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AI and Cultural Sensitivity: Student Perceptions of How AI Handles Religion, Identity, and Tradition in Texts

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Abstract

AI tools are increasingly used by university students to comprehend literary and cultural texts, but in Libya this use becomes sensitive when texts include religion, identity, and tradition, where misrepresentation may affect respect and classroom trust. This study aims to examine students' perceptions of AI cultural sensitivity and the risks of bias in literature and culture learning at the University of Zawia. The study used a mixed-methods design, combining a questionnaire survey of 500 undergraduate students from the Faculties of Arts, Education, and Languages and Translation (124 males, 376 females) with semi-structured interviews with 10 lecturers. Survey findings show that AI use is common, with most students using AI at least weekly for text comprehension, cultural/historical context, writing support, and translation. Students reported moderate perceptions of AI cultural sensitivity, but high concern about misrepresentation, especially oversimplification of religious meanings, misunderstanding culture-specific terms, and biased framing. Students also showed a very strong preference for responsible-use governance, including verification practices, lecturer guidance, and AI literacy training. Faculty comparisons indicated higher perceived learning value among Languages and Translation students, while gender differences were minimal except for slightly stronger governance expectations among females. The study implies that AI can be integrated as a contextual support tool, but universities should provide clear guidelines and training to protect cultural respect and critical evaluation in sensitive topics.

INTRODUCTION

In literature and culture classes, students do not only learn language or plot. They also learn meanings that are connected to religion, identity, and tradition, and these meanings are sometimes sensitive in the classroom. In applied linguistics, culture is not an extra part of language learning, but it is inside the language itself and inside interpretation (Bibi & Hamida, 2024; Byram & Grundy, 2003; Siregar et al., 2020; Tri et al., 2021). For many university students, especially in EFL contexts,

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understanding a text requires understanding cultural frames, historical background, and the social values behind the words (Al Dokali et al., 2025; Baround et al., 2024; Byram, 2024). Because of this, literature learning can support intercultural competence, but it can also create misunderstanding when the cultural content is simplified or treated without respect.

Recently, AI tools, including large language models, became widely used by students for reading support, summarizing, translation, and explanation of complex passages. In higher education, research shows that AI tools are increasingly used for learning tasks, and students often see them as helpful for guidance and immediate feedback (Holmes et al., 2019; Ibrahim et al., 2025). From a learning perspective, such tools can work like platforms, because they reduce difficulty in the early stage of understanding and they help students to move from confusion to partial clarity (Piaget & Vygotsky, 2008; Swe Dberg, 1980). They can also reduce cognitive load during reading by providing quick background and vocabulary support (Sweller, 1988). For students in humanities disciplines, AI support can appear very attractive because it saves time and gives fast explanations.

However, the use of AI in interpreting culture is not a neutral practice. Many scholars warn that language technologies can reproduce social bias, stereotypes, and unequal representations, because they learn from large datasets that already contain human bias (Blodgett et al., 2020). In addition, generative models can produce fluent but incorrect information, and users may accept it because of the confident language style (Bender et al., 2021; Ji et al., 2023). This is a serious issue when the text includes religion, identity, and tradition, because inaccurate or insensitive framing may create harm, misunderstanding, or disrespect in the classroom. The problem is not only wrong facts, but also the way AI explains sensitive topics, for example by overgeneralizing cultures or presenting one cultural lens as universal (Meylani et al., 2024).

This concern is highly relevant in the Libyan context. In Libya, university students commonly study literature and culture through English, which means they interpret global texts while also protecting local values and religious sensitivities. In such settings, cultural misrepresentation is not an abstract risk. It affects students' trust, their identity positioning, and the classroom climate. Cultural identity is not fixed, but it is constructed through representation and discourse, and students can feel tension when representations do not match their lived understanding (Abrahem & Baroud, 2025; Yahya et al., 2025). Also, postcolonial critique shows that "knowledge" about culture can be produced through power and selective framing, which may influence how students judge explanations that sound authoritative (Aini et al., 2025; Alsaeh et al., 2025; Said, 1978). Therefore, using AI for cultural interpretation requires careful attention to respect, accuracy, and contextual awareness.

Despite growing literature on AI in education, there is still limited empirical research that focuses specifically on cultural sensitivity in generative AI use for literature and culture learning, especially in North African and Libyan universities. Many studies discuss adoption and performance outcomes, but fewer studies examine how students evaluate AI when the content is religious, identity-related, and socially sensitive. This is an important gap because humanities learning depend on interpretation, nuance, and ethical engagement with others' beliefs and traditions.

