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Artificial Intelligence for Academic Research Assistance: An Empirical Study of Academic Users in Higher Institutions

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ABSTRACT

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is increasingly used to support academic research through literature discovery, writing assistance, citation management, information retrieval, and data analysis support [1]–[4]. This study focuses on the awareness, usage, acceptance, perceived benefits, challenges, and training needs associated with AI-based research-assistance tools among academic users in the institutions of Latur district, Maharashtra, India. A descriptive and analytical research design was adopted, and a questionnaire substantially based upon the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) was administered to 175 selected respondents through purposive and convenience sampling. Faculty members, postgraduate students, and research scholars were included in the respondent group. The paper illustrates a high level of awareness of mainstream tools, particularly ChatGPT (95.4%) and Grammarly (83.4%), whereas the use of several other research-specific tools appears to be under-recognized. According to the descriptive statistics, AI is primarily used for literature review, writing and editing, citation and referencing, and data analysis. Among user perception categories, perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and trust were identified as key adoption factors. In addition, the inadequate access to advanced tools, over-dependence, technical-skill gaps, difficulty interpreting AI outputs, privacy concerns, plagiarism risk, and insufficient training were also noted as critical adoption barriers. Hence, the study hypothesized that access to AI is not sufficient for academic users, and institutions should foster AI literacy, practical training, source verification, research-integrity guidance, and ethical governance to enable responsible adoption of AI in academic research. A five-layer responsible-adoption framework – Access, Literacy, Application, Verification, and Ethical Governance – was developed for this purpose.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence; Academic Research; Research Assistance; Technology Acceptance Model; AI Literacy; Higher Education; Generative AI; Research Ethics; User Acceptance

1. Introduction

Artificial Intelligence is an integral component of the digital research environment. AI-powered systems may help researchers with literature discovery, summarization of documents, language improvement, citation management and data exploration [3], [4]. Increased access to generative AI expands its possible applications but also raises the issue of verification, transparency and responsible use.

Technology acceptance can serve as a solid theoretical background for studying the reasons for adopting or rejecting some technological innovations. Davis [1] introduced the Technology Acceptance Model that identified perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use as the key determinants of acceptance. Later on, Venkatesh et al. [2] suggested the UTAUT model, which accounted for other factors such as social influence and facilitating conditions.

The adoption of AI in scholarly research differs from the adoption of any other technology due to the special responsibilities of academic users. A system may provide fluent and useful texts while at the same time generating some inaccurate statements and references. Walters and Wilder [9] detected a high level of fabrication and substantive errors in bibliographic citations generated by AI algorithms, which illustrates the necessity of independent verification of AI outputs. UNESCO [8] also advises adopting a human-centred approach to generative AI in the context of education and research, with an emphasis on privacy, validation,

institutional readiness and practical use.

Therefore, the current research should focus specifically on AI as a research-assistive technology and look into not only adoption but also the conditions of responsible adoption.

2. Background and Research Context

It is reasonable to categorize AI-assistive systems used in scholarly research by the stage of the research process they are intended for their work.

2.1 Literature Discovery

AI-assisted discovery platforms are designed to help researchers find relevant papers, explore connections between publications and discover literature that can be of some importance for the researcher's work. Such systems may speed up the process of preliminary literature discovery.

2.2 Academic Writing and Editing

Generative AI and AI-assisted writing solutions may help in grammar correction, paraphrasing, summarization, and language and structure improvement. Nevertheless, researchers should be aware of their responsibility for verifying the correctness and originality of the generated output.

2.3 Citation and Reference Management

Reference management systems supported by AI are capable of helping in organization of bibliographic information, recommendations of related publications, generation of citations, etc.

2.4 Research Analytics and Data Analysis

AI-enabled analytic tools may help researchers analyze datasets, detect patterns, generate summaries, and conduct exploratory analyses. However, these results must be validated through proper statistical and methodological procedures.

2.5 Research Integrity

AI can also help in detecting plagiarism, validating citations, and conducting research integrity checks. However, improper use of AI might present some risks in terms of fabricating references, making unsubstantiated claims, committing plagiarism, hiding the fact of AI-generated content, and improper handling of confidential research data.

