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The Impact of English Students' Increased Reliance on AI Technology in Literary Analysis

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Abstract. The introduction of artificial intelligence (AI) technology has had a significant impact on the landscape of English literary studies. Although AI technology can be a valuable tool in enhancing the efficiency and quality of critical analysis, students increasingly rely on AI tools for literary analysis and comprehension, often at the expense of engaging with the texts themselves. This paper seeks to explore the implications of this excessive dependence, examining the reasons behind students' aversion to reading and the consequences of substituting AI for traditional literary engagement. Entrenched in both Piaget's Constructivist Theory and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which emphasise that literary analysis is both an individual cognitive activity and a social and cultural process, this paper utilised the interpretive paradigm to explore the subjective experiences, meanings, and the nuanced influence of AI on human interpretation and learning processes. The Qualitative Approach and Case Study Design were employed to gain deep insight into this phenomenon. Semi-structured interviews were administered to six purposively selected English lecturers from three higher educational institutions in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa. Thematic analysis of data revealed that the development of critical thinking and subjective interpretation of texts were crippled by over-dependence on AI. Furthermore, the study highlighted that flipped classrooms and modelling were powerful teaching strategies that could be used to combat the widespread use of AI. The authors recommend that higher education institutions should encourage the utilisation of AI tools as complementary resources, rather than replacements for human intuition.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence; Critical analysis; Literary studies; Over-reliance; Emotional development

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1. Introduction

Recently, the integration of AI technology into various academic disciplines has revolutionised the way students approach learning and research. Among students of English, particularly those engaged in literary analysis, AI tools like ChatGPT; Grammarly; and other language processing tools have become a significant asset. Holmes et al. (2019) and Luckin and Cukurova (2019) have observed that these technologies, with their capability of processing vast amounts of text, providing summaries, and offering critical insights, can streamline the analysis of literary works, making the task quicker and more efficient.

However, while AI can aid in understanding and interpreting literature, this shift raises critical questions about the impact of AI on students' understanding of literature and their overall academic development. Some students, especially those who study English as the first additional Language, often exhibit a marked aversion to reading, a skill that could otherwise sharpen their linguistic skills. As Baddane and Ennam (2024) observe, literary analysis traditionally demands deep engagement, critical thinking, and personal interpretation developed through close reading. Excessive reliance on AI risks weakening these essential skills, leading to superficial interpretations where students prioritise machine-generated responses over original, nuanced insights.

Taking the argument further, Holmes et al. (2019) and Luckin et al. (2016) observe that the rise of AI in education has transformed how students approach learning, research, and analysis. In the field of literary studies, where critical thinking, analysis, and deep engagement with texts are essential, this transformation is particularly striking. The appeal of AI lies in its ability to reduce the complexity, and time demands of textual analysis. However, over-dependence on such tools can be detrimental. As Tackett (2021) notes, AI-generated outputs often provide generalised interpretations that lack the depth required for high-level literary scholarship, thereby threatening the academic integrity expected in tertiary education.

One of the primary concerns about the disproportionate use of AI is its potential to diminish critical thinking and analytical skills. When students accept AI-generated interpretations without scrutiny, they may not cultivate their analytical and critical thinking abilities. Baddane and Ennam (2024) caution that this could foster passive learning and reduce students' capacity to develop complex arguments and engage in nuanced literary criticism. Yadav (2024) adds that educators and institutions must carefully consider the ethical and pedagogical implications of AI in literary studies. As AI evolves, the challenge for educators is to balance its benefits with the imperative to foster original thought and deep engagement with literary texts.

This study is particularly relevant in today's academic environment, where the digitalisation of learning has accelerated due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the growing availability of AI-based educational tools. The trend toward AI-enhanced learning has raised important questions about the future of literary education. As AI becomes increasingly integrated into students' academic

practices, understanding its impact on learning, especially in disciplines like literary analysis that rely on subjective and interpretive skills, is crucial. Building on the ideas of these scholars, this study seeks to explore the impact of this over-dependence on AI tools, considering both the advantages and potential drawbacks in the context of literary analysis. It also examines whether AI, when used as a support tool for non-native English speakers rather than a replacement for personal engagement, can enhance the educational experience without eroding the critical thinking skills essential for literary scholarship in the South African higher education context.

Although current literature acknowledges both the benefits and drawbacks of AI use in education, few studies offer targeted strategies that respond to the specific challenge of over-reliance on AI in literary analysis, particularly within African tertiary contexts where issues of language, reading culture, and academic preparedness intersect. This study seeks to fill this gap by investigating the implications of AI overuse on student learning and proposing practical, culturally relevant interventions to augment the use of AI by supporting deep, independent engagement with literature. This paper is guided by the following research questions:

- What is the impact of Artificial Intelligence on students' academic performance?
- How can students' excessive dependence on AI be minimised?

2. Literature Review

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in literary studies has sparked a global discourse on its potential to transform, but also destabilise, traditional pedagogical practices. Several scholars express concern that while AI increases efficiency, it may inadvertently diminish the depth, creativity, and subjectivity that are essential to the discipline of literary analysis. Several Western scholars warn that AI tools, although efficient, may encourage a form of surface learning that limits critical engagement. For example, Anyanwu et al. (2025) argue that students increasingly develop shallow reading habits, relying on AI for interpretation rather than engaging with texts directly. Yadav (2024) supports this observation, highlighting that AI-generated insights often prioritise speed and accessibility over nuanced textual understanding. He cautions that while tools like Grammarly or ChatGPT streamline tasks, they may simultaneously stifle the development of students' independent thinking and literary creativity.

These concerns are not limited to Western contexts but extend to other regions, including Asia. In their studies conducted in China and Turkey, Yim and Su (2024) point out that AI is reshaping how literary texts are both analysed and created. Through automated sentiment analysis and thematic tagging, large language models uncover textual patterns that students might overlook. Yet the authors caution that this computational approach can blur the lines between human and machine authorship, raising ethical issues and further distancing students from interpretive autonomy.

African scholars take this critique a step further by emphasising the cultural misalignment between AI tools and African literary traditions. Brokensha et al. (2023) argue that Eurocentric AI models often fail to capture the depth and complexity of African literature, including its symbolic, linguistic, and contextual richness. Lugonzo (2025) echoes this concern, suggesting that reliance on AI may depersonalise literary engagement and marginalise indigenous epistemologies. In parallel, Omotubora and Basu (2024) underscore the limitations of using non-localised datasets, warning that such tools risk producing culturally distorted interpretations that reinforce colonial narratives rather than challenge them.

Vargas-Murillo, Gutiérrez, and Salazar-Salinas (2023) contribute to this discourse by offering a global synthesis of both the benefits and risks of AI-assisted learning in higher education. Their systematic literature review highlights that tools like ChatGPT can enhance efficiency, enable smart learning, and support academic tasks, but also risk fostering over-reliance that undermines critical thinking, originality, and interpretive autonomy. They caution that unchecked use may erode students' ability to engage deeply with texts, while also raising ethical concerns around authorship and integrity. Importantly, they advocate for pedagogical strategies that integrate AI responsibly, distinguishing between idea generation and content production, thereby promoting student agency and safeguarding academic values.

Similarly, Adiyono, Suwartono, Nurhayati, Dalimarta, and Wijayanti (2025) examine AI reliance in the context of higher-education assessments, revealing that 70% of students at an Indonesian tertiary institution occasionally or frequently use AI to complete exam answers. While some perceived academic benefits were reported, the majority acknowledged that AI use did not necessarily deepen their understanding of course material. Lecturers expressed concern that such dependency could erode analytical thinking and originality, issues equally relevant to literary studies. The authors recommend clearer institutional policies on AI usage, the incorporation of project-based learning, and pedagogical approaches that prioritise student motivation and lecturer guidance as stronger determinants of academic success.

What emerges from this scholarly conversation is a shared concern over the erosion of critical thinking, interpretive nuance, and cultural authenticity. While AI tools offer undeniable pedagogical benefits, such as increased accessibility and analytical support, their unchecked use may encourage homogeneity in interpretation, suppress student creativity, and compromise the culturally embedded essence of literary study. While the critiques around AI use in literary studies are valid, especially those that raise ethical, cultural, and pedagogical concerns, it is equally important to recognise that not all scholarly perspectives are cautionary. A growing body of international research highlights the educational potential of AI when applied thoughtfully and contextually. For instance, Hadinezhad et al. (2024) argue that AI can play a powerful role in promoting inclusivity by adapting to students' diverse linguistic and cognitive needs, an advantage particularly relevant for English Additional Language learners.

Building on this, Hussain et al. (2024) show how AI platforms can enhance learner engagement by breaking down complex literary texts and offering real-time, interactive feedback that supports active learning. From a broader cultural perspective, Wang et al. (2024) suggest that AI's ability to conduct large-scale corpus analysis offers exciting opportunities to foster cross-cultural literary understanding by identifying patterns and connections across global texts. These views suggest that AI, when used to support rather than replace human interpretation, can enrich literary education by promoting deeper engagement, inclusivity, and a more enhanced appreciation of literature.

Despite growing literature on AI in education, few studies propose practical strategies that balance its efficiency with the interpretive depth vital to literary analysis. Most either celebrate AI's functionality or warn of its risks but seldom bridge the two. Crucially, there is a lack of approaches suited to African higher education, where cultural relevance and cognitive development are key. This study addresses that gap by examining AI over-reliance and proposing contextually grounded interventions, such as flipped classrooms and modelling, that foster deeper, more independent literary engagement.