For these reasons, this study investigates students' perceptions of how AI

handles religion, identity, and tradition in texts across three faculties at the University of Zawia: Arts, Education, and Languages and Translation. The study aims to understand perceived cultural sensitivity, perceived bias and misrepresentation risks, perceived learning value, and students' trust and verification behaviors, while also examining whether perceptions vary across academic units and gender. In addition, interviews with lecturers provide professional insight about classroom realities, including how teachers respond to AI-supported interpretation and what guidance is needed for safe and respectful use. By combining student survey evidence with lecturer perspectives, the study contributes context-based understanding for responsible AI integration in literature and culture learning in Libya.

METHODS

This study adopted a mixed-methods design with a dominant quantitative component supported by qualitative interviews. The quantitative part used a cross-sectional survey to measure students' perceptions of AI cultural sensitivity when AI tools are used to interpret texts involving religion, identity, and tradition (Adol et al., 2025; Busral et al., 2025; Engkizar et al., 2022, 2024, 2025; Kasheem et al., 2025; Kassymova et al., 2025; Masoud & Almajri, 2025; Wekke et al., 2024). The qualitative part used semi-structured interviews with lecturers to provide deeper explanation of the survey patterns and to capture classroom realities in different disciplines. The research was conducted at the University of Zawia in 2025 across three faculties: the Faculty of Arts, the Faculty of Education, and the Faculty of Languages and Translation.

The student sample included 500 undergraduate students selected through stratified sampling to ensure representation from the three faculties and different academic levels. The sample consisted of 124 male students and 376 female students, which reflects the gender distribution available in the participating classes. Students were eligible if they were currently enrolled and had at least basic exposure to AI tools for learning, such as ChatGPT, translation tools, or writing assistants, either through course activities or self-study. In addition, ten lecturers were recruited purposively for interviews to represent courses where texts and discussions commonly include culturally sensitive themes, including religion and identity. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed for this study and administered online. The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) and included items measuring AI use and self-efficacy, perceived cultural sensitivity, perceived bias and misrepresentation risks, perceived learning value, and governance and responsible use expectations.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize patterns of perceptions, followed by inferential tests to examine differences by faculty and gender. Faculty-level differences were examined using one-way ANOVA with post-hoc comparisons where significant; while gender differences were examined using independent samples t-tests. To understand factors that predict perceptions of AI cultural sensitivity and perceived risk, multiple regression analysis was planned using variables such as AI use frequency, verification behavior, and faculty affiliation. Lecturer interviews were audio-recorded with consent, transcribed and anonymized, and analyzed thematically through coding and theme development. The qualitative themes were then compared with the survey results to support triangulation and strengthen interpretation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Demographic characteristics

The final sample included 124 male students (24.8%) and 376 female students (75.2%). Students were drawn from three faculties at the University of Zawia, with 180 students from the Faculty of Arts (36.0%), 160 from the Faculty of Education (32.0%), and 160 from the Faculty of Languages and Translation (32.0%). Representation across academic years was balanced: Year 1 (n = 130, 26.0%), Year 2 (n = 120, 24.0%), Year 3 (n = 130, 26.0%), and Year 4 (n = 120, 24.0%). In addition, prior exposure to AI tools for learning was high, with 420 students (84.0%) reporting that they had used AI tools before, while 80 students (16.0%) reported no prior use (see table 1).

Table 1. Participant demographics (N = 500)

Variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	124	24.8
	Female	376	75.2
Faculty	Arts	180	36.0
	Education	160	32.0
	Languages & Translation	160	32.0
Academic year	Year 1	130	26.0
	Year 2	120	24.0
	Year 3	130	26.0
	Year 4	120	24.0
Prior AI use	Yes	420	84.0
	No	80	16.0

Students' AI Use Patterns in Literature and Culture Learning

Frequency of AI use

Students reported frequent engagement with AI tools for learning. The results showed that 28.0% indicated daily use and 42.0% indicated weekly use, which means that around seven out of ten students were using AI tools at least weekly. Monthly use was reported by 18.0%, while 10.0% reported rare use. Only 2.0% reported never using AI tools. The pattern suggests that AI is not marginal in students' study routines; instead, it is becoming a regular support tool in literature and culture learning in the university context (see table 2).

Main purposes of use

The reported purposes of AI use show that students employ AI for both language support and cultural understanding. Most students used AI to understand course texts (72.0%), which aligns with the idea that AI is often used as a quick comprehension aid. A large proportion also used AI for writing improvement (62.0%), which is expected in humanities coursework where written assignments are frequent. More than half reported using AI for cultural and religious context (56.0%) and translation support (52.0%), which is especially relevant for students working with English texts that include culture-specific references. In addition, 40.0% used AI to generate discussion questions, suggesting that AI is also being used to prepare for class participation and seminars, not only for private reading support (see table 2).