3. Literature Review

3.1 AI in Higher Education and Research

Zawacki-Richter et al. [4] systematically analyzed the uses of AI in higher education and observed a rich landscape of research while stressing the necessity of considering educational and institutional factors. Dwivedi et al. [3] considered both opportunities and challenges of multi-disciplinary AI.

3.2 Technology Acceptance

Davis [1] introduced perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use as key constructs in technology acceptance. The further development of technology acceptance theory took place thanks to Venkatesh et al. [2]. These models offer a good theoretical base for analyzing users' acceptance of AI research tools.

3.3 Trust, Accuracy, and Verification

Trust cannot be equated with correctness. Walters and Wilder [9] analyzed 636 citations generated in AI-produced papers and found out fabrications and serious citation mistakes, such as 55% of fabricated citations in their GPT-3.5 sample and 18% in their GPT-4 sample. These results clearly prove the necessity of independent verification of AI-generated references and facts.

3.4 Ethical and Institutional Governance

UNESCO's Guidance for Generative AI in Education and Research offers a human-centric approach and stresses privacy issues, ethical validation, capacity development, and coherent policy frameworks.

3.5 Research Priorities for Generative AI

Van Dis et al. [11] point out that generative AI requires special consideration of evaluation, transparency, scientific practices, and responsible use of generative AI. These issues are highly relevant to academic research assistance.

4. Research Problem

AI-based tools have become quite common for use among students, faculty members and researchers. Just

being available is not an indication of research competence, as popular tools might be well known while academic tools might not be known. One might like to benefit from speed and comfort while being worried about accuracy, privacy, plagiarism, dependency, and lack of training. Prior research has considered the use of AI in higher education and technology acceptance [1]–[4], but the current study aims to bring into an empirical framework the awareness, usage, acceptance, trust, ethical considerations, barriers and training for the local institution.

The key problem to address in this research can be formulated as follows: What is the degree of awareness, usage, acceptance and preparation of academic users with respect to AI-based research assistance tools and what factors affect acceptance and responsible adoption of such tools?

5. Research Gap

It has been proven in the literature that AI is gaining importance in higher education and technology acceptance. However, comparatively fewer empirical studies have been conducted in the context of simultaneous consideration of:

- Awareness of multiple AI research-assistance tools;
- Usage purposes of AI tools in academic research;
- Usefulness and ease of use;
- Trust in AI-generated output;
- Ethics issues;
- Barriers;
- Training needs; and
- Strategies for responsible adoption of AI.

The source manuscript describes a specific gap in the research on perception, acceptance, ethics issues and institutional support for AI research assistance. This gap is filled by empirical research based on the data obtained from 175 academic users in the Latur district.

6. Objectives

- To assess awareness of AI-based research-assistance tools among academic users.
- To examine the purposes for which AI tools are used in academic research.
- To examine perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use and trust as acceptance-related factors.
- To examine the factors influencing acceptance of AI-based research assistance.
- To identify technical, ethical and institutional challenges associated with AI adoption.
- To examine training and skill-development needs for responsible AI use.
- To propose practical institutional measures for responsible AI adoption in academic research.

7. Research Questions

- RQ1: What is the level of awareness of AI-based research-assistance tools among academic users?
- RQ2: For which research activities are AI tools used most frequently?
- RQ3: How do usefulness, ease of use and trust relate to users' acceptance of AI tools?
- RQ4: What are the major challenges to effective AI adoption?
- RQ5: What forms of AI training are needed for academic users for effective and ethical AI use?
- RQ6: What institutional measures can promote responsible AI adoption in academic research?

8. Conceptual Framework

The current study is based on TAM [1] but is also inspired by UTAUT [2]. In the extended framework proposed, perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use and trust are the acceptance dimensions. Ethical concerns, skill gap and lack of institutional support are some of the contextual factors that can hinder responsible adoption.

For the current study, the framework is extended to include trust, ethical concerns, institutional support, and training.

Proposed conceptual model pathway: Perceived Usefulness + Perceived Ease of Use + Trust + Institutional Support + AI Literacy → Responsible Acceptance and Usage of AI Research Assistance Tools, moderated by Ethical Awareness and Verification practices.



