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University Students in the Age of Artificial Intelligence: Shifts in Knowledge Construction and Intellectual Autonomy

A Study of Students from the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities at the University of Djelfa, Algeria

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Abstract

Generative artificial intelligence (AI) is becoming part of the everyday academic experience of university students. This exploratory study examines how students from the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities at the University of Djelfa, Algeria, describe their use of AI in learning and academic work. Particular attention is given to the benefits they associate with these tools, their concerns about dependence, and their views on the place of AI in university education. The analysis draws on the descriptive responses reported for 30 students. All respondents (100%) stated that AI saves time and effort, while 80% said that it helps them understand their lessons. A further 63.33% perceived an improvement in their academic performance, and 36.67% reported such improvement to some extent. At the same time, 93.33% acknowledged at least some difficulty completing academic tasks without AI, and 90% believed that excessive reliance could have a negative effect on research and analytical skills. Most respondents favoured the integration of AI into university education (83.33%) and considered clear academic guidance necessary (73.33%). Taken together, the responses point to a tension between the immediate usefulness of AI and the need to preserve independent academic judgement. Because the sample is small and the available methodological information is incomplete, the findings are descriptive and exploratory; they should not be treated as representative of a wider student population or as evidence of causal effects. The study concludes that universities need a balanced approach built around AI literacy, transparent rules, careful verification of information, and assessment practices that keep students responsible for their own reasoning.

Keywords: artificial intelligence; generative AI; university students; knowledge construction; intellectual autonomy; critical thinking; higher education; academic integrity.

1. Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI), and generative AI in particular, has moved quickly from specialist technological settings into the ordinary routines of university study. Students can ask conversational systems to explain unfamiliar concepts, summarize lengthy readings, translate material, suggest ways of organizing an assignment, or comment on a draft. Used thoughtfully, these functions may make academic resources easier to approach and provide support at the moment a learner needs it. Yet the same developments raise questions about reliability, authorship, academic integrity, and the amount of intellectual effort students continue to invest in their work.

The significance of generative AI for higher education is therefore not limited to the speed with which it supplies an answer. Its use may also alter the way students move between questions, sources, teachers, and their own understanding. A student who asks for an explanation and then checks it against lectures and scholarly literature may use AI as an additional route into a difficult subject. A student who accepts a fluent response without checking its claims or rebuilding the argument is in a different position: the tool may have completed part of the thinking that the student was expected to do. The educational value of AI consequently depends on how it is used, what learning task it serves, and the guidance available within the institution.

These issues are particularly relevant to the social sciences and humanities, where learning depends on interpretation, contextual understanding, engagement with competing viewpoints, and careful assessment of evidence. AI may help students organize ideas or approach unfamiliar material, but it cannot take responsibility for the conclusions they submit. Students remain accountable for judging the quality of arguments, checking sources, and explaining how they reached a position. UNESCO (2023) places human agency and pedagogical oversight at the centre of its guidance on generative AI in education. Kasneci et al. (2023) likewise discuss the educational opportunities of large language models alongside concerns about accuracy, bias, misuse, and the need for critical evaluation.

Against this background, the present study considers how students at the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Djelfa, perceive the role of AI in their academic work. It examines the assistance they associate with understanding lessons, academic performance, and saving time, as well as the difficulty some report when working without AI. It also considers their views on excessive reliance and their expectations of university-level guidance. The study does not claim to measure intellectual autonomy through a validated psychological or educational instrument. Instead, it examines students' own reported perceptions of practices and concerns that are relevant to intellectual autonomy.

The study is guided by the following question: How do students from the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities at the University of Djelfa understand the role of AI in their academic learning, and what concerns do they express about balancing its practical benefits with intellectual autonomy? Three related issues give focus to this question: students' perceptions of AI's contribution to learning and academic performance; their reported difficulty working without AI and their concerns about research and analytical skills; and their views on integrating and regulating AI within university education.

2. Conceptual and Theoretical Background

2.1. Artificial intelligence and generative AI

Artificial intelligence is a broad area of computing concerned with systems designed to perform tasks commonly associated with human cognitive abilities. These tasks include recognizing patterns, processing language, making predictions, and supporting decisions. Generative AI refers to systems that produce content—such as text, images, audio, or computer code—in response to instructions or prompts. Large language models, for example, generate text by drawing on statistical patterns learned from extensive collections of language data. Their responses can be coherent and useful, but fluent wording alone does not establish that an answer is accurate, well reasoned, or based on genuine understanding.

