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لمجلة ستاردوم العلمية للدراسات التربوية و النفسية

Investigating the Impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on Fourth Year EFL Students' Research Writing Project

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of AI in writing research projects for the fourth-year EFL students at the English Department, Faculty of Education, University of Aden. The researcher used a pure qualitative method to collect data of this study. The data was collected by using two instruments that are the students' corpora research projects and the focused group discussion. The corporation was used to provide an in-depth analysis of the ways the students used in writing their research. On the other hand, the focused group discussion concentrated on capturing the students' opinions, experiences and perceptions about the use of AI in research writing. The researcher employed content-based analysis and comparative analysis to analyze and interpret the data. The findings from the instruments revealed that most of the students had strong positive impact from using AI programs in their research-writing projects such as improving their grammatical accuracy, writing style, and overall ability of writing; all which led to increase their writing performance. In contrary, some of them expressed that they had a negative impact on their research writing projects such as the reliance on AI programs hindered their ability to develop independent critical thinking and writing skills. The study recommended the following: students should not rely entirely on the use of AI programs when writing the research project, but they can use them to organize their ideas and determine their area of work. Moreover, there should an awareness of the negative impact of using AI programs completely; since AI, programs since may lead students to depend on themselves. Additionally, incorporating AI programs into education should consider the ethical aspects of writing. A protocol should be created with boundaries regarding the use of AI programs in academic work.

Key Words: Impact, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Research Writing Project

1. Introduction

The use of technology is very important nowadays; many people and students rely on technology to facilitate their learning, working and other activities. For EFL students, "Artificial intelligence" (AI) is like savor for their learning. It saves time and effort while helping them to produce acceptable work in their writing. However, despite the benefits of AI, can lead the students to become overly dependent and hinder the development of their minds' critical thinking skills.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

In Arab countries, English is taught as a foreign language, and not all students consistently have the ability to use English effectively in all language skills. Ezza (2010) explains that Arab EFL students will always face challenges in writing due to the use of outdated and old approaches and resources in teaching writing courses. Tahaineh (2010) as well supports this by noting that Arab students tend to master low level in writing compared to other language skills; they encounter difficulties with English in general and writing skills in particular. In addition, a study conducted by Ibrahim (2021) on academic writing teaching methods for Arab students in the UAE. The findings revealed that the students struggled with aspects of writing system such as grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure.

At English Department, Faculty of Education, University of Aden. Even if the students are in the fourth year (their final year of graduation); they still face challenges in writing including grammar, coherence, cohesion, and vocabulary. The researcher has taught the small-scale research project course for more than nine years. During this time, the researcher monitored the students' writing level in research projects and observed significant improvement in the students' writing level. Despite the students' initially weak writing skills, they became more organized, with fewer issues related to coherence and cohesion issues, and their texts written were almost error free. In addition, with the growth of using AI programs the students declared that they frequently used AI programs. Consequently, the researcher conducted this study to examine the impact of AI on the students' level of writing of their research projects.

1.2 Objectives of Study

This study aims to investigate the impact of (AI) on the fourth year EFL students' research writing projects i.e. how the use of AI programs affects the students' writing outcomes.

1.3 Research Question

The study aims to address the following question:

- What is the impact of (AI) on the fourth year EFL students' research writing projects?

1.4 Limitation of the Study

This study was limited to the course of small-scale research project, assigned to the students in their final year of study. The participants of the study were exclusively the fourth-year students; other students from the first, second, and third were not included. Additionally. This study was conducted solely at English Department, Faculty of Education, University of Aden. Therefore, the results of the study cannot be generalized on the other faculties.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Education

With the technological revolution of the twenty-first century, the concept of artificial intelligence (AI) developed rapidly in the entire world. The definition of AI at the beginning was linked with what computers can do. Bartneck et al. (2021). However, over time, the concept of AI had expanded to permeate all fields globally.

Poole & Mackworth define AI as "the field that studies the synthesis and analysis of computational agents that act intelligently". (Poole & Mackworth, 2010, as cited in Bartneck et al. ,2021, P. 8). Similarly, Russell & Norvig describe AI as "the study of [intelligent] agents that receive percepts from the environment and act. Each such agent is implemented by a function that maps percepts to actions, and we cover different ways to represent these functions, such as production systems, reactive agents, logical planners, neural networks, and decision-theoretic systems" (Russell & Norvig, 2010, as cited in Bartneck et al. ,2021, P. 8). Furthermore, Kaplan & Haenlein define AI as "a system's ability to correctly interpret external data, to learn from such data, and to use those learnings to achieve specific goals and tasks through flexible adaptation" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2019, as cited in Bartneck et al. ,2021, P. 8).

García-Martínez et al. (2023) points out that with the advancement of science today, we notice that the new generations have quickly adapted to with this technology development quickly. On the other hand, with the development of artificial intelligence, many students and researchers used it in the educational process. (Guilherme, 2017) clarifies that there is a cooperation between teachers and students in the educational field.

Crompton et al. (2020) support this by saying that there is a need to enhance academic performance using AI; as results, the difficulties of the students will be minimized.

2.2 The Impact of Using AI in Education

Tomeo et al. (2023) clarifies that one of the most negative effects related to the use of artificial intelligence is the quality of the information provided by these AI programs. Providing inaccurate or enough information is a defect. Thus, the use of these programs and tools gives inaccurate or unrealistic information. The findings of Tomeo et al. (2023) study prove the negative effect of AI programs among educators. García et al. (2023) points out in the results of their study that the use of AI is effective. However, there is a need to check more on its effectiveness, it involves a great challenge in ethical consideration as well as in relation to teachers' teaching in all educational stages.

Aljuaid (2024) explains that despite the benefits of artificial intelligence, the way to use these programs are still limited. Therefore, Middlebury College banned the use of programs such as ChatGPT in their classrooms because it limits the students' self-critical thinking and critical thinking skills, as well as their writing skills. In contrast, in some stages, it helped the students in some points such as grammar and style. Nevertheless, the students limited their creativity skills.

The results of Kiranmai (2023) study show that the use of AI in writing helped the students to overcome some difficulties related to writing proficiency and writing style. In contrast, one of the drawbacks of using AI in writing is the lack of creativity of humans in producing strong expressions of written text.

A study conducted by Khalifa & Albadawy (2024) shows that artificial intelligence has provided significant benefits to academic writing and scientific research across various fields with AI software. However, there is a need to consider the use of AI software with ethical considerations for use in academic AI applications in academia.

Furthermore, Yunus (2024) study clarifies that the use of AI has pros and cons. The main cons are losing the important skills the students should master and learn, such as critical thinking and problem solving, when students rely on Al how these skills can be developed.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study presents an investigation of the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on fourth year EFL students' research writing project.

The researcher employed a purely "Descriptive-Qualitative Method" to collect the study data. Creswell (2014) noted that qualitative research is used to investigate and understand social problems experienced by of individuals or groups. Data collection involves various techniques aimed at gathering in depth information moving from specific to details about the participants. In short, qualitative methods assist the researchers in collecting the required data and analyzing them based on the gathered information, the results present descriptions of the required investigation.

The instruments of the study were corpora of research projects and focused group discussion.

3.2 Sampling

The research utilized ten research projects as the corpus of written texts as the first instrument in this study. Additionally, ten students from the fourth level students, who were leaders of their respective research project groups, participated in the second instrument of the study, which was the focused group discussion.

3.3 Instruments

3.3.1 Corpora of Research Projects

According to Nilsson Björkenstam (2013), a corpus is a group of language data such as text, sounds, and signs which used for specific purposes. The most well-known corporation consists of texts. However, there are other types of corpora such as sign language corpora. In this study, the researcher focuses on an academic corpus of research projects. Academic corpora include the students' written research papers, essays, and projects or theses at both undergraduate and higher studies graduate levels.

The researcher utilized 10 research projects as (corpus of research projects). The researcher was the instructor who taught the students the course of small-scale research project. The procedure was as follow: students were divided into ten groups, each consisting of five members. Each student selected an academic topic related to language teaching or English language skills. Every group appointed a leader who is responsible for overseeing the work of their colleagues. The instructors (the researcher) met with the students each week to monitor their progress in writing the chapters of the research. The students brought their first draft to receive feedback and make the corrections required from them. Finally, they submitted their completed projects to the instructor in the 10^{th} week.