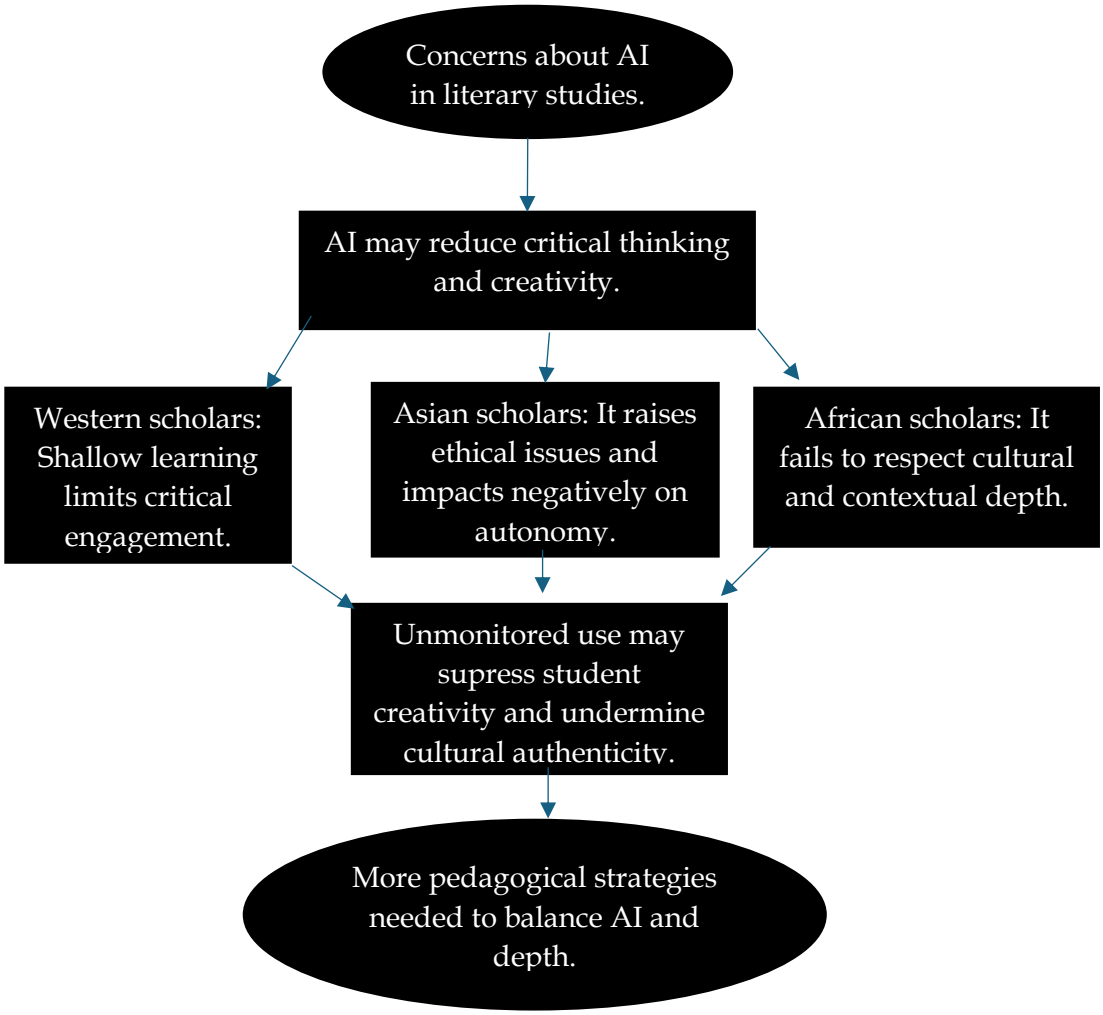

Figure 1: Concerns and implications of AI integration in literary analysis below presents the connections between the ideas of different scholars

This flow chart outlines key scholarly concerns about AI in literary studies, including its potential to diminish critical thinking, creativity, and cultural authenticity. It captures perspectives from Western, Asian, and African scholars, all of whom caution against the uncritical adoption of AI. The diagram underscores the urgent need for pedagogical strategies that balance technological efficiency with interpretive depth.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by Piaget's (1970) Constructivist Theory and Vygotsky's (1986) Sociocultural Theory, both of which emphasise the active, developmental, and social nature of learning. Piaget's theory views learning as a process of constructing knowledge through interaction with the environment. As students progress through cognitive stages, their capacity for abstract reasoning and literary analysis deepens. The disproportionate use of AI may short-circuit this process by replacing active engagement with pre-packaged interpretations, potentially limiting cognitive growth.

Vygotsky, in contrast, highlights the importance of social interaction, cultural tools, and language in learning. Literary analysis is not only a cognitive task but a socially situated one. Guided discussion, scaffolding, and peer collaboration are crucial to developing interpretive skills. If students bypass these opportunities in favour of AI, they may lose access to the social and cultural richness that deepens understanding. Together, these theories frame literary analysis as both a developmental and dialogic process, one potentially undermined by uncritical dependence on AI.

3. Research Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative case study design to explore how students' reliance on AI affects their literary analysis skills, as experienced and interpreted by university lecturers. Rooted in the interpretivist paradigm, the research aimed to understand the subjective perspectives of educators on the implications of AI within real classroom settings. The qualitative approach enabled an in-depth exploration of complex, context-specific experiences, with a focus on meaning-making, interaction, and the social realities of teaching literature in an AI-influenced academic landscape.