Verification behaviors and trust practices

A clear finding in this study is that students did not present "blind trust" in

AI outputs, especially when the topic is sensitive. Most students reported that they verify AI information either often (56.0%) or sometimes (34.0%), while only a small minority reported rarely (9.0%) or never (1.0%) verifying (see table 2). This verification tendency is also consistent with the high agreement on the item about trusting AI explanations only after confirming with sources (E25; M = 4.24, SD = 0.83) and the strong agreement that AI should state uncertainty in sensitive cultural information (E26; M = 4.32, SD = 0.79). In the Libyan context, where religion and tradition are socially important, this pattern suggests that students prefer a careful and respectful approach, and they are aware that AI can produce confident answers that still require checking with credible references (Alrumayh, 2025; Baroud, 2024; Kasheem et al., 2025).

Table 2. AI use profile

Indicator	Response	n	%
AI use frequency	Daily	140	28.0
	Weekly	210	42.0
	Monthly	90	18.0
	Rarely	50	10.0
	Never	10	2.0
Main purposes *(multiple allowed)*	Understanding texts	360	72.0
	Cultural/religious context	280	56.0
	Writing improvement	310	62.0
	Translation support	260	52.0
	Generating discussion questions	200	40.0
Verification behavior	Often verify	280	56.0
	Sometimes verify	170	34.0
	Rarely verify	45	9.0
	Never verify	5	1.0

Item-Level Results by Construct

AI Use and Self-Efficacy (A1–A5)

At the item level, students showed a generally high engagement with AI for academic learning. The strongest agreement in this construct was for verifying AI answers (A5; M = 4.03, SD = 0.98), which indicates that many students used AI but still tried to confirm the information through other sources. Students also reported high use of AI tools for academic purposes (A1; M = 3.98, SD = 0.99) and for understanding course texts (A2; M = 3.77, SD = 1.05). In comparison, confidence in prompting AI was more moderate (A4; M = 3.22, SD = 1.17), suggesting that many students use AI but still feel they need better skills to ask questions and guide the tool effectively. Using AI for cultural and religious references (A3; M = 3.40, SD = 1.15) was also moderate, which reflects that students use AI for sensitive content, but not as strongly as for general comprehension and writing support.

Code	Item	Mean	SD
A1	Used AI tools for academic learning	3.98	0.99
A2	Use AI to understand course texts	3.77	1.05
A3	Use AI for cultural/religious references	3.40	1.15
A4	Confident in prompting AI	3.22	1.17

A5	Usually verify AI answers	4.03	0.98

Perceived Cultural Sensitivity in AI Responses (B6–B12)

Students' ratings of AI cultural sensitivity were mostly in the mid-range, showing a careful and not fully confident evaluation. The highest item in this construct was the perception that AI is respectful when discussing religious topics (B6; M = 3.58, SD = 1.09). Students also tended to agree that AI avoids offensive wording (B9; M = 3.46, SD = 1.10) and that AI recognizes that religious issues are sensitive (B7; M = 3.44, SD = 1.11). However, the items connected to deeper cultural nuance were weaker. For example, students were less convinced that AI avoids "one-culture" generalization (B10; M = 3.18, SD = 1.09) and less convinced that AI discusses identity issues in a balanced way (B11; M = 3.10, SD = 1.09). The lowest item in this construct was the perception that AI discusses tradition without stereotyping (B12; M = 3.02, SD = 1.08). This pattern suggests that students see AI as usually polite in language, but not always accurate in cultural complexity and diversity, which is a key issue when texts discuss religion, identity, and tradition (Alrumayh, 2025; Baroud & Aljarmi, 2025; Elihami et al., 2024).

Code	Item	Mean	SD
B6	AI is respectful on religious topics	3.58	1.09
B7	AI recognizes religious sensitivity	3.44	1.11
B8	AI explains traditions appropriately	3.29	1.10
B9	AI avoids offensive wording	3.46	1.10
B10	AI avoids one-culture generalization	3.18	1.09
B11	AI discusses identity issues balanced	3.10	1.09
B12	AI discusses tradition without stereotyping	3.02	1.08

Perceived Bias and Misrepresentation Risk (C13–C18)

Students reported relatively high concern about bias and misrepresentation risk. Many students agreed that AI can misunderstand culture-specific terms (C16; M = 3.81, SD = 0.97), and they also reported noticing contradictions or factual errors in AI explanations about culture and religion (C18; M = 3.67, SD = 1.03). A strong concern was also seen in worry about misrepresentation of their culture or religion (C17; M = 3.96, SD = 0.94), which is important in the Libyan context where religion and tradition are central values in social life and education. Students also agreed that AI oversimplifies religious ideas (C13; M = 3.69, SD = 1.03) and may reflect biased perspectives (C15; M = 3.62, SD = 1.05). Perceived stereotyping was also present (C14; M = 3.52, SD = 1.07). This overall pattern supports concerns from the wider literature that AI systems can reproduce representational bias and produce fluent but unreliable outputs, especially in culturally sensitive topics (Shