

A Systematic Review of Undergraduate Students' Experiences with Generative AI in Academic Writing: Insights from a Phenomenological Study at the University of Yombo Ouologuem in Mali

Kante Drissa

Abstract-- This systematic review examines undergraduate students at the University of Yombo Ouologuem in Mali, experiences with generative AI in academic writing. Drawing on qualitative insights through a phenomenological lens, the study combines findings to explore how students' approach and integrate tools into their academic work (e.g., ChatGPT). The identification of Four Core Themes Based on the Technology Acceptance Model, Constructivist Learning Theory, and a phenomenological perspective reveals reliance on artificial intelligence (AI) as cognitive scaffolding; ambivalence of AI-based tools for developing skills generally regarded as essential competencies for higher education success; problematic ethical dilemmas in aiding or undermining academic integrity ought to be acknowledged explicitly if this change in pedagogy is to be effective; and that emotional responses run the spectrum from empowerment through reduction in anxiety to threats of substitution. Findings indicate that although AI is effective in improving language fluency, efficiency in writing and encouragement for EFL learners, over-dependency reduces autonomous critical thinking as well as originality. This study highlights the pressing need for context-sensitive institutional policy, scaffolded AI literacy curricula and pedagogical approaches that position AI as an aid to autonomous academic writing rather than its replacement in resource-scarce contexts.

Keywords-- Generative AI, academic writing, phenomenology, undergraduate students, Mali.

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the widespread availability of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools has changed higher education. In the past few years, applications like OpenAI's ChatGPT and Google's Gemini (previously Bard) have rapidly become available for students globally; these and other large language models can be used at various levels—from brainstorming ideas to generating outlines to drafting essays in full as well as polishing academic prose (Sullivan et al., 2023).

This change in technology had resulted in educators and researchers begin to grapple with how these tools will alter student learning, questions of academic integrity, and more importantly whether they undermine or facilitate the development of critical writing skills.

Although the positive aspects that accompany AI-assisted writing, such as improved productivity and feedback grants as well as reining the developing number of different languages scholastics need to deal with all together to aid understudies composition clearly, endlessly numerous ensure that overusing (and in this manner muddling) composing abilities would prompt false; intellectual reasoning capacities because most instructors urged one another not to utilize Ai anywhere nearby whatsoever mixed bag (Aslanyan-rad, 2024). Given these dual possibilities, it is imperative the school systems develop evidence grounded infrastructure to speak to student experiences through their eyes.

The challenge of course is that each education system and developing country context is fairly different — particularly in terms of digital infrastructure which quarantine most sub-Saharan Africa countries into a nightmare blackhole. The University of Yombo Ouologuem in Mali provides a valuable case study for investigating the AI-assisted academic writing practices of undergraduates in a developing country context. As a premier teacher-education institution in the country, the university is indicative of wider trends within Malian higher education but also faces own contextual issues, such as access to intermittent internet, and low levels of digital literacy among students, alongside changing institutional policies regarding the use of AI (Nguar & Appolloni, 2025). In a context where classical pedagogical approaches meet fast-developing technological innovations, a phenomenological study of students lived experiences at the institution can provide depth and nuanced understandings of how generative AI is transforming academic writing practices, student-teacher relationships, and conceptions of authorship.



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1.1. Problem Statement

Although the adoption of Generative AI within higher education institutions across the globe has quickly changed academic writing practices, there is still a limited understanding of how undergraduate students within Sub-Saharan African contexts, in particular the University of Yombo Ouologuem of Mali, experience and perceive these tools in their scholarly work. While some phenomenological evidence has emerged from the literature, much of it remains within Western higher education settings that are far more enabling than resource poor places, with specific nuances of lived experience going unreported due to disparities relating to access, digital literacy, and pedagogical scaffolding (Cotton et al., 2023; Fuller, 2026).

This systematic review takes an important step beyond this major gap by discussing the qualitative results of a phenomenological study that sheds light on how Malian undergraduates interact with generative AI technologies in the context of academic writing to inform locally-relevant policy and practice recommendations.

1.2. Purpose of the Study

The aim of this study is to investigate the subjective experiences of undergraduate students with generative AI tools in academic writing at the University of Yombo Ouologuem of Mali. With this phenomenological approach to inquiry, the study hopes to give a clear description of student experiences using these technologies in their writing processes to elicit motivations, difficulties and the influence perceived by students over their academic development and honesty [or integrity]. While the results are presented in accordance with our research questions, they primarily aim to give context for and provide education around institutional policy, pedagogy, and resources

1.3. Research Questions

- ✓ How do undergraduate students perceive and experience the use of generative AI in their academic writing?
- ✓ What are the perceived benefits and challenges?
- ✓ How does AI influence their learning and writing processes?