In university settings, generative AI can assist with explaining concepts, summarizing readings, developing initial ideas, supporting language use, and offering feedback. These benefits need to be considered alongside its limitations. A response may contain inaccurate statements, invented references, missing context, bias, or an oversimplified account of a complex issue. Kasneci et al. (2023) therefore emphasize the importance of critical evaluation and AI literacy. The central educational question is not simply whether universities should permit

or prohibit these tools. It is how students can be taught to use them in ways that support learning without transferring their academic responsibility to the system.

2.2. Knowledge construction in higher education

Knowledge construction involves more than receiving information. Learners interpret what they encounter, connect it with what they already know, examine the evidence, and develop explanations of their own. From a sociocultural perspective, this process takes place through language, interaction, tools, and institutional practices. Digital technologies can widen the range of resources available to students, but access alone does not determine what is learned. AI is now one of the tools mediating students' engagement with information: it can make explanations easier to obtain, while also changing the order in which questions are asked, sources are consulted, and answers are formed.

Using AI does not, by itself, mean that a student has constructed knowledge. A generated summary can become a useful part of learning when the student checks it against the original reading, identifies omissions, connects it with relevant concepts, and expresses the ideas independently. The situation is quite different when generated material is copied without examination. In that case, receiving information may take the place of interpreting and developing it. Universities therefore need to teach students not only how to obtain AI responses, but also how to question, verify, and improve them.

2.3. Intellectual autonomy and critical thinking

In this study, intellectual autonomy refers to a student's ability to raise questions, reach reasoned judgements, assess claims, select and evaluate evidence, and accept responsibility for academic conclusions. It should not be confused with working entirely alone or refusing help. University learning has always involved support from lecturers, classmates, books, libraries, and other resources. The important distinction is whether students use these resources thoughtfully while retaining responsibility for their own decisions.

Critical thinking is closely connected to intellectual autonomy. It involves analysing and interpreting information, evaluating arguments, drawing inferences, and reflecting on the quality of one's own reasoning. In work supported by AI, these abilities are exercised when students verify factual statements, compare explanations, examine whether evidence supports a claim, and acknowledge uncertainty. Chan and Hu (2023) report that university students see potential benefits in generative AI while also raising concerns relevant to its educational use. Kremantzis (2024) draws attention to the complicated relationship between AI text generators and critical-thinking development, underscoring the importance of the cognitive activity students undertake when using such tools.

2.4. Academic dependence, cognitive offloading, and integrity

Cognitive offloading describes the use of external resources to reduce the mental effort required to complete a task. It is not necessarily harmful. A calculator, search engine, or reference tool can save time and allow a learner to concentrate on a more demanding part of a problem. The difficulty arises when assistance begins to replace the very activities students need to practise. If generated answers routinely take the place of formulating questions, evaluating sources, or building an argument, students may have fewer opportunities to develop those skills through their own effort.

Academic integrity is part of the same discussion. Students need to know which uses of AI are permitted, when assistance should be acknowledged, and where the use of generated material would undermine the authenticity of assessed work. Cotton et al. (2024) argue for institutional policies and educational support rather than an approach based solely on detection. UNESCO (2023) similarly calls for responses that protect human agency

and encourage safe, equitable, and meaningful uses of generative AI. Clear expectations are particularly important when students and lecturers may otherwise hold different assumptions about acceptable practice.

3. Research Objectives and Questions

The overall aim of this study is to explore how students from the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities at the University of Djelfa perceive the place of AI in their academic learning and in practices associated with intellectual autonomy.

- The study seeks to describe students' views of AI as a support for understanding lessons, improving academic performance, and saving time and effort.
- It also examines the extent to which students report difficulty completing academic tasks without AI and how they view the possible consequences of excessive reliance for research and analytical skills.
- A further objective is to identify students' attitudes towards integrating AI into university education and their views on the need for clear academic guidance.
- Finally, the study describes the measures respondents consider important for encouraging responsible and educationally constructive uses of AI.

4. Methodology

4.1. Research design

The research is exploratory and descriptive. It draws on survey figures reported in the original manuscript and examines them through frequencies and percentages, followed by a cautious sociological interpretation of the overall response patterns. The analysis is not designed to test causal explanations or statistical relationships, and no inferential tests are reported.