3.3.2 Focused Group Discussion

Focus group discussion is a qualitative method used to gather extensive information through interaction and discussion between facilitator who asks the participants. According to Neville, "focus group discussion is used to gather data, usually in the form of opinions, from a selected group of people on a particular and predetermined topic, e.g., consumer topic, political topic, educational topic etc. The purpose of the discussion is to introduce the ground realities" (Neville, 2007, as cited in Basnet, 2018, P. 82). Basnet (2018) also defines focus group discussion as an instrument that has the potential to be a central approach in the fields of educational research and sociology. In addition, focus group discussion is an effective instrument to provide valuable information. It is a social process in which the facilitator poses the questions and the informants for discussions to the participants and guide discussion among participants to obtain the required information. In this study, the researcher conducted a focused group discussion with 10 students who were leaders of their research projects groups. The eight questions were as follows:

- Who gave you recommendation to use of AI programs for writing your research projects?

- What difficulties did you encounter while writing the research that led you to use AI programs?

- What are the pros of using AI programs for writing your research projects?

- What are the cons of using AI programs for writing your research projects?

-Which AI program did you use to assist you in writing your research projects?

- Did you use AI programs for writing your entire research paper, or only in some chapters, or sections?

- Have AI programs met your expectations for writing your research?

- From your point of view, do you recommend others to use AI programs for writing their research projects?

3.4 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The students were informed about a research study investigating the impact of (AI) on the fourth year EFL students' research writing projects. The researcher politely for their participation in this research and they agreed. In addition, the researcher assured them that all data and information collected from their records, the focused group discussions and research

paper would remain confidential and be used solely for the purposes of this study.

4. Data Collection and Analysis:

This study employs "Descriptive-Qualitative Method". Sugiyono (2010) explains that descriptive qualitative research involves inductive analysis by systematically describing and examining in depth phenomena, actions, social interaction, peoples' opinions and perceptions. i.e. the researcher used content-based analysis to analyze the focused group discussions. On the other hand, Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) was employed to analyze the corpora of research projects. (QCA) is a systematic method used to analyze and understand the factors and reasons that lead to specific results in the students' performance (Rihoux, 2006). Furthermore, this method helps to evaluate and identify the differences of students' performance and improving educational strategies. This method can be applied by frequently comparing the students' work to identify the similarities and differences in students' outcomes. The following section outlines the process of data collection and analysis for the two instruments used in this study.

4.1 Data Collection and Analysis of Corpora Research Projects

It is worth mentioning that in this study the researcher relied on non-electronic analysis of the students' work; that is, AI program detectors were not used. The process of conducting the first instrument was as follow: The students submitted their drafts chapter to the researcher. The researcher collected all these drafts along with the final ten copies of the completed research papers. For the analysis, the researcher employed comparative analysis by comparing students' work, as well as categorizing their research writing. In summary, the researcher used:

1. **Comparison**

When the researcher compared the students' primary and final draft, she noticed the change in their writing styles. These changes involved in grammar, coherence, and organization. The use of unusual or complex sentence constructions the students used in their writing was evidence of the use of AI programs.

2. Asking and Discussion

The researcher used to ask the students to explain their work in detail. However, few of them were unable to answer. When the students were not able to provide satisfactory answers or seemed confused about their own work. Thus, it indicates that they did not write it by themselves. The researcher followed the same system used to correct and evaluate students' research projects. Appendix (A) outlines the steps involved in writing a research project.

4.2 Data Collection and Analysis of Focused Group Discussion

The process of conducting the second instrument was as follows: First, the researcher met with the ten participants and explained the nature of the research. After that, the focus group discussion began by asking the eight questions and encouraging them to answer freely. The researcher recorded their responses and took some notes regarding their answers. The process lasted between fifteen to twenty minutes. Finally, the researcher analyzed the participants' answers using content-based analysis, in which the data were coded, categorized, and interpreted to identify the main themes.