1.4. Significance of the Study

This study has important implications for both teaching practice and institutional policy in higher education. Additionally, analysing undergraduate students lived experiences with generative AI in academic writing systematically through a phenomenological lens will contribute to informing pedagogical strategies for integrating AI by providing evidence of useful and contextually-profiled approaches that instructors can use when introducing AI tools as supplements — rather than replacements — for critical thinking and writing skills. In addition, the study will provide other universities in defining policy and ethical situations by shedding light on how students negotiate competing tensions such as academic integrity, authorship, and an equitable access to these tools; thereby offering evidence undergirded insights to help the University of Yombo Ouologuem of Mali and similar institutions design responsive frameworks grounded in common scholarly ethics for AI use in academic environments.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

2.1. Phenomenological Framework

Phenomenology is characterised as a qualitative research design that focuses on the lived experiences of individuals, conceptualising how people experience and make sense of phenomena in their everyday world (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Phenomenology, grounded in the philosophical traditions of Husserl and Heidegger, attempts to reveal the essence of lived experiences through qualitative data by bracketing preconceived assumptions while intimately following participants narratives (Husserl, 1931). Within the context of this study, a phenomenological framework lends itself well to examining undergraduate students lived experiences with generative AI in academic writing at the University of Yombo Ouologuem of Mali as it allows for richness, complexity and contextual detail around undergraduate students' interactions with an emerging technology.

This approach centers students' voices-and their processes of meaning making to describe how generative AI intersects with this group of writers' academic practices, challenges and identities in a specific higher education context.



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2.2. Constructivist Learning Theory

For Constructivist Learning Theory, knowledge is not passively received but rather is actively constructed by the learner as he or she interacts with the environment. AI/ML tools that undergraduate students are using for academic writing mediate the process of knowledge construction, where a dialectical engagement emerges through their interactions with AI-generated information, so they cannot simply take and use what has been produced or suggested by artificial intelligence. By the methodology of phenomenology, it was analysed that students at the University of Yombo Ouologuem of Mali draw on their own intelligence and perceptions in negotiating their understanding of academic writing as they interact with AI yet they also engage morally and pedagogically as Vygotsky (1978) highlighted.

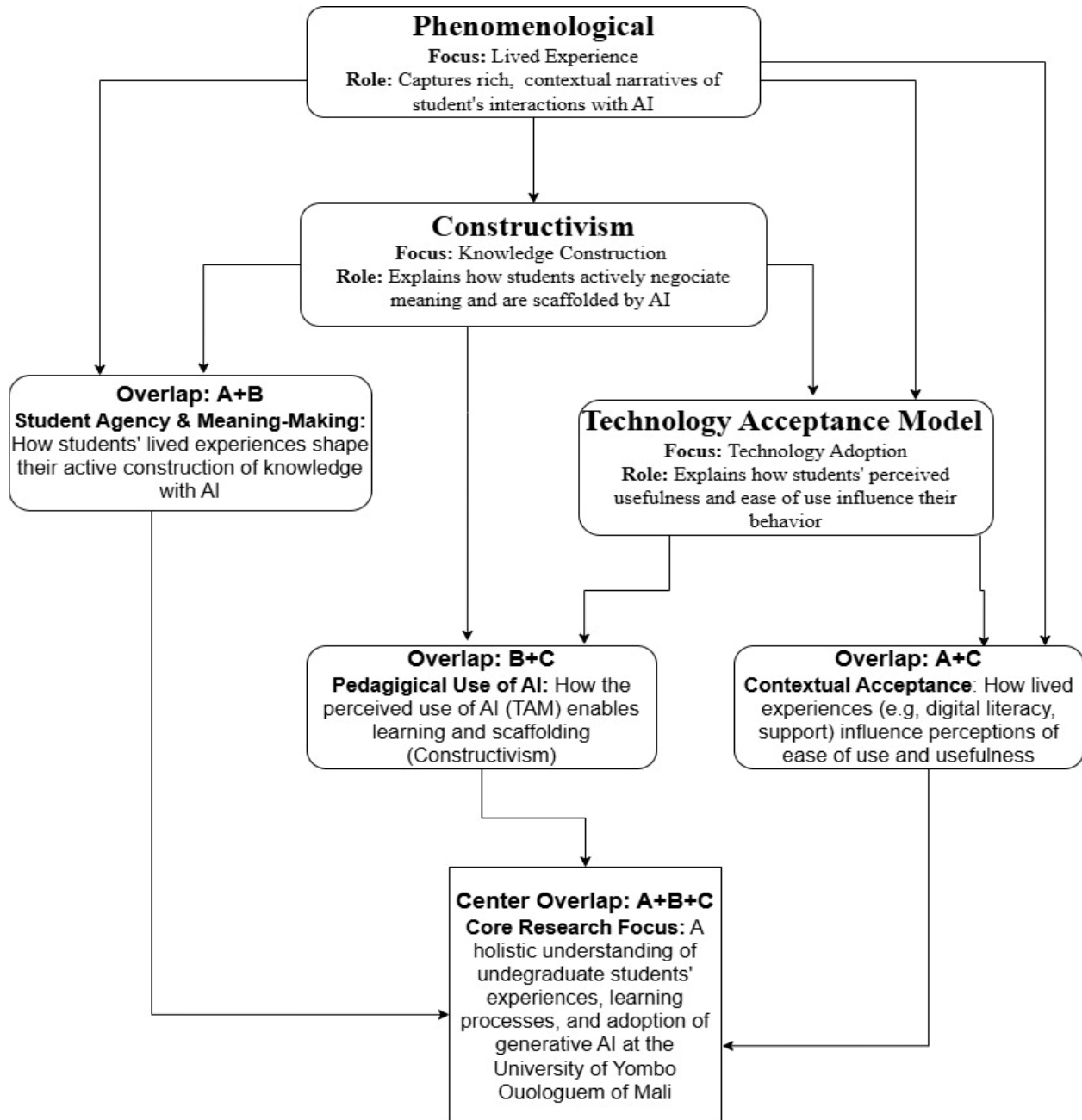
This is consistent with Vygotsky's ZPD, in which AI acts as the more knowledgeable other to scaffold achieving tasks that learners would not typically accomplish on their own to expand cognitive structures and academic literacies.

2.3. Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

The Theory of Reasoned Action, initially introduced by Dai (1989) is a solid theoretical foundation for understanding the adoption or resistance to adoption of AI tools amongst students in their academic writing practices. In the domain of undergraduates at University of Yombo Ouologuem of Mali, TAM suggests that student actual use behaviour regarding generative AI is determined mainly by their behavioural intention that is influenced by two essential beliefs: perceived usefulness- the extent to which students believe tools can improve their efficiency, quality or academic performance in terms of writing and secondly perceived ease of use —the degree to which a person believes using a particular system would be effort free.

When situating the phenomenon in this environment, a phenomenological study would probably uncover those contextual forces such as digital literacy, institutional support and prior writing experiences influence student acceptance of generative AI; thereby indicating while perceived functional benefits exist [i.e., AI writing] its adoption hinges largely on how accessible and intuitive students find these new technologies in their own academic context.

Interconnected Theoretical Framework





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This Conceptual Framework Diagram shows how the three theories interconnect and relates to this research focus, and it illustrates the specific contributions of each theoretical lens.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1. Overview of Generative AI in Academic Writing

The generative AI landscape in academic writing includes a variety of tools adopted at a fast pace across higher education. ChatGPT, Grammarly, Elicit are famous forms of generative AI tools performing different tasks in writing process such as content generation and paraphrasing; grammar correction; citation management; literature synthesis (Gabay et al., 2026). These tools have radically changed our students' approach to drafting, editing and researching academic papers, providing gains in efficiency while imposing new pedagogical challenges.

Since ChatGPT was made public in late 2022, institutions of higher education worldwide have experienced a rapid (and dramatic) increase in interest and adoption of AI. A summary of studies indicates that students across disciplines within North America, Europe, and Asia are using ChatGPT widely (Baidoo-Anu & Ansah, 2023). Yet, such adoption is still not consistent across regions as many African universities, including those in Mali suffer from infrastructural limitations surrounding the use of OER at the institutional level and varying digital literacy levels among students and faculties. The contextual gap emphasizes the necessity for research tailored to this area, especially phenomenological studies exploring students' experiential engagement with generative AI tools and applications in low-resource academic settings.

3.2. Effect on Students' Writing and Learning

Scholarship on generative AI in academic writing suggests a paradox of power and vulnerability for students at the undergraduate level. On the plus side, research has shown that AI tools can boost creativity, productivity and performance-managed multiple voices within text, such as offering immediate aid to ameliorate students experience of writer's block via structural scaffolding or linguistic perfusion (Sahu 2026). Yet, these benefits are offset by significant risks: academics repeatedly report the dangers of cognitive dependency, a decline in creativity and critical analysis over quickly obtained knowledge-claims produced by an algorithm (Shomotova & ElSayary, 2026; Eleftheriou et al., 2025) leading to ongoing concerns about academic integrity and plagiarism.

It is that tension between being useful and being vulnerable that resonates for instance in a setting like the University of Yombo Ouologuem of Mali; where students could touch on AI as an academic equalizer but also note the potential demise of authentic intellectual maturation.

3.3. Previous Phenomenological and Qualitative Studies

Qualitative research from around the world finds that undergraduate students experience generative AI in academic writing as a double-edged sword: it is necessary for productivity and linguistic precision, yet feared to compromise critical thinking and academic integrity (Teng, 2024; Wang, 2024). The systematic literature review in Tanzania, Teng (2024) showed that students across English as a foreign language contexts value AI for immediate feedback and brainstorming capabilities but fear dependence on it, and Wang (2024) documented similar aversion to division of authorship between AI-generated text products and meaning-making identities by both native and non-native speakers of the language. But these studies are dominated by research carried out in Asia and Europe, while Africa remains a largely blank canvas. This study is of paramount importance due to its filling (and stimulating further research) a major regional gap in the state of phenomenological inquiry into how generative AI-as-EFL experiences are for Malian undergraduates writing in often poorly resourced post-colonial educational environments.

3.4. Gaps in Literature

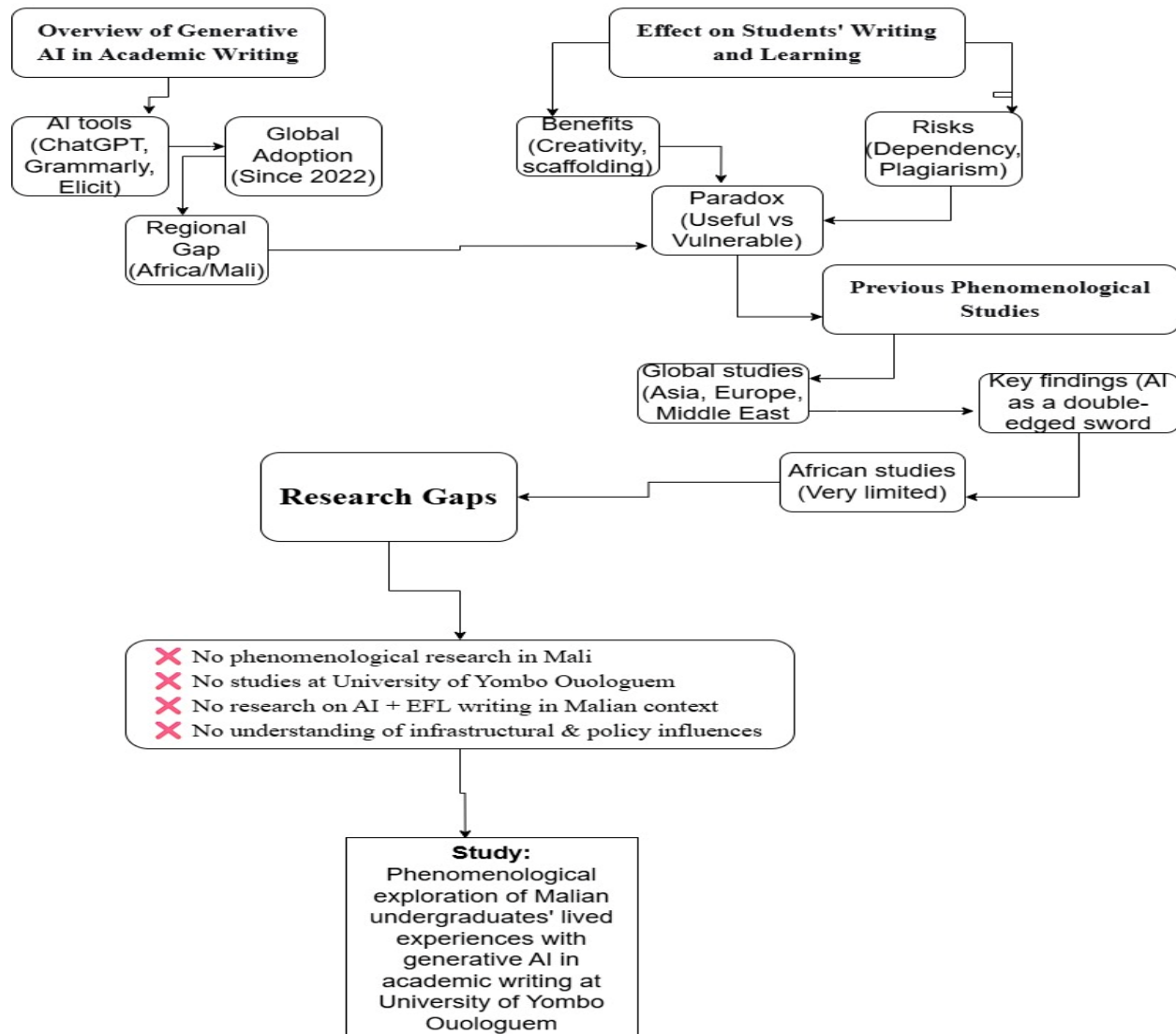
There is little phenomenological research documenting the student experience in African contexts, especially Mali, despite the fast-paced emergence of generative AI tools across higher education worldwide. Literature refocused largely on Western, Asian and Middle Eastern contexts has failed to provide a nuanced account of the segment of students coming from such under-resourced institutions. While Kromoser (2025) performed a phenomenological investigation of the stress and generated artificial intelligence perceptions of Gen Z students in South Africa, studies like these are scarce and geographically sparse over all continents.