4.2. Study context and participants

The study, as reported in the source manuscript, involved 30 students from the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities at the University of Djelfa, Algeria. The material available for this revision does not specify participants' gender, age, academic level, or field of study. Nor does it describe how students were selected, how they were invited to participate, or what proportion of those approached completed the questionnaire. These details have not been assumed or added.

4.3. Data source and instrument

The figures presented in this article are reproduced from the results reported in the source manuscript. The original questionnaire, respondent-level data file, and records describing the fieldwork were not available during revision. It has therefore not been possible to check the precise wording of every item, the construction of the response scale, the way the questionnaire was administered, or evidence of the instrument's validity and reliability. The table labels and response categories have been retained as reported, but they should be checked against the original research records before the article is submitted.

4.4. Data analysis

The reported frequencies and percentages are arranged in three tables covering perceived academic benefits, concerns about dependence and institutional attitudes, and recommendations for responsible integration. The percentages are presented for the stated sample of 30 students. Where the meaning of the categories permits, the discussion also combines responses such as "yes" and "to some extent" to describe the overall direction of

opinion. Differences between percentages are expressed in percentage points. These procedures are descriptive; they do not demonstrate that two responses are associated or that one factor causes another.

The absence of respondent-level data and the original questionnaire places clear limits on the analysis. Cross-tabulations, confidence intervals, significance tests, measures of association, and reliability coefficients could not be calculated. The aggregate figures also cannot show whether the same individuals who found it difficult to work without AI were those who worried about its effect on analytical skills. For this reason, the discussion compares the reported distributions at group level and avoids claims about relationships between individual variables. No inferential statistical analysis is claimed.

4.5. Ethical considerations

The source manuscript contains no account of informed consent, institutional ethical review, participant anonymity, or data-protection arrangements. The authors should verify these matters against the procedures followed when the study was conducted and add an accurate statement before submission. This revision does not claim that ethical approval was obtained.

5. Results

The findings are reported as frequencies (n) and percentages (%). With a sample of 30, each participant represents approximately 3.33 percentage points. Percentages should therefore be read with the sample size in mind, particularly when comparing small differences. Where useful, combined response categories are presented to show the broad direction of the responses; these summaries do not replace analysis of individual response patterns.

The tables below reproduce the numerical results contained in the source manuscript. They should not be understood as the outcome of a new analysis of the original questionnaire data, which were not available for this revision.

Table 1. Students' perceptions of AI and academic learning (N = 30)

Indicator	Yes n (%)	To some extent n (%)	No n (%)
AI helps students understand lessons	24 (80.00)	0 (0.00)	6 (20.00)
AI improves academic performance	19 (63.33)	11 (36.67)	0 (0.00)
AI saves time and effort	30 (100.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)
Reliance on AI affects independent thinking	19 (63.33)	10 (33.33)	1 (3.33)

The responses in Table 1 suggest that students value AI mainly for the practical help it offers with their academic work. The clearest result concerns time and effort: all 30 respondents (100%) said that AI helps them save both. No other response category was selected for this item. Within this sample, then, the perception of AI as a time-saving resource was shared by every participant.

A large majority also felt that AI helps them understand lessons. Twenty-four students (80%) answered positively, while six (20%) did not report this benefit. The difference between the two groups is 60 percentage points. One possible explanation is that students find it useful to request another explanation, ask

follow-up questions, or approach a difficult topic in a different way. The figures, however, record students' own views; they do not show whether their understanding was independently tested or objectively improved.

Views about academic performance were positive, but less uniform. Nineteen students (63.33%) said that AI improves their performance, while 11 (36.67%) selected "to some extent"; no one chose "no". Thus, all respondents reported at least a qualified benefit, although they differed in how strongly they expressed it. This distinction is worth retaining. AI may help a student organize an assignment or understand a topic, but such assistance does not automatically lead to higher grades, deeper learning, or stronger research skills.

The final item in Table 1 concerns the effect of relying on AI on independent thinking. Nineteen respondents (63.33%) answered "yes", 10 (33.33%) answered "to some extent", and one (3.33%) answered "no". In total, 29 students (96.67%) indicated that reliance on AI has at least some effect. The item as reported, however, does not clarify whether respondents regarded that effect as positive, negative, or mixed. It would therefore be incorrect to present the figure as proof that AI weakens independent thinking. What can be said is that nearly all respondents perceived AI use as having some bearing on their thinking and academic practices. This finding raises a relevant question about how digital assistance may influence students' habits of inquiry and judgement, but the direction of that influence remains uncertain.

Taken together, the first table presents AI as a useful source of practical support, particularly for saving time and obtaining explanations. At the same time, students appear to recognize that its use may have consequences for the way they approach academic work. This combination introduces the central issue explored in the article: the same tool that makes certain tasks easier may also change the amount and kind of effort students invest in them. Since no direct assessment of learning or independent thinking was conducted, the findings should be read as reported perceptions rather than demonstrated educational effects.

Table 2. Perceived dependence, research skills, and institutional attitudes (N = 30)

Indicator	Yes n (%)	To some extent n (%)	No n (%)
Difficulty completing academic tasks without AI	12 (40.00)	16 (53.33)	2 (6.67)
Excessive AI reliance negatively affects research and analytical skills	27 (90.00)	3 (10.00)	0 (0.00)
Support for integrating AI into university education	25 (83.33)	1 (3.33)	4 (13.33)
Need for clear academic guidelines on AI use	22 (73.33)	0 (0.00)	8 (26.67)

Table 2 brings a more cautious perspective to the benefits described above. Twelve students (40%) said that they had difficulty completing academic tasks without AI, and another 16 (53.33%) reported such difficulty to some extent. Only two students (6.67%) answered "no". Combined, the first two categories account for 28 respondents (93.33%). The result suggests that, for many students in this group, AI assistance has become an important part of how they approach academic tasks. It is one of the strongest patterns in the reported data, although it does not by itself establish dependence in a clinical or psychological sense.

The finding can be considered in relation to the growing place of digital tools in everyday student routines. When a system is readily available to explain a concept, translate a passage, organize information, or help with a draft, students may begin to use it as a regular step in completing their work. Difficulty working without it could reflect convenience, habit, reduced confidence in unaided work, or several of these factors together. The available responses do not allow us to distinguish between these explanations. The safest conclusion is that most participants reported at least some difficulty when AI assistance was unavailable.

The next item concerns students' views of excessive AI use. Twenty-seven respondents (90%) believed that excessive reliance negatively affects research and analytical skills, while three (10%) thought that it does so to some extent. No respondent selected "no". All 30 participants therefore expressed at least some concern about this possibility. The result indicates a strong awareness of the risk within the sample, but it remains a reported belief rather than evidence that students' actual research abilities have declined. Recognizing a possible risk and demonstrating that the risk has occurred are two different things.

Concern about excessive reliance does not appear to translate into a rejection of AI in education. Twenty-five students (83.33%) supported its integration into university teaching, one (3.33%) expressed qualified support, and four (13.33%) opposed it. When the two supportive categories are combined, 26 respondents (86.67%) were at least partly in favour. The pattern suggests that many students distinguish between the potential educational value of AI and the problems that may arise when it is used without limits or guidance.

The responses about academic guidelines point in the same direction. Twenty-two students (73.33%) considered clear rules necessary, compared with eight (26.67%) who did not. Support for guidelines was therefore 46.66 percentage points higher than opposition. Considered alongside the support for educational integration, this result suggests that respondents may prefer a managed approach: AI should have a place in university education, but students and lecturers need a shared understanding of acceptable use, disclosure, verification, and responsibility for submitted work.

The overall picture in Table 2 is therefore not one of simple enthusiasm or rejection. Students report that working without AI can be difficult, recognize the possible costs of excessive reliance, and generally support its integration under clearer institutional expectations. This is a comparison of group-level response patterns, not evidence that the same individuals hold each of these views. Even with that limitation, the findings provide a useful basis for considering how universities can help students benefit from AI while maintaining responsibility for research, analysis, and independent judgement.

Table 3. Students' recommendations for the constructive use of AI (N = 30)

Recommendation	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Establish clear academic guidelines	14	46.67
Provide training and education on AI use	9	30.00
Encourage supportive use rather than total reliance	6	20.00
Promote critical thinking and information verification	1	3.33
Other suggestions	0	0.00
Total	30	100.00

The recommendations in Table 3 offer a more practical view of what students expect from the university. The most frequently selected measure was the establishment of clear academic guidelines, chosen by 14 respondents (46.67%). Training and education came next, with nine responses (30%). The difference between these two categories is five respondents, or 16.67 percentage points. The prominence of guidelines suggests that many students want clearer boundaries around AI use: what is acceptable, when assistance should be disclosed, and where responsibility for the submitted work remains with the student.