Figure 1: Conceptual Model

The conceptual framework assumes that adoption of AI in research is not only driven by usefulness but also by whether or not the users trust the technology and have knowledge regarding the same.

9. Methodology

9.1 Research Design

The study is carried out using the descriptive and analytical research design as per the source manuscript.

9.2 Population and Sample

The population includes students, research scholars and faculty members working/ studying in academic institutes in Latur district. The sampling technique used here is purposive/convenience, and the number of sample respondents is 175.

9.3 Instrument

Primary data were collected with a pretested structured questionnaire derived from the theory of acceptance and use of technology model. The questionnaire was divided into different sections such as demographic characteristics, awareness, usage, factors influencing acceptance, problems faced, and training requirements.

9.4 Data Analysis

The source manuscript indicates frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation and suggests t-test, ANOVA and correlation analysis. Yet, the provided manuscript does not furnish the respondent-level data or actual inferential-test results. For this reason, this revised paper simply states descriptive results that are justified by the provided tables and does not fabricate p-values, effect sizes or statistically significant hypothesis findings.

10. Results

10.1 Demographic Profile

Demography	Details	Respondents	Percentage
Age	20–25	24	13.7
	26–35	86	49.1
	36–45	47	26.8
	46–55	15	8.57
	56 and above	3	1.71
Gender	Male	112	64
	Female	63	36
	Transgender	0	0
Types of Respondents	Faculty members	52	29.7
	PG students	96	54.8
	Research Scholars	27	15.4
Educational Qualification	SecondaryHigh School	6	3.42
	Graduation	78	44.5
	Post graduation	56	32
	PhD or Doctorate	35	20

The age group with the highest number of students was between 26 and 35 years (49.1%), and the

postgraduate student population was the most represented (54.8%). The source data indicated that 112 males and 63 females took part in the study.

10.2 Awareness of AI Research Assistance Tools

Sr. No.	Items	Yes		No	
		N	%	N	%
1	ChatGPT (OpenAI)	167	95.4	8	4.57
2	Research Rabbit	102	58.2	73	41.7
3	Elicit	114	65.1	64	36.5
4	Perplexity.ai	132	75.4	43	24.5
5	Scholarcy	74	42.2	101	57.7
6	Scite.ai	98	56	77	44
7	Zotero (with AI extensions/plugins)	106	60.5	69	39.4
8	Mendeley (with AI features)	125	71.4	50	28.5
9	QuillBot	112	64	63	36
10	Grammarly	146	83.4	29	16.5
11	Others	58	33.1	117	66.8

Awareness of ChatGPT (95.4%) was significantly higher compared to 83.4% for Grammarly and 75.4% for Perplexity.ai. The awareness of Scholarcy (42.2%) and Scite.ai (56.0%) was comparatively lower.

Is the flowchart consistent? This pattern is consistent with higher awareness of popular general-purpose AI does not imply equal awareness of specialized tools used by academics. This reinforces the case for research-focused AI literacy.

10.3 Reported Research Uses

Sr. No.	Items	Most often		Often		Sometimes		Rarely		Never	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1	Literature review	99	56.6	75	42.8	62	35.4	9	5.14	4	2.28
2	Writing and Editing	102	58.2	82	46.8	35	20	10	5.71	7	4
3	Citation and referencing	86	49.1	70	40	24	13.7	4	2.28	2	1.14
4	Data analysis	93	53.1	66	37.7	36	20.5	0	0	3	1.71
5	Not using AI tools	56	32	32	18.2	43	24.5	5	2.85	0	0
6	Other	68	38.8	27	15.4	58	33.1	9	5.14	4	2.28

Writing and editing had the highest reported 'Most often' frequency, followed by literature review and data analysis.

10.4 Acceptance-Related Findings

Sr. No.	Items	Strongly agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1	Perceived Usefulness	126	72	86	49.1	58	33.1	16	9.14	10	5.71
2	Perceived Ease of Use	138	78.8	102	58.2	55	31.4	27	15.4	6	3.42
3	Trust in AI Tools	115	65.7	73	41.7	40	22.8	5	2.85	7	4
4	Ethical Concerns	69	39.4	75	42.8	38	21.7	8	4.57	10	5.71
5	Overall influence on Acceptance	76	43.4	68	38.8	30	17.1	14	8	13	7.42

The most commonly reported positive variable was perceived ease of use (78.8%), followed by perceived usefulness (72.0%) and trust (65.7%). These results are in the same direction as the TAM [1].

Note on data quality: the source table includes other response count/percent fields which cannot sum up to a traditional mutually exclusive five-point Likert distribution. In order not to publish internally inconsistent numbers, this revised document only reports the often more visible "Strongly agree" indicators from that table. Those original responses have to be cross-checked with the raw questionnaire file before submission.

10.5 Challenges

Sr. No.	Items	Strongly agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1	Lack of technical skills	142	81.1	45	25.7	34	19.4	10	5.71	5	2.85
2	Difficulty in understanding AI outputs	132	75.4	51	29.1	45	25.7	8	4.57	7	4
3	Limited access to advanced AI tools	156	89.1	47	26.8	28	16	4	2.28	1	0.57
4	Integration problems with existing systems	114	65.1	40	22.8	67	38.2	15	8.57	6	3.42
5	Data privacy and security concerns	105	60	39	22.2	86	49.1	4	2.28	2	1.14
6	Risk of plagiarism	98	56	62	35.4	58	33.1	12	6.85	6	3.42
7	Over-dependence on AI tools	143	81.7	37	21.1	50	28.5	6	3.42	8	4.57
8	Absence of institutional policy/guidelines	80	45.7	22	12.5	95	54.2	35	20	4	2.28
9	Lack of training opportunities	122	69.7	45	25.7	34	19.4	10	5.71	5	2.85
10	Inadequate infrastructure	106	60.5	64	36.5	68	38.8	8	4.57	0	0
11	Resistance to adopting new technology	118	67.4	58	33.1	27	15.4	11	6.28	9	5.14

The biggest challenges cited were poor access to advanced tools (89.1%), over-reliance (81.7%), lack of technical expertise (81.1%) and difficulty interpreting AI outputs (75.4%).

The results underscore a fundamental differentiation between access and ability. AI assistance without training in critical assessment may do more to increase research risk than minimize it.

10.6 Training Needs

Sr. No.	Items	Always		Often		Occasionally		Rarely		Never	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1	Basic awareness of AI tools	45	25.7	164	93.7	32	18.2	4	2.28	2	1.14
2	Hands-on training & practical	99	56.5	78	44.5	55	31.4	3	1.71	1	0.57

	sessions										
3	Advanced AI applications in research	133	76	69	39.4	26	14.8	5	2.85	3	1.71
4	Ethical use of AI in academic work	101	57.7	80	45.7	55	31.4	8	4.57	3	1.71
5	Data analysis using AI tools	60	34.2	102	58.2	71	40.5	1	0.57	2	1.14
6	Online courses/webinars	58	33.1	63	36	59	33.7	3	1.71	7	4
7	Self-learning modules	76	43.4	23	13.1	34	19.4	6	3.42	5	2.85
8	Institutional training programs	85	48.5	36	20.5	59	33.7	3	1.71	4	2.28

Most selected training requirements were advanced use of AI applications in research (76.0%), ethical use of AI applications (57.7%) and practical sessions (hands-on) (56.5%).

11. Discussion

Results demonstrate a more established but still less than full transition to AI-enabled research. Public knowledge of mainstream products is widespread, and respondents use AI for at least some research activities. This agrees with existing evidence of higher education and research AI adoption [3], [4].

Acceptance correlates highly with perceived ease of use and usefulness, just as TAM [1] suggests. Acceptance is no synonym for blind faith. While the level of trust measured is high, the fact that several fake AI-generated citations have been found illustrates why academics require skills to verify [9].

The most significant obstacles - poor access, over-reliance, skills shortcomings and inability to understand output - point to institutions opting for support with AI literacy, not buying subscriptions. Guidance for human use also highlights capacity development, Privacy, Policy and Legal Preparedness.

The training findings suggest a pragmatic direction: Further research should focus on advanced use-cases and making the tools 'work'. This would be better than a broad-based awareness session, because of a general high awareness amongst users of mainstream tools.

12. Proposed Responsible AI Adoption Framework

Layer 1 - Access

Adequate access to suitable tools for artificial intelligence research, bibliometrics and related infrastructure should be shared.