In the same vein, Rozaimie et al. (2025) explored integration of ChatGPT into writing development among pre-university students in Brunei Darussalam, considering situated contexts offered a step change; yet studies located within the particular infrastructural, pedagogical and cultural circumstances characterising Malian higher education are almost non-existent.

The absence of localized, phenomenological investigation thus sees existing research on how students navigate academic integrity, critical thinking and AI-dependency largely drawn from overseas contexts- particularly given the

stark contrasts on issues like digital access, policy vacuums or pedagogical traditions at an African University such as the University of Yombo Ouologuem of Mali.

Literature Review Structure



This diagram uses a funnel structure to narrow from generative AI's global context to the specific research gap in Mali. It tells a compelling story: global AI adoption is well-documented, but African contexts like Mali remain critically under-researched, especially phenomenologically. The diagram culminates by positioning this study as a necessary intervention, clearly articulating the geographical, contextual, and methodological gaps it will address.

IV. METHODOLOGY

4.1. Research Design

The methodological approach of this research is designated as a systematic literature review (SLR)—a descriptive and structured method for obtaining, extracting and summarising evidence from existing research.

This paper presents an SLR which enables researchers to explore and discover more about the experiences of, and experiences with generative AI in academic writing among undergraduate students at the University of Yombo Ouologuem of Mali. It also raises awareness of similarities, divergences, or potential futures in these experiences. This exercise reduces subjectivity and increases triangularity/replicability and objectivity in both the selection of literature and its verification due to strict principles.

4.2. Search strategy

The search strategy was systematic to ensure a thoroughly comprehensive inclusion of eligible high-quality studies and its multi-layered approach included several methods in order to identify potentially relevant work. Initially, keyword and Boolean searches (generative artificial intelligence; ChatGPT; academic writing; undergraduate students; higher education; Mali) were executed within the academic databases (Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, PubMed and Google Scholar). Grey literature such as institutional reports and policy documents from University of Yombo Ouologuem of Mali (UYOM) and the Ministry of Higher Education were included in the search. This involved an intensive method was meant to collect a holistic data on students lived experiences, challenges they perceived as well as successes resulting from the use of generative AI tools for academic writing in Malian higher education.

4.3. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

4.3.1. Inclusion criteria

- i. Studies on undergraduate students' experiences, perceptions, challenges, or outcomes of using generative AI tools in academic writing.
- ii. Publications from 2020 up to now (ChatGPT launched Nov 2022; this captures the generative AI era while ensuring recency and relevance)
- iii. Articles, reports or policy documents in English.
- iv. Empirical research studies (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods), phenomenological studies, policy analyses, and institutional or NGO reports of significance relevant to generative AI in higher education academic writing.
- v. Papers regarding issues on student experiences, academic integrity, writing quality, pedagogical implications, institutional policy responses, access and equity, and faculty perspectives on generative AI in academic writing.

4.2.1. Exclusion criteria

- i. Studies only focusing on primary education, vocational training, adult education, or other non-undergraduate contexts.
- ii. Opinion papers, editorials, conference abstracts, commentaries, or any publications lacking original empirical data.
- iii. Publication in a language other than English.
- iv. Studies published prior to 2020, except seminal theoretical works directly relevant to understanding recent Generative AI policy implementation in higher education contexts.

4.4. Data extraction

We conducted a systematic search for studies and policy documents concerning undergraduate students' experiences with Generative AI in academic writing. It includes a range of sources such as academic databases, institutional reports, publications from government and grey literature. Inclusion criteria were predestined to ensure relevance in the context of phenomenology as practiced at the University of Yombo Ouologuem of Mali. Information critical to the comparative analysis—goals, interrogated processes, implementation barriers and effects—were consistently documented in standardized extraction sheets.

4.5. Data synthesis

Qualitative data were thematically analysed to identify patterns or themes related to students' perspectives of AI assistance, integration issues, academic integrity concerns and writing skill development. If quantitative findings were provided, they were averaged through meta-analytic methods focusing on frequency of AI use, adoption as well as scores for writing performance. Taking two perspectives made possible a more comprehensive view of general trends, achievements and challenges in the use of Generative AI for academic writing among undergraduate university students at the University of Yombo Ouologuem of Mali.

4.6. Ethical Statement

At the University of Yombo Ouologuem of Mali, ethical considerations for studying undergraduate students' experiences with using Generative AI in academic writing includes confidentiality / anonymity of student participants; obtaining informed consent for data to be collected; and digital divides which may result in skewed participation i.e. more technologically privileged students participating than digitally disadvantaged ones.

Language that is locally appropriate, culturally viable, and contextually relevant — i.e., without Western, hegemonic assumptions about AI use in educational contexts. In order to responsibly conduct this phenomenological study, we will transparently disclose the purpose of the study, that participants may withdraw at any time without academic penalty (and how they should do so) and equal access to AI tools.

V. RESULTS

5.1. Emerging Themes

5.1.1. Perceived Usefulness and Ease of Use of AI Tools

Overall, undergraduate students rate generative AI tools as very useful and fairly easy to use in academic writing settings. Research inspired by the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) suggests perceived usefulness and ease of use are both key determinants in university students' decision-making process to adopt AI, with students finding this type of tool valuable for brainstorming, drafting, refining written work, and overcoming writing blocks (Chan & Hu, 2023).

Using a mixed-methods approach, an exploratory study conducted in 2025 synthesized the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Theory of Planned Behaviour using participants from two different writing contexts to show how usefulness and self-efficacy were key predictors for students' intentions to use generative AI in both formal and informal writing tasks, but contextual demands varied depending on which kind of writing task being performed (Liu et al., 2025). The immediate, non-judgmental nature of AI feedback is particularly welcomed by students (Wang, 2025), reducing barriers to engagement and allowing them a greater sense of autonomy over their writing process.

5.1.2. Emotional Responses: Excitement, Anxiety, and Ethical Concerns

The emotional engagement of students with generative AI is complex and ambivalent, accompanied by excitement, anxiety and mistrust. Some studies have demonstrated the potential of AI tools to increase motivation and decrease writing anxiety for some learners when used as a scaffold, (Almusharraf, 2026) but other work shows that frequent use of AI-assisted writing may actually exacerbate anxiety because students worry about over-reliance on such technology or fear academic misconduct (Almusharraf, 2026). Ethical concerns are most prominent: students report concern over plagiarism, authorship transparency, the privacy of data, and biased or inaccurate AI generated text (Zhu et al., 2025).

This emotional duality—environment in which I felt exciting about efficiency, yet pull at the same time about integrity—is typical of what scholars call a "tension" between feelings of excitement and anxiety over transitioning to AI technology in education (Toncelli & Kostka, 2024).

5.1.3. Changes in Writing Processes and Skills

Generative AI integration has fundamentally changed how undergrads do their academic writing, transforming processes from independent ideation to human-AI collaboration. The students, who turn to AI mainly for grammar checking, vocabulary building and expanding, paraphrasing, and structuring their writing — tasks that have been made drafting-quick(er) but skill-softening (Liu et al., 2025). Longitudinal and qualitative evidence indicates that although the use of AI tools can facilitate writing proficiency and self-regulation in the short term, sustained over-reliance may undermine independent critical thinking, creativity, and personal writing voice (Werdingasih et al., 2024). More importantly, high writing anxiety students have an even higher tendency to look towards AI help-seeking behaviour and thus create a feedback loop that changes technology from a scaffold for development to one of coping (Liu, 2025).

5.1.4. Perceptions of Academic Integrity and Originality, Impact on Learning Motivation and Confidence

Student Perceptions of Academic Integrity in the Generative AI Era: Students had mixed feelings related to the nature of academic integrity (Zhou et al., 2024). Nonetheless, AI tools seem to have a positive impact on learning motivation and academic confidence when used appropriately. This evidence resonates with a growing body of research demonstrating that AI-mediated instruction facilitates improvements in student motivation, self-efficacy, and self-regulated learning; students who participated reported higher engagement and confidence in their academic capabilities (Yang, 2025; Xu, 2026). Nevertheless, this assurance is conditional on proper balance: an over-reliance on AI undermines students' sense of ownership regarding their work and weakens long-term skill retention to a degree that ultimately shortchanges the confidence these very tools are designed to build (Kosmyna et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2024).

5.2. Phenomenological Study

5.2.1. Core Themes: Reliance on AI, Perceptions of Skill Development, Ethical Dilemmas, and Emotional Responses

The reviewed literature identifies four overlapping themes in the experiences of undergraduates with academic writing and generative AI. First, use of AI becomes paradoxical: students leverage tools such as ChatGPT for planning, drafting, and revision—treating them as "assistive scaffolding," but accordingly unsupervised use promotes dependency that threatens writing capability (Kasneci et al., 2023). Second, students have ambivalent beliefs about generating skills — many state that AI improves organization, fluency and language support (especially for non-native speakers) but at the same time worry that overreliance weakens critical thinking, creativity and problem-solving skills (Swiecki et al., 2022).

Third, ethical dilemmas abound in regard to unclear authorship, plagiarism risk, false references and issues of fairness with students operating within "moral grey areas" under institutional policies that are as yet vague (Johnston et al., 2024). Fourth, judgments in the emotional domain can be anything from cognitive relief and higher self-efficacy to what scholar's label "AI fault", a form of moral misalignment where one feels conflicted about submitting work that was supported by AI for fear of acting deceptive or perpetuating feelings of impostor syndrome.

