Caught between efficiency and integrity: EFL students' views on AI integration in university settings

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Universities face a critical juncture regarding artificial intelligence integration, as AI tools are rapidly transforming student practices across academic disciplines. While a significant number of quanitative surveys have been conducted on both student and faculty attitudes toward AI, it is imperative to complement them with in-depth qualitative analysis that captures the nuanced complexities of how students navigate ethical considerations and learning implications in their actual AI practices. This is particularly relevant for EFL students, who may experience unique challenges and opportunities in leveraging AI for both general academic work and foreign language development.

This study aims to investigate EFL student attitudes towards AI integration in higher education, in general, and their perspectives on AI's potential for foreign language learning, in particular. A group inteview involving five university students (including Spanish and international participants) with different backgrounds and perspectives on the topic was conducted to explore students' views on appropriate AI use across academic contexts, their academic integrity concerns, and their assessment of AI's current and potential role in foreign language learning.

While different student profiles seem to emerge even in a small group like this, findings reveal a thorough understanding of AI capabilities and limitations across academic contexts, with participants demonstrating critical awareness of bias and reliability issues. Students show a nuanced grasp of the ethical implications of AI, distinguishing between acceptable uses (exam preparation, tutoring, idea generation) and unacceptable practices (complete text generation, academic dishonesty). They demonstrate remarkable competencies in developing strategies to maximize AI benefits while preserving academic integrity, including cross-checking AI-generated content with multiple sources and using iterative prompting to enhance reliability.

Regarding AI impact on learning, participants express concerns about AI's potential negative impact on critical thinking and writing competencies. However, they value its efficiency in mechanical tasks and personalized tutoring capabilities. A significant finding is that students rarely use AI specifically for language learning, demonstrating limited awareness of AI's potential for foreign language acquisition, while recognizing its value for grammar checking and naturalness verification.

Another notable finding is that students increasingly experience anxiety about being caught cheating, which reflects growing awareness of institutional detection measures. In this respect, students hold clear expectations about university responsibilities: they advocate for AI literacy training over restrictive regulations, emphasizing the need for guidance on ethical usage rather than broad prohibitions. Furthermore, students criticize faculty's predominantly negative attitudes towards AI and expect instructors to take a more active role in guiding

students on how to best leverage AI tools to enhance learning rather than simply focusing on detection and punishment.

The study provides valuable insights into EFL student perspectives on AI integration in higher education, revealing both the complexity of current practices and the untapped potential for foreign language learning. The findings may inform institutional future policies, highlighting the need for comprehensive AI literacy education that addresses both technical skills and ethical considerations. They also show an urgent need to guide EFL students on how to take advantage of AI tools to learn foreign languages. The research advances understanding of how students balance efficiency gains with learning integrity, providing crucial evidence for developing sustainable AI integration frameworks in higher education generally and language learning specifically.