled to differentiate between assistance and substitution, blurring the line between learning aids and cheating. Third, cultural norms profoundly shaped AI acceptance. Students rejected AI on principle, and viewed AI as a pragmatic tool in life out of the educational frame.

This analysis underscores the need for clear institutional guidelines, ethical literacy training, and culturally sensitive approaches to methods and cases of AI integration in language education and academic life.

## 5. Discussion

The discussion of this research reveals a complex and evolving relationship between English language students and the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in academic settings. As AI becomes increasingly embedded in students’ daily lives, particularly in language learning environments, students display a wide range of attitudes toward its application. Survey data collected for this study showed that while many students are enthusiastic about AI’s potential to aid their learning and improve productivity, others express concern about its potential to erode academic integrity. These varying perceptions are deeply influenced by students’ previous experiences with technology, their understanding of AI, and their awareness of ethical considerations surrounding its use, in line with Yuk-Chan’s (2023) findings.

The diversity in student attitudes is further highlighted by the case studies presented in the research, which illustrate not only different levels of AI engagement but also varied degrees of ethical awareness and caution. Some students, aware of academic norms, reported using AI tools like translators and grammar checkers as supplementary aids in the learning process. Others, however, misused these tools in ways that could compromise academic honesty, often due to a lack of clear institutional guidance. Ka Yuk Chan (2023) points out that even digitally literate

students often misuse AI tools because they lack a proper understanding of their limitations and ethical boundaries. This confirms the need for educational strategies that not only teach technical skills but also promote ethical literacy.

The findings also support the idea that while AI tools can greatly assist language learning—by enhancing clarity, improving grammar, or offering translation alternatives—they also occupy a grey area in terms of academic ethics. Yuk-Chan (2023) emphasizes that machine translation can help students better understand nuanced language and complex texts, and AI paraphrasing can aid in re-elaborating information. However, when these tools are used to produce entire assignments with minimal input from students, they risk becoming a substitute for genuine learning. This distinction between support and substitution must be addressed to maintain academic integrity.

In response to these challenges, institutions have begun to take action. Some universities have introduced strict guidelines, partial restrictions, or outright bans on the use of generative AI tools in coursework, as noted by Xiao et al. (2023). These institutional policies are intended to curb academic dishonesty and clarify the acceptable limits of AI use. At the same time, the academic community recognizes the importance of integrating AI literacy into curricula. Florida State University, for example, emphasizes the need to collaborate with students in understanding how to use AI tools responsibly, rather than excluding them altogether.

To effectively guide students in the ethical use of AI, proactive educational measures are necessary. As Lakkaraju (2024) suggest, discussions about AI misuse, academic integrity, and the limitations of AI should be introduced early in students' academic journeys through formal courses, workshops, or classroom dialogues. These efforts must be paired with clear and practical guidelines for the use of AI in academic contexts. Real-life examples of both acceptable and inappropriate uses can help make these concepts more accessible. Moreover, students must be taught to critically evaluate AI-generated content, understanding that AI is a support tool—not a replacement for personal intellectual effort or engagement with the learning process. Ultimately, this research highlights the double-edged nature of AI in education. While it offers powerful tools for language learning, it also presents serious ethical challenges. The key lies not in rejecting AI outright but in developing thoughtful policies and pedagogical strategies that enable students to engage with AI in a responsible, informed, and academically honest manner.

### Conclusion

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has emerged as a transformative force in language education, offering powerful tools that enhance both teaching and learning through instant feedback, personalized tutoring, and support for creative and communicative

tasks (Aljuaid, 2024). This research has examined the expanding role—and ethical tensions—surrounding the use of AI among English language students in higher education. It revealed how students frequently rely on AI tools such as translators, grammar checkers, and content generators to support their academic work. While many students recognize the benefits of AI, their practices reflect a wide spectrum of ethical awareness and engagement.

Findings from this study indicate a growing number of students who express concern for academic integrity and moral responsibility when using AI tools. Some approach AI transparently and ethically, using it for support rather than substitution. Others, however, unknowingly or deliberately cross ethical boundaries, often due to a lack of clear institutional policies or insufficient understanding of plagiarism and academic honesty. As such, the integration of AI in education remains fraught with ambiguity, particularly in how ethical boundaries are defined, communicated, and enforced across academic contexts.

These observations highlight two pressing needs. First, there must be a collective effort to raise AI literacy among students, educators, and policymakers, particularly in departments of language education, where the line between support and substitution is often blurred. Second, institutions should implement transparent and practical guidelines that clearly distinguish between ethical and unethical use of AI in academic settings. Without such measures, students may continue to misuse AI, whether unintentionally or strategically, leading to increased academic dishonesty and diminishing educational value.

As AI technologies continue to evolve and expand in functionality, their influence on language education will only deepen (Yuk-Chan, 2023). Educators, scholars, and institutions must engage in ongoing dialogue about how best to harness the benefits of AI while upholding academic standards. This includes not only setting ethical boundaries but also adapting pedagogical strategies to align with the digital tools students are already using.

In the near future, language learning is expected to become more personalized and technology-driven. AI tutors employing advanced natural language processing will be accessible across multiple platforms—mobile phones, tablets, laptops, and even smart TVs—offering individualized exercises and real-time conversational practice. These AI systems will increasingly simulate real-life social interactions, including vocal inflection and micro-expressions, enhancing the realism of language practice (Godwin-Jones, 2024). As a result, students may come to trust AI tutors as much as human instructors.

However, this shift also raises concerns about fairness, accessibility, and the need for adaptable teaching practices. If not implemented equitably, AI-driven education risks deepening existing inequalities between students with different levels of access to technology. Ensuring that AI serves all learners fairly will require

institutional commitment to inclusion and curriculum reform. In the decade to come, language education will likely involve multifaceted interactions with AI, making it more integrated, efficient, and accessible. Yet, only through responsible use, transparent policy, and ethical awareness can this transformation truly support meaningful and equitable learning.

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