5.2.2. Variations Based on Academic Discipline, Gender, and Year of Study

Data provide empirical evidence of the difference among students in their experience with AI across demographic and disciplinary lines. A recent 20-country survey found disciplined-based adoption and use that differed substantially across disciplines: some social sciences students were most aware of generative AI, and patterns varied between STEM (science, technology, engineering or mathematics) users compared to humanities text generation users versus those using AI for data analysis (Johnston et al., 2024). Likes and dislikes of generative AIs: Like seems to have gender differences as well, with women having a lower tendency (10 point) to use generative AI for research more than once a day which will further widen the gap between inequality in academic productivity and digital literacy skills (Swiecki et al., 2022).

In terms of year of study, PhD students and early career academics are the biggest users engaged in research writing while undergraduates—particularly those earlier through their degrees—encourage an institutionalised use of AI for superficial editing or grammar correction rather than engaging with deeper structural or argumentative support (Johnston et al., 2024).

These variations indicate the need for context-sensitive scaffolding and tailored policy support to ensure equity in integration.

5.2.3. Illustrative Quotes and Narratives

Phenomenological and qualitative studies offer descriptions, from first-person perspectives that reflect aspects of the lived experience, in this case of AI-assisted academic writing. A student observed the ambivalent reality of how they develop skills: "ChatGPT helps me organize my thoughts but I'm worried I won't learn to think for myself anymore"—a mindset that emerged across several studies where learners characterized AI as a combination of "collaborative tool" and crutch (Hysaj et al., 2025). You also feel a tension in students' narratives; for example, one of them reflected: "Every time I copy and paste text produced by AI into my essay, this is a benefit to me and under the circumstances that my professor at university has not stated that it is wrong to do any of these things, I still feel like cheating." The weakly defined institutionalization as well cause ethical distress (Kasneci et al., 2023).

A language beginner undergraduate in education from the Global South: "Without ChatGPT I would have had to spend maybe three hours a day trying to translate and make grammatical heads or tails of my writing instead of expressing ideas; it's kind of like getting home-tutored every time you use it, a translator-cum-tutor" (Hysaj et al., 2025, regarding disciplinary context). In fact, these narratives highlight that students' interactions with generative AI are individual, contextually grounded, and emotionally charged.

VI. DISCUSSION

6.1. Results of combining Literature and Phenomenological Results

6.1.1. Do Global Trends Mirror or Differ from Experiences of Malian Students

The phenomenological results from the University of Yombo Ouologuem of Mali show emerging similarities and differences with global patterns in undergraduate engagement with generative AI for academic writing. Internationally, adoption of LLM-related language usage has 1 full increased since 2022 among less-white English-speaking & non-Low-profits economies (Prakash et al., 2025), reflecting Malian students who've used AI to improve their linguistic fluency in English-medium academic contexts. But where a key difference exists is in the form of engagement.



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Students in countries with more advanced technologies engage in what are termed "vibe writing" (entire essays generated through iterative prompting of AI without student authorship) (Granada et al., 2025) but Malian students may use generative AI as secondary to other strategy. This discrepancy is due to the digital divide whereby access to broadband internet connectivity continues to be a key determinant of adoption of AI tools (Prakash et al., 2025), and one that is not evenly distributed within Sub-Saharan Africa. Thus, Mali students will use AI mainly for grammar correction and idea generation rather than writing entire textual materials; consequently, revealing that the supposed "global" story regarding AI undercuts are molded by unequal structures of access to technology.

6.1.2. Cultural and Contextual Factors Influencing Perceptions

Generative AI variables and the perceptions of Malian student writers about the integration of generative AI into academic writing are profoundly shaped by cultural and contextual factors. Studies from Sub-Saharan Africa sheds light on student perceptions in the region: students reportedly see AI tools as supplementing, not replacing human instruction and overwhelmingly supported more institutional regulation rather than a ban of such tools (Iddris et al., 2026). In the context of collaborative AI use, this sentiment is probably heightened in Mali, a more collectivist society where student academic performance is perhaps reliant on peers and instructors in addition to that from AIs.

In distinction to their high-income country peers, students in Mali experience generative AI through the additional lens of linguistic empowerment—leveraging these tools to negotiate between local ways of communicating and Anglophone academic discourse conventions (Granada et al., 2025). Such culturally pervasive beliefs also suggest that policies in Mali must escape empty universal-magnitude prohibitions, and develop instead comparatively sensitive and contextual university frameworks, which respect students as agents in their technology use, but which also protect the epistemic integrity of academic writing.

6.2. Implications for Pedagogy

6.2.1. The necessity for AI Literacy and Ethical Training

These findings from this phenomenological study highlight the imperative for structured programmes in AI literacy and ethics to be incorporated into undergraduate curricula at University of Yombo Ouologuem of Mali.

To develop critical proficiencies and understandings that extend both technical competence and also a conjunctural knowledge of algorithmic biases, data privacy concerns, and ethical boundaries around AI-assisted compositions—all vital skills in academic writing practices as generative AI tools tighten their grip on the field. The work by Laupichler et al. (2022) provides a comprehensive review of 30 studies on AI in education, the strong need for sound frameworks and assessment tools that assess learning outcomes in this area is also mentioned.