3.1 Research Paradigm

Interpretivism, which is defined by Scauso (2024) as a research approach that seeks to comprehend nuanced human attitudes, behaviours and experiences through the unique perspectives of participants, guided this study. This paradigm was particularly appropriate for investigating how lecturers perceived and interpreted students' increasing reliance on AI tools in literary analysis. It allowed for a nuanced exploration of how educational, technological, and social contexts shaped teaching and learning practices.

3.2 Research Approach

This study employed the qualitative approach which supported the aim of generating rich, descriptive data regarding lecturers' observations, beliefs, and strategies in response to AI use in the classroom. Through open-ended

questioning and flexible interactions, it enabled a deeper understanding of how lecturers interpret shifts in students' engagement with literature.

3.3 Research Design

As Creswell and Creswell (2018) note, research design reflects both philosophical assumptions and practical strategies for inquiry. A case study design was used to examine this phenomenon within its natural academic setting. This design was selected over phenomenology to capture broader institutional and contextual dynamics rather than focusing solely on individual lived experiences (Viera, 2023). The theoretical grounding of the study draws from Piaget's Constructivist Theory, which views learners as active knowledge constructors, and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which recognises the role of tools such as AI and social interaction in shaping cognitive development. These frameworks allowed the study to investigate how AI acts as a learning mediator and how it affects students' critical and interpretive development in literary studies.

3.4 Participant Selection

Purposive sampling was employed to select six lecturers of English from three public universities in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa. The selection focused on lecturers teaching both first year and final year literature students. These participants were selected for their direct involvement in teaching and assessment, which positioned them well to assess students' analytical growth, and any deviations linked to AI use. Their expertise also enabled them to suggest pedagogical strategies to mitigate AI over-dependence in literary analysis.

3.5 Data Collection Instruments

In this study, semi-structured interviews were used. This technique enables researchers to adapt and delve further into topics that arise during the conversation, resulting in richer and more complex data (Hamilton & Finley, 2019). Interviews were conducted for two weeks, with three interviews each week. With their consent, participants were recorded for purposes of analysis. Among the key questions asked were the following:

- In what ways has AI affected students' engagement with literary texts in your classes?
- What challenges do you face when assessing AI-assisted student work?
- What strategies have you used or considered to reduce students' overreliance on AI?

Data were analysed thematically where similar patterns were identified and grouped together. To ensure validity, this study used triangulation by cross-referencing interview data with participants' written analyses to validate interpretations. Member checking was also carried out by discussing preliminary findings with participants to ensure accuracy. To increase reliability, a structured interview guide ensured consistency across sessions, while an audit trail documented the research process for transparency. The code-recode technique improved theme consistency, while peer debriefing was employed to reduce researcher bias. Despite the small sample size, the participants' diverse encounters with AI tools generated rich and valuable insights.

4. Findings and Discussion

The objective of the study was to explore the impact of AI on students' academic performance and to suggest ways in which increased reliance on AI can be minimised. The study was guided by the interpretivist paradigm, which holds that reality is socially constructed and best understood through the lived experiences and perspectives of individuals (Bingham, 2023). Data analysis focused on participants' subjective insights and culturally situated responses to AI use in literary analysis. This approach aligned with the Constructivist principles of Piaget and Vygotsky, who both emphasise context, experience, and social interaction in learning.

Interview data were analysed thematically using Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach. After transcribing and reading the data multiple times, key ideas were manually coded and grouped into themes. Themes that emerged from data analysis were crippling the development of critical thinking and analytical abilities required for thorough text comprehension; retarding growth of subjective and emotional interpretation of texts; as well as the benefits of flipped classrooms and modelling. These themes were then refined to reflect patterns aligned with the study's objectives and theoretical lens.

4.1 Objective 1: To explore the impact of AI on students' academic performance

4.1.1 Theme 1: Crippling the development of critical thinking and analytical abilities required for text comprehension

One of the major findings on the impact of students' over-reliance on AI in literary studies is that it undermines the development of the critical and analytical skills essential for meaningful engagement with texts. While AI can offer helpful summaries and insights, this dependence, as Yadav (2024) notes, may limit students' ability to think independently and interpret literature deeply. This finding aligns closely with Piaget's (1970) Constructivist Theory, which stresses that learners must actively engage with their environment to construct knowledge. Passive reception of AI-generated summaries bypasses the cognitive disequilibrium necessary to trigger deeper learning, thereby stagnating development at earlier stages of cognitive growth.