Training was the second most common recommendation. Together, guidelines and training account for 23 of the 30 responses (76.67%). This concentration points to the importance of institutional support rather than leaving students to work out acceptable practice on their own. Clear rules can explain expectations; training can show students how to meet them. Such training might include checking factual claims, tracing references

to their original sources, recognizing inaccurate or biased outputs, and acknowledging AI assistance when required.

Six students (20%) recommended encouraging students to use AI as a support rather than relying on it completely. Although this option ranked third, it speaks directly to the central concern of the study. The distinction is between using a tool to assist one's learning and allowing it to take over the intellectual work that learning requires. In practice, students should remain responsible for framing questions, weighing evidence, developing arguments, and deciding what conclusions their work can reasonably support.

Only one respondent (3.33%) selected the option concerning the promotion of critical thinking and information verification; no one selected "other suggestions". This small figure should not be taken to mean that students do not value critical thinking. Indeed, 90% of respondents in Table 2 believed that excessive reliance on AI could negatively affect research and analytical skills. The difference may be connected with the wording or arrangement of the recommendation options, or with the priorities respondents chose when answering. Because the original questionnaire is unavailable, these explanations remain possibilities rather than established findings.

Overall, the recommendations favour guidance, training, and a form of use that supports rather than replaces students' work. These three options account for 29 responses (96.67%) in the reported distribution. The pattern suggests that respondents are not simply asking for greater access to AI. They also want the university to explain how it should be used and to preserve the student's role in developing and presenting academic knowledge.

One methodological point should be noted. The frequencies in this table add up to 30, which is consistent with one recorded recommendation per participant. However, without the original questionnaire, it is not possible to confirm whether respondents were instructed to select only one option or could choose more than one. The percentages are therefore reported as they appear in the source manuscript. The final article should state the response format explicitly once it has been checked against the questionnaire.

6. Discussion

6.1. The perceived educational utility of AI

Students in this sample associate AI with practical benefits, most clearly the saving of time and effort and help with understanding lessons. The unanimous response on time saving suggests that this is the most widely recognized advantage in their experience. The 80% who said that AI helps them understand lessons also points to the appeal of conversational systems that can offer another explanation or respond to follow-up questions. A similar interest in the potential benefits of generative AI among university students is reported by Chan and Hu (2023).

These positive perceptions should not be confused with evidence of improved learning outcomes. The study did not include examination results, a comparison group, or measurements taken over time. The 63.33% who perceived an improvement in academic performance were reporting their own assessment, not a verified change in grades or knowledge. An AI-generated explanation may help a student get started, but its value still depends on whether the student checks it, relates it to course content, and develops a sound understanding.

6.2. Intellectual autonomy and the possibility of dependence

The most notable tension in the findings lies between the convenience students associate with AI and their concern about becoming reliant on it. While respondents widely recognized its practical value, 93.33%

reported at least some difficulty completing academic tasks without it. In addition, 90% believed that excessive reliance could harm research and analytical skills. These responses suggest that students are aware of a possible trade-off: immediate assistance may make academic work easier, but students still need opportunities to practise the skills on which independent work depends.

The results do not establish that AI has caused a decline in intellectual autonomy. The sample is small, the responses are self-reported, and the study contains no direct assessment of critical thinking or research competence. A more measured conclusion is that students perceive a risk of dependence and recognize the importance of maintaining their own analytical contribution. This interpretation is consistent with the concerns discussed by Kasneci et al. (2023), particularly the need to evaluate generated information carefully and retain human oversight.

From a sociological perspective, AI can be seen as a resource that is becoming part of the ordinary organization of academic work. Its significance depends in part on whether students use it to extend their inquiry or to avoid the work of inquiry. Asking for clarification and then comparing the response with academic sources can support active learning. Submitting generated material without understanding or checking it may instead displace the work through which students develop knowledge. The task for universities is not simply to increase or restrict access, but to shape the practices through which students use these systems.