Layer 2 - Literacy

Teach capabilities, limits, prompting, source evaluation, privacy and research-focused AI workflows.

Layer 3 - Application

Help users learn how to use AI for literature discovery, writing help, managing citations, and exploratory data analysis.

Layer 4 - Verification

(AHRQ Publication Number 2226) for their quality and relevancy. Require the source of AI-generated references, facts, quotations, statistics and interpretations to be independently confirmed.

Layer 5 - Ethical Governance

Create policies in the areas of privacy, plagiarism, authorship, disclosure, bias, confidentiality, and human oversight.

Summary, the model is: ACCESS LITERACY APPLICATION VERIFICATION ETHICAL GOVERNANCE.

13. Implications

13.1 For Universities and Colleges

Academics should develop, implement and evaluate AI-literacy programmes, hands-on learning workshops, guidance on authorized use and systems for periodic policy review.

13.2 For Researchers

Researchers must always be responsible for all the claims, references, analysis and conclusions in their works, even when AI has contributed to the drafting or analysis.

13.3 For Academic Libraries

They can provide expertise on responsible adoption of AI through research consultations, teaching on information literacy, guidance on verifying sources, and workshops on research-specialized tools.

13.4 For Research Supervisors

Supervisors will need to instruct students in when AI help is okay, when to say so, if they need to, and how to fact-check.

14. Recommendations

- Introduce regular research-oriented AI literacy programmes.
- Prioritize practical workshops over awareness-only lectures.
- Demonstrate that AI references and factual statements can be independently fact-checked.
- Create institutional policies on privacy, plagiarism, authorship, disclosure and confidentiality.
- Make available academic AI tools for specialized research as well as general-purpose chatbots.
- Develop library-based AI research support services.
- Promote human review at all critical research decision points.
- Repeat training at intervals because AIs and risks change fast.

15. Hypotheses for Future Inferential Testing

H01: No difference observed in AI research-tool perception between faculty, postgraduate students and research scholars.

H02: Perceived usefulness does not have a significant effect on the acceptability of tools designed for AI researchers.

H03: Ease of use does not have a significant effect on acceptance.

H04: Trust does not significantly influence acceptance.

H05: Acceptance will not be affected by a moral concern.

H06: There are no positive relationships between institutional support and training and implementation of AI.

All these hypotheses are therefore held as testable propositions. Since the inferential outputs are not available in the provided source, this manuscript makes no statement of the acceptance or rejection of any null hypotheses.

16. Limitations

- The sample was selected by means of purposive and convenience sampling techniques hence, generalizability is limited.
- The study is limited to selected academics of Latur district.
- Responses are self-reported and subject to recall or social-desirability bias.
- AI technologies and user perceptions change rapidly.
- The raw complete respondent data table and inferential statistics have not been uploaded.
- Some internal inconsistencies exist in the Likert frequency fields within the tables; those should be resolved with the original data set before submitting for journal review.

17. Future Scope

- Perform a larger multi-institution study with sampling by probability when possible.
- Compare acceptance of AI across fields and academic positions.
- Collect data at respondent level, and then perform the testing of reliability, correlation, ANOVA, regressions or structural equation modelling as appropriate.
- Develop and validate an AI research-literacy scale.
- Conduct longitudinal studies to follow up on AI adoption.
- Have institutional AI policies and training programmes been successful?

18. Conclusion

AI can provide great support for academic work, but the implementation of AI won't happen unless there is not only access to the technology but also higher awareness of the functionality and benefits of the service. Our current survey among 175 academic users showed that existing tools are widely recognised, used and appreciated, while users also face many pain points, from access to interpretation to reliance, privacy and plagiarism.

The main takeaway is that academic institutions need to change from an 'AI access' to a 'responsible AI research capability'. Capability can be achieved with equitable access, research-focused AI literacy, operational skills, routine verification and validation, and ethical governance. Our proposed five-layer framework offers a practical way to make the switch.

AI must therefore be presented as a helper of human being judgement-and not a replacement of it. This is in line with current advice on human-centred application of generative AI for educational and research purposes and with evidence that scholarly AI information may include major mistakes [8], [9].

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