Likewise, Chanpradit (2025), in a systematic review of generative AI within academic writing, highlighted poor literacy about the potential pitfalls of these young writers integrating tools as one of the key barriers to responsible use, concluding that, when students lack a solid ethical background in issues like AI hallucinatory nature, plagiarism risk or cultural insensitivity are not addressed. For a context like that of Mali, where the digital divide may be even more prevalent, it is not just recommended but necessary to embed AI literacy into the academic writing curriculum in order for individuals to engage equitably and responsibly with these technologies.

6.2.2. Strategies for Balancing AI Use with Skill Development

Navigating the affordances of generative AI while sustaining independent writing skills will require a purposeful, scaffolding pedagogical strategy that see AI as an augmentation rather than a replacement of cognitive resources. The qualitative findings from this review indicate that, although AI contributes to grammar, cohesion, and idea generation capacities in students' writing, over-exposure can lead to a reduction in creativity and analytical skills—an issue very much relevant at the university level where many students are still becoming proficient.

In their systematic review of AI applications in academic writing, Deep and Chen (2026) concluded that while uncalibrated use can erode writing skills, structured course-request assignments focused on process over product capture self-directed learning and develop learners' ability to critique their own work. In view of such, educators at the university level must provide writing tasks for students to reflect and compare their arguments in AI generated drafts with human-produced revisions. This fits with the calls for "human oversight" and "structured training" to limit over-reliance whilst leveraging what AI can do well to reduce cognitive load at drafting and revision times.

6.3. Policy Recommendations

6.3.1. Institutional guidelines on AI use

The results of this phenomenological study emphasize the critical need for post-secondary educational institutions to create explicit institutional policies surrounding AI use in academic writing. Since the adoption of generative AI tools by students will only continue to grow in complexity and pervasiveness, universities will need to quickly transition from punitive policy frameworks that respond post-facto to new technologies toward forward-looking policies that clarify expectations around appropriate use, standards for attribution, and where academic integrity stops and starts.

At present, the University of Yombo Ouologuem of Mali (and quite a few institutions in Global South) does not have extensive AI governance structures; students are left to navigate vaguer ethical territory without institutional scaffolding. Drawing on Sullivan et al. (2022) regarding how AI writing tools further dilemmas of academic integrity, institutions must create context-sensitive policies that differentiate parsimoniously among AI-assisted research and editing support versus unauthorized content production; guidelines co-created with students may be needed to ground these rules in empirical reality as experienced by students on a day-to-day basis.

6.3.2. Incorporating AI literacy in curricula

This study extrapolates the phenomenological insights that point to a significant gap in students' understanding of generative AI capabilities and limitations, highlighting the need for integrating AI literacy into undergraduate educational programs. Students at the University of Education showed different degrees of critical understanding in relation to machine-generated texts and outputs: Many were unsure about how to cite material from AI systems or whether machine-written text was epistemically trustworthy (Baidoo-Anu and Ansah, 2023). AI literacy should include ethical reasoning, evaluating sources and even metacognitive awareness of your own writing process.

More recently Jeon (2026) that successful integration of AI literacy depends on the need for disciplinary customization—to make use of writing-intensive programs with embedded modules for critical engagement with AI as follows: "for these changes to take root, they must be embedded in dedicated contexts. What knowledge can be built about AI and its role in disciplines; each field has specific conventions and epistemologies". In the context of teacher education for Mali, this means creating gradually released scaffolding in AI literacy embedded into academic writing courses along with faculty development programs for instructor modelling and students developing independent critical judgment about the use of AI.

6.3. Limitations

This review is also limited by the fact that it was conducted in one institution (University of Yombo Ouologuem of Mali) and therefore findings might not generalize to all contexts. The fast pace at which generative AI tools change means that the student experience can quickly become outdated, as well. Finally, the open-ended nature of phenomenological data prohibits large scale synthesis and publication looms as limited peer-celebrated literature on this theme in Sub-Saharan African better education circles the evidence base.

VII. CONCLUSION

The systematic review highlights the paradoxical nature of generative AI as a tool for academic writing for undergraduate students at the University of Yombo Ouologuem of Mali, both enabling and anxiety inducing. AI offers benefits of improved linguistic fluency, development of writing skills, and strengthened academic self-confidence for EFL learners but at the expense of worrying issues in cognitive reliance on writers—authorship ambiguities and breaches with regard to academic integrity. The results highlight the necessity of context-specific administrative policies, layered AI literacy education and teaching strategies that prioritize AI as a corollary or supplement to independence in critical reasoning instead of stark replacement. The case for responsible AI integration in Malian higher education must balance frameworks that honour students' agentic engagement with technology alongside protections for the epistemic values of academic writing and reasoning, particularly within resource-poor locations.

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