6.3. Institutional integration and academic integrity

The fact that 83.33% of respondents supported integrating AI into university education, while 73.33% considered clear academic guidelines necessary, suggests that innovation and regulation are not viewed as mutually exclusive. The responses point towards acceptance of AI accompanied by a request for clearer expectations. This is compatible with UNESCO's (2023) emphasis on human-centred educational use and with Cotton et al.'s (2024) argument that institutions need policies and student support to address questions of academic integrity.

Effective guidance should explain which forms of assistance are acceptable, when students are expected to disclose AI use, how generated claims and references should be checked, and which tasks require independent performance. Students and teaching staff should receive practical training alongside the policy itself. A set of rules is unlikely to change practice if users do not understand how generative systems work, why their answers can be unreliable, and what responsible evaluation involves.

6.4. Students' recommendations and the development of AI literacy

The prominence of academic guidelines (46.67%) and training (30%) points to a need for practical institutional direction. Students could benefit from clear examples of permitted and prohibited uses, straightforward disclosure procedures, and exercises in checking AI-generated claims against reliable sources. The 20% who favoured supportive use rather than total reliance also underline the importance of keeping students responsible for the reasoning presented in their work.

The fact that only one respondent selected the separate option on critical thinking and information verification (3.33%) requires careful interpretation. The result may reflect the wording or structure of the options, the priorities respondents assigned when choosing a recommendation, or other factors that cannot be identified from the available data. It should not be treated as evidence that students regard critical thinking as unimportant.

7. Implications for University Practice

- Develop a transparent institutional policy defining acceptable, restricted, and prohibited uses of generative AI in coursework, examinations, and research.
- Integrate AI literacy into university teaching, including how generative systems produce outputs, their limitations, bias risks, and the possibility of fabricated information and references.
- Require students to verify factual claims and bibliographic references against authoritative sources and to retain responsibility for the accuracy of submitted work.
- Design assessment tasks that make reasoning visible, such as oral explanations, annotated drafts, reflective notes, source comparisons, in-class writing, and staged research assignments.
- Encourage students to use AI for clarification, feedback, and brainstorming while requiring independent synthesis, argumentation, and final judgment.
- Provide professional development for lecturers so that expectations are consistent across courses and assessment practices reward learning processes as well as final products.

8. Limitations of the Study

Several limitations need to be considered when interpreting these findings. The sample includes only 30 students from one faculty at one university, so the results cannot be generalized to all students at the University of Djelfa or to Algerian higher education more broadly. The original questionnaire and respondent-level data were not available for this revision; consequently, the exact wording of the items, the sampling procedure, the conditions under which the questionnaire was administered, and the validity and reliability of the instrument could not be checked. The findings are also based on self-reported perceptions rather than direct measures of critical thinking, research competence, academic achievement, or intellectual autonomy. In addition, the available manuscript does not document the fieldwork date, participant characteristics, response rate, or ethics procedures. Finally, the descriptive design does not allow causal conclusions about the effects of AI use.

These limitations do not remove the value of the reported responses, but they define what can reasonably be claimed from them. The article should therefore be read as an exploratory account of the views reported by this particular group. Future studies could build on it by using larger and more varied samples, documenting the questionnaire and sampling process in full, incorporating validated measures or performance-based tasks, and combining survey findings with interviews or close analysis of students' academic work.

9. Conclusion

This study examined how a small group of students from the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities at the University of Djelfa perceive AI in their academic lives. The responses show a clear duality. Students value the practical assistance: all 30 respondents said that AI saves time and effort, and 80% felt that it helps them understand lessons. At the same time, 93.33% reported at least some difficulty completing academic tasks without AI, while 90% believed that excessive reliance could have a negative effect on research and analytical skills.

The students' responses also indicate broad support for integrating AI into university education, alongside a preference for clearer academic expectations. Guidelines and training were the most frequently selected recommendations. This combination suggests that concern is directed less at the existence of AI than at the conditions of its use—especially the point at which useful assistance may begin to replace the student's own intellectual work.

For universities, the implication is not to prohibit AI indiscriminately or to accept its outputs without question. A more constructive response would establish transparent rules, develop students' AI literacy, strengthen their ability to evaluate sources, and use assessment methods that make individual reasoning visible. AI can support learning when it helps students ask better questions, reflect on explanations, and revise their work. It becomes educationally problematic when it takes the place of those activities. Since the present findings are based on a small sample and self-reported perceptions, further research is needed before drawing broader conclusions about AI and intellectual autonomy among university students in Algeria.

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