Relying too heavily on AI can result in shallow learning, whereby students rely solely on the pre-packaged interpretations and summaries provided by AI, without engaging with the content independently and meaningfully. Instead of asking questions, hypothesising, and improving interpretations, students may come to accept AI outputs as legitimate answers. This passive consumption contrasts with the active, dialogic nature of literary study, which emphasises discussing interpretations and refining ideas. Participant 1 commented thus:

> *''Relying too much on AI for literary analysis can erode critical thinking and analytical abilities, which are necessary for analysing texts. When AI gives ready-made interpretations, readers do not need to interact meaningfully with the material, ask questions, or confront their own assumptions. This convenience may appear to be beneficial at first, but with time, it can impede the development of the independent mental processes that reading is intended to foster. I'm concerned that students will begin to accept AI-generated insights passively, missing out*

> *on the intellectual growth that comes from wrestling with the text and drawing their own conclusions.''*

This perspective mirrors a broader philosophical approach in education, that holds that learning is as much about the process as the outcome. By overcoming confusion and uncertainty, students learn to think critically, synthesise information, and generate nuanced opinions. This directly reflects Piaget's emphasis on cognitive conflict as a driver of development. When AI resolves this conflict prematurely, it inhibits the learner's natural progression through developmental stages. Without this approach, AI risks turning literary analysis into a retrieval exercise rather than a discovery one.
In agreement with Participant 1, Participant 2 commented:

> *''When AI tools provide quick analysis, students may avoid the necessary step of dealing with a text on their own. This battle is where critical thinking and deeper comprehension emerge. By relying on AI, students risk losing motivation to deconstruct complex ideas or evaluate different interpretations. I believe that this could gradually erode the skills required for nuanced literary analysis, leaving students reliant on AI outputs rather than having the confidence to trust their own analytical abilities.''*

This participant highlights that literature does not often yield simple answers. It is always interpreted in numerous ways, and ambiguity is a feature rather than a problem. This supports Vygotsky's (1986) Sociocultural Constructivist Theory, particularly his concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). In the absence of scaffolded guidance, students may become over-dependent on AI and miss out on the support that teachers or peers would typically provide within the ZPD. By avoiding the difficult aspects, students may lose their capacity to appreciate and negotiate this complexity.

The participant vouches for the preservation of effort as an essential component of growing resilience, interpretative flexibility, and innovative thinking, concurring with Yim and Su (2024), who argue that over-reliance on AI can interfere with originality and authorship of texts. Both participants emphasise the potential loss of critical thinking, analytical skills, and personal interpretation. According to Vygotsky, these skills develop best in social learning contexts where students internalise strategies demonstrated through interaction. Overdependence on AI weakens these crucial peer-to-peer and teacher-student exchanges, thus stalling development.

While the potential loss of critical thinking and independent analysis is significant, another major concern is the impact of AI on students' capacity to engage with texts on a personal and emotional level. The subjective nature of literary interpretation, whereby readers identify with characters, themes, and emotions, risks being compromised if AI-generated insights dominate the analytical process. This detachment can impair students' ability to build meaningful, empathetic responses to literature, eventually stifling their ability to engage profoundly with texts.

4.1.2 Theme 2: Retarding growth of subjective and emotional interpretation of texts
The growing reliance on Artificial Intelligence in literary studies may inhibit the development of subjective and emotional interpretations, which are essential for deeply engaging with texts. Literature is more than just an intellectual exercise; it is a very personal and emotional experience influenced by individual viewpoints, cultural circumstances, and emotional resonance (Koopman & Hakemulder, 2015).

This finding connects strongly with Vygotsky's view that learning is socially and culturally mediated. The flattening of diverse interpretations by AI undermines the sociocultural richness necessary for personal meaning-making in literary analysis. Echoing Jasim and Awqati (2025) who argue that AI's capacity to generate a text might undermine human creativity and the subjective, personal aspects of literary interpretation, Participant 3 expressed his concern thus:

> *''I believe that leaning too heavily on AI can diminish the personal part of literary analysis. When I employ AI tools, I observe that they frequently present the most usual or popular interpretations, which sometimes makes me query my thoughts. I believe literature is intended to be experienced individually by each person, but if we continue to rely so heavily on AI, we may all see texts in the same way. It appears that we are losing the opportunity to investigate fresh ideas or opinions that may differ from dominant viewpoints. I'm afraid that this will make students hesitant to voice their perspectives, which are critical for understanding literature.''*

This supports Vygotsky's assertion that learning happens through tools shaped by cultural-historical contexts. When AI tools are not localised, they risk silencing culturally embedded interpretations, thereby suppressing indigenous meaning-making. Similarly, Participant 4 expressed his concern:

> *''I believe that as AI techniques are more integrated into literary study, they risk impeding the development of personal, emotional responses to texts. Literature is intended to elicit individual views and feelings; nevertheless, when AI continually promotes the most popular interpretations, it can create the impression that there is a 'right' way to read a piece. This may discourage readers, particularly students, from following their instincts and making their connections with literature. Over time, this may result in a more mechanical approach to reading, removing the personal and emotional elements that make literary study so rewarding.''*

Here, Piaget's and Vygotsky's frameworks converge emotional and subjective engagement is central to constructing meaning. Piaget recognises that emotional investment enhances cognitive effort, while Vygotsky sees such interpretation as mediated through language, culture, and social context. AI, which lacks both emotional understanding and cultural embeddedness, cannot replicate this depth. The participants argue that an overreliance on AI technologies could limit diverse interpretations, erode students' confidence in expressing creative ideas, and, eventually, harm the richness and complexity that literature brings to the human experience.