5. Findings:

This section presents the findings of the two instruments used in the current study as follows:

5.1 Findings from Corpora Research Projects

The instructor who taught the students and monitored their progress in writing their research could easily detect if the students used AI programs such as ChatGPT or Grammarly. Employing a comparison strategy, the researcher who was also the students' instructor noticed this. The researcher regularly asked the students to submit their hard copies weekly to review and track their writing progress. Furthermore, this practice helped the students to overcome difficulties in writing. The researcher observed significant changes in the students' writing style; their primary drafts were completely different from the final version of their work.

The following lines clarify the sections and chapters in which the students used AI programs, based on a comparison of their primary and final drafts.

1. Chapter One

In chapter one, many students used AI programs, such as ChatGPT, to write the background of the study, the statement of the problem, and the definitions. Additionally, they used Grammarly to check for grammatical mistakes.

2. Chapter Two

In chapter two, most students used AI programs, such as ChatGPT, to write the entire chapter and employed Grammarly program to check and correct the grammar.

3. Chapter Three

In chapter three, many students used AI programs, such as ChatGPT, to write about the concepts of population, participants, validity, and reliability, as well as the definitions of the instruments.

4. Chapter Four

In chapter four, few students used AI programs, such as ChatGPT, in the section of general findings.

5. Chapter Five

In chapter five, some students used AI programs, such as ChatGPT, to obtain complete citations for general conclusions. On the other hand, few students used AI programs in the recommendations.

References

Regarding references, some students used AI programs, such as ChatGPT, to obtain complete citations of the authors and organize the references.

5.2 Findings from Focused Group Discussion

The qualitative content analysis of the focused group discussion also revealed the following themes:

- Regarding whom recommended the use of AI programs for writing research projects. The students indicated that their friends, senior colleagues and others recommended the use of AI program, because they had also used them in writing their assignments.

- Regarding difficulties encountered while writing the research that led to use AI programs. The students explained that they struggled to present accepted work with appropriate vocabulary, grammar and style. Moreover, gathering the required type of information was very challenging for them; they searched for articles, but they found it difficult to understand due to the complex scientific language. Furthermore, writing the statement of problems was particularly challenging and difficult.

- Regarding the pros of using AI programs for writing research projects. It surprising to find that most students relied entirely on AI programs. Only a minority who had limited access or no internet access did not rely on AI programs. Students explained that they used ChatGPT and DeepSeek to gather information for different sections of their work. They then employed Grammarly to check grammar and edit their writing. In addition, Quillbot was used to help in paraphrasing the content. According to the students, using AI programs significantly reduced the time required to gather information and write the content.

- Regarding the cons of using AI programs for writing research projects. The main cone the students expressed that the instructor knew they were using AI programs. Additionally, they mentioned that some of their ideas are either disconnected or too complex for them to write or understand. Some students said that AI programs felt like an addiction to them. They explained that there is no need to think deeply because using AI programs facilitates obtaining answers. The students believe that this may lead to overreliance on AI and increased laziness.

- Regarding which AI program the students used to assist them for writing their research projects. Most students stated that using AI programs nowadays is necessary to save time. They need to adapt to technology and reduce the time spent on thinking about their work.

- Regarding the use of AI programs for writing the entire research paper, or only in some chapters, or sections. Most students indicated that they use ChatGPT to write entire sections of the literature review. On the other hand, some mentioned that they used ChatGPT to write the statement of problem. Meanwhile, few said they only use AI programs to brainstorm about the topic or to organize their references.

- Regarding whether AI programs met expectations of the students for writing their research. The students indicated that the use of AI programs such as ChatGPT fulfilled their expectations by helping them to improve their writing and thinking process without requiring a long time to work independently.

- Regarding the students' point of view, in recommending others to use AI programs for writing their research projects. The students recommended using AI programs such as ChatGPT, Grammarly and Quillbot to facilitate the writing process of research.

6. DISCUSSION

Based on the findings from the two instruments, the study addressed the research question: What is the impact of (AI) on the fourth year EFL students' research writing project?

It was clear that most students experienced a strong positive impact of using AI programs in their research-writing projects. In contrast, some students expressed that the use of AI had a negative impact on their research-writing project. The findings are consistent with those of Kiranmai (2023), Tomeo (Kiranmai ,2023; Tomeo et al. ,2023; García et al. ,2023; Khalifa & Albadawy, 2024; Aljuaid ,2024) studies. The following lines present other studies that support the results of the current study as follows:

Hong (2023) conducted a study on the impact of ChatGPT on foreign language teaching and learning, focusing on opportunities in education and research. The results showed that it is difficult to stop and prevent students from using AI programs such as the Chatbot in college. However, there should be efforts to raise awareness about integrating technology into education.

Tamimi et al., (2024) conducted a study on evaluating the effects of Artificial Intelligence homework assistance tools on high school students' academic performance and personal development. The results revealed that

students relied entirely on artificial intelligence to complete their tasks. Consequently, this dependence hindered students' development in language learning.

A study of Mohammed (2024) explored the Saudi EFL learners' perceptions and challenges in AI assisted post-editing tools for writing. The results indicated that AI tools were highly effective in improving the students' problems including grammatical accuracy and writing skills. For the negative impact, some students reported difficulties with post-editing and felt their independent writing skills were hindered.

Ozfidan et al., (2024) conducted a study on the use of AI tools in English academic writing by Saudi undergraduates. The results showed that the students agreed on the advantages of using AI tools such as idea generation, preparing outlines, and fixing grammatical issues. On the other hand, the ethical considerations should be taken in consideration and the accuracy and reliability of the texts.

Yunus (2024) conducted a study on the negative impacts of AI tools on students in academic and real-life performance. The findings revealed that despite technological advancements and emergence of AI, there are both advantages and disadvantages. One significant drawback is that reliance on AI reduces students' ability to think independently and perform tasks both in their studies and in real life.

Alyami et al., (2025) conducted a study on Saudi EFL learners' perceptions of using Artificial Intelligence and its impact on their writing skills. The findings revealed that AI expresses positive experiences such as the fast responses and assistance with grammar and vocabulary. However, they also noted some challenges of using AI such as supporting the writing.

ALHusaini & Qutub (2025) conducted a study to explore the use of AI-writing assistant for foreign language learners. A mixed-methods study in the Saudi EFL context. The results revealed that the students who used AI-generated content quickly found it effective for their writing development.

Black & Tomlinson (2025) conducted a study on university students, describing how they adopted AI for writing and research in a general education course. The results showed that students used AI for simple tasks such as revising and editing, as well as improving their research. In addition, they used AI in their writing tasks to understand difficult topics and analyze the findings. Despite these benefits, some students expressed doubts about using AI and the reliability of its content.

7. Recommendations

This section presents recommendations for instructors and students regarding the use of AI programs in research project writing.

- AI programs should not be relied upon completely in writing research papers. If students use artificial intelligence, it should be limited to organize their ideas.
- Over time, it is recommended to incorporate Artificial Intelligence technology into education while taking into consideration the ethical consideration of writing.
- Artificial Intelligence can be used to select research areas.
- It is recommended to conduct further research to examine how AI programs can help to improve the students' writing skills.
- It is recommended to create a balance between the use of AI programs and the development of students' academic writing skills.
- It is recommended to raise awareness about the negative impact of the continuous use of AI programs.
- It is recommended to inform students that if they use AI programs, instructors may use detection software programs to identify potential plagiarism.
- It is recommended to establish a protocol for using AI programs, which clearly defines clear boundaries, regarding to the extent to which AI programs can be utilized in academic work.

8. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study details the impact of AI on writing research projects for fourth-year EFL students in the English Department, Faculty of Education, University of Aden. The emergence of (AI) brought both advantages and disadvantages from the students' perspective. The benefits include helping them understand how to start and organize their work. Conversely, AI has encouraged overreliance on AI programs, which has diminished their critical thinking abilities. Furthermore, effectively integrate into education alongside human learning. It is necessary to conduct a clear investigation, to check on the ethical consideration of using of AI programs.

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Appendix A

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REFRENCES

APPENCIES

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