With these arguments, it can be deduced that excessive dependence on AI can harm students' cognitive development. This reliance on AI-generated solutions compromises the development of important cognitive skills like critical thinking and extensive analysis. As Piaget's (1970) Constructivist Theory suggests, children's cognitive abilities and worldviews develop with time. According to this theory, these developmental phases influence children's ability to grasp and analyse literary texts, with abstract thinking and problem-solving skills improving as they mature. Hands-on experiences are essential for promoting cognitive growth at all levels. The shift from in-depth reading and contemplation to fast, AI-generated summaries has the potential to stifle students' natural learning processes.

As Baddane and Ennam (2024) claim, literary analysis has typically required significant engagement with texts, critical thinking, and personal interpretation skills generated through direct connection with texts. On the contrary, learning in AI settings focuses on receiving information rather than processing and internalising it. When students avoid the intellectual labour of working through challenging literature, they miss out on the mental effort required to improve information retention and recollection. Consequently, this could result in superficial learning, where students are able to memorise data at the surface level but fail to understand the deeper themes and ideas that are essential to literary studies.

4.2 Objective 2: To suggest ways by which increased reliance on AI can be minimised

4.2.1 Theme 1: Use of flipped classrooms

One of the findings revealed that flipped classrooms can help reduce students' over-reliance on AI. By allowing students to engage with texts in more comfortable settings, using language that is culturally- and linguistically relevant to them, literature becomes less intimidating and more accessible. This supports Vygotsky's emphasis on collaborative learning and the role of social interaction in intellectual development. When students engage in discussion and shared interpretation, they benefit from scaffolding and exposure to multiple perspectives within their ZPD.

These conversational spaces not only encourage students to internalise information but also help them feel more competent in communicating their perspectives, resulting in increased cognitive engagement and literary appreciation. Such convenient spaces highlight the importance of flipped classrooms, as suggested by Matiso (2024), who defines the concept as a shift away from traditional teacher-centred approaches and towards student-centred learning.

In English literary studies, Sánchez-Cuervo (2024) has observed that many students favour the flipped classroom for its flexibility and clarity. It lets them prepare at their own pace, boosts their confidence, and encourages more active participation. It also supports motivation, respects different learning styles, and promotes both independence and collaboration. To maximise the benefits of this

strategy, students can be given recordings of theories through which they can discuss themes in class, as Participant 5 commented:

> *''I appreciate how flipped classrooms push us to dig deeper into the content before class, minimising the temptation to rely too heavily on AI for answers. They promote critical thinking and self-directed learning, which are crucial skills that AI cannot fully emulate. In my experience, flipped classrooms inspire me to take responsibility for my learning, making AI an adjunct instrument rather than a crutch. I believe that flipped classrooms strike a healthy balance between technological use and personal effort, allowing for more meaningful discussions in class. They promote greater collaboration and interaction among peers, minimising the need for AI-driven answers.''*

This strategy also mirrors Piaget's idea of active learning through problem-solving and discovery. Pre-class preparation followed by discussion ensures that students experience cognitive dissonance and resolve it through peer collaboration. Since students engage with instructional material before class, this allows class time to be dedicated to discussion, collaborative activities, and problem-solving. Such strategies foster a democratic learning environment while also developing desirable twenty-first-century competencies (Thai et al., 2017).

This setup allows students to wrestle with the content on their own, promoting critical thinking and increased understanding before taking advantage of AI-based tools or other resources. As they prepare beforehand, students are less likely to turn to AI for prompt answers because they already have the fundamental knowledge. This fosters accountability and intrinsic determination, two essential components of self-directed learning, as posited by Knowles (1975) in his Adult Learning Theory.

As Muhuro and Kang'ethe (2025) observe, by encouraging the principles and ethics of creativity, teamwork, flexibility, interactive learning, experiential, and exploratory approaches, the flipped classroom concept is believed to address numerous objectives of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), as well as a few principles and philosophies of the Fifth Industrial Revolution (5IR) which focus on combining the strengths of human capacity with those of modern technology. The integration of culturally relevant content, coupled with the promotion of Indigenous Knowledge Systems and student-centred learning approaches in technology-infused contexts will allow students to attach more meaning to the literature they learn in class.

Building on the principles of the flipped classroom, which emphasise creativity, teamwork, and interactive learning, the concept of modelling strengthens student engagement by offering concrete demonstrations of essential skills and knowledge. While the flipped classroom equips students with foundational understanding through pre-class preparation and in-class collaboration, modelling complements this by showcasing effective strategies for analysing literature, interpreting texts, and applying theoretical frameworks. By observing and engaging in guided demonstrations, students can develop critical thinking

skills and enhance their ability to engage with culturally relevant content in meaningful ways.

4.2.2 Theme 2: Modelling

To address the adverse effects of AI in literary analysis among first-year university students, modelling came up as another key finding of this investigation. Matiso (2024) defines modelling as a teaching approach in which the teacher demonstrates a cognitive process, behaviour, or skill for the students to observe and learn from. The teacher serves as a role model by demonstrating how to approach a task, solve an issue, or participate in critical thinking, allowing students to see how these abilities or methods might be applied in real-world circumstances. By modelling, the teacher demonstrates how students can engage in productive and meaningful discussions, guiding them in developing these skills themselves.

To support this finding, Participant 4 stated:

> *''Since English is not our mother tongue, our students always find it challenging to appreciate and engage actively and meaningfully with texts written in English. Their lack of understanding and inability to apply analytic skills in English frustrates them and they end up opting for the easy way out. Literature teachers need to guide students through the processes of analysis patiently, before giving them an assessment. It is equally important for teachers to lead by example, and show the importance of analysing a text meaningfully, in a way that will encourage growth.'''*

This aligns with Vygotsky's notion of scaffolding, whereby teachers support students as they move from dependence to independence within their ZPD. When educators model thinking processes, they make abstract skills observable and learnable. This method, as posited by Tacket (2021), focuses on the humanistic qualities of literature, which underscore the significance of depth, nuance, personal understanding, emotional engagement, and cultural awareness. When students see their lecturers actively practising profound literary analysis, they realise how important human involvement is in text interpretation. This can help them minimise their dependence on AI by increasing their awareness of the irreplaceable importance of their own intellectual and emotional contributions.

In agreement with this assertion, Participant 6 stated:

> *''Before confronting students with a text that is written in another language, a language that they are not comfortable with, it is important to first bring it to class for discussion. In this way the teacher can demonstrate more manageable tricks of tackling a text that is written in a foreign language. Additionally, we know that students learn the best when they share the content with their peers. If the teacher opens comfortable platforms of discussion, even those students who experience challenges can learn better from their peers and grow their analytic skills.''*

These findings again reflect both Piaget's and Vygotsky's theories: Piaget sees learning as self-regulated through action, and Vygotsky sees it as co-constructed

through dialogue. Together, they highlight that modelling and peer learning develop both individual cognition and social competence. Participant 2 also shared the same sentiment:

> *''During group discussions, students are expected to think critically about the content, explain their ideas, and defend their points of view under the guidance of the teacher. Listening to their peers exposes them to a variety of perspectives and interpretations, which can help them gain a better knowledge of the topic. This interchange of ideas can contribute to a complete and more nuanced grasp of the text under question. Students can improve their memory and comprehension of the subject at hand by debating complicated issues cooperatively.''*

These participants concur that collaborative conversations and peer-led learning can be essential in demonstrating how group participation can increase comprehension. Since literature focuses mainly on social issues and people's lived experiences, such conversations can yield authentic and enriching results, compared to the standardised responses that are generated by AI. This approach reduces AI dependence by reinforcing human creativity, intuition, and critical dialogue. As Mutanga et al. (2024) note, training and ethical integration of AI must go hand-in-hand with reinforcing human-led learning practices.

Figure 2 below illustrates how key themes emerged from the data collected during interviews:

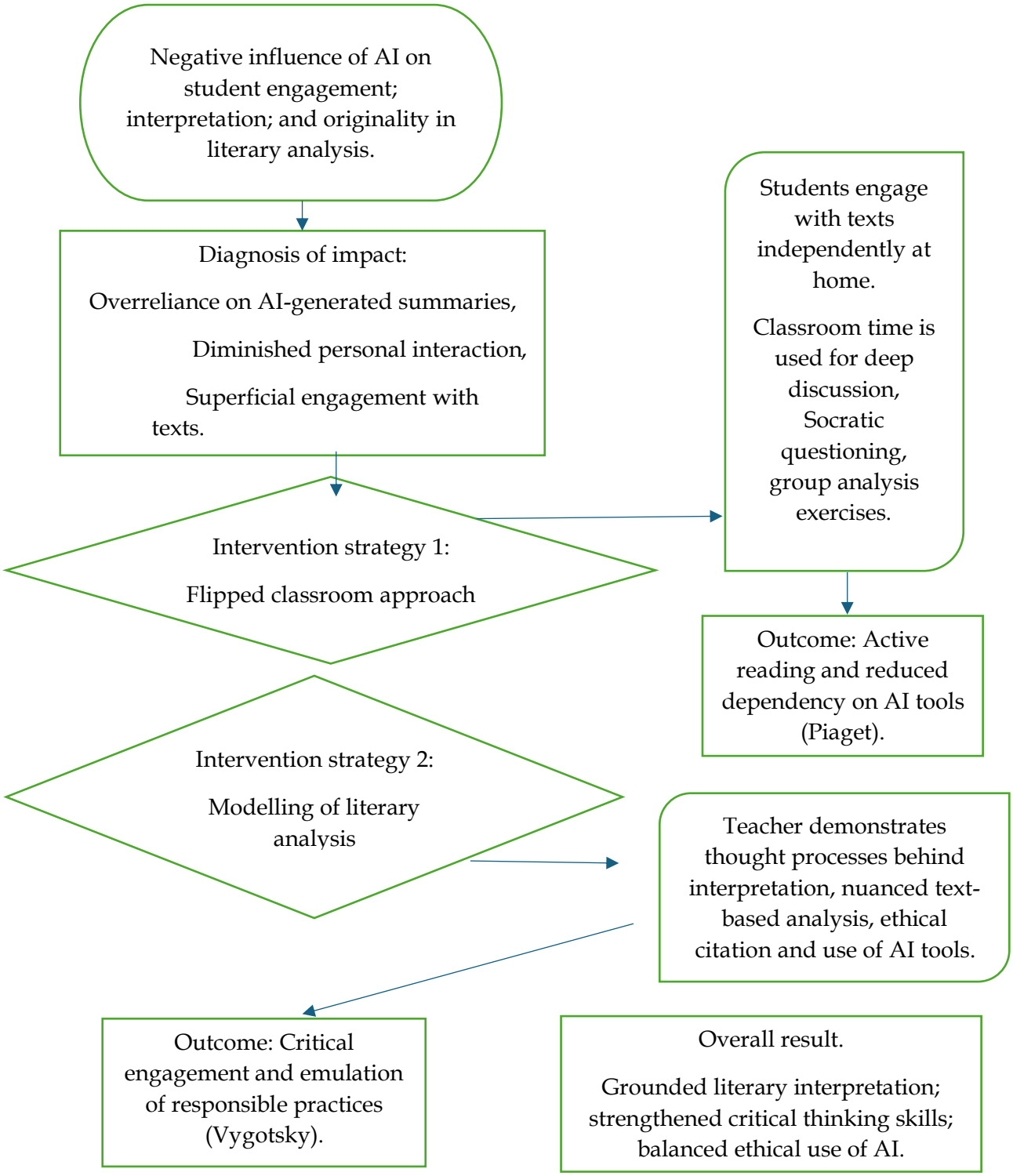

Figure 2: How thematic insights led to pedagogical recommendations

This flow chart maps the negative impact of AI on student engagement and originality in literary analysis. It then outlines two targeted interventions: flipped

classrooms (Piaget) and modelling (Vygotsky), designed to restore critical thinking, deepen interpretation, and promote ethical AI use.

These findings have long-term implications for curriculum development, particularly in the design of literature modules that now require greater emphasis on critical engagement, digital ethics, and learner autonomy. As such, this study recommends a re-evaluation of current pedagogical frameworks to ensure that students are equipped not only with technological skills but with sustained interpretive and analytical capacities. Without intentional intervention, the overreliance on AI risks eroding the very cognitive and emotional skills that literary studies aim to cultivate. Therefore, curriculum developers and educators must adopt a proactive approach, integrating innovative yet human-centred strategies that restore depth, dialogue, and reflection in the learning process. By doing so, the curriculum becomes not just a response to technological disruption, but a transformative space that reclaims the purpose of literary education in a digital age.

5. Limitations of the Study

While this study offers beneficial insights concerning the adverse impact of AI tools when used extensively in literary analysis, some limitations must be acknowledged. First, the sample size was relatively small, potentially limiting the findings' applicability to bigger populations. Furthermore, data collection relied on self-reported responses, which increased the potential for social desirability bias. Although efforts were made to ensure participant integrity, this limitation should be acknowledged when analysing the results.

The authors recommend that future research addresses these challenges by incorporating larger, diversified samples, focusing on students' perspectives regarding the use of AI, and triangulating data from multiple sources to improve reliability. Additionally, the authors suggest that future studies adopt a mixed-methods approach to complement qualitative insights with quantitative data, such as academic performance metrics, for a more comprehensive understanding.

6. Conclusion

The objective of this inquiry was to explore the impact of AI on students' academic performance and to suggest ways in which increased reliance on AI can be minimised. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews which were held with six purposively selected lecturers of English from a higher educational institution in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa. While acknowledging the benefits of AI tools in enhancing efficiency and comprehension, the findings reveal that excessive reliance on such technologies can hinder the development of critical thinking, independent interpretation, and deep literary engagement — skills fundamental to literary scholarship.

What is innovative about this study is its identification of flipped classrooms and modelling as effective, context-sensitive strategies to counter passive learning and promote active, student-centred engagement with texts. By advocating for a balanced, pedagogically-sound integration of AI, where digital tools support

rather than replace intellectual effort, this research advances the conversation on how to harness technology in a way that upholds academic integrity and fosters intellectual independence. It adds to existing knowledge by addressing the gap in literature around AI's cultural and educational implications in postcolonial, multilingual classrooms. Future research should build on these findings by including students' voices to inform responsive, ethical frameworks that enable AI to serve as a catalyst, not a substitute for critical literacy, creativity, and deeper humanistic engagement with literature.

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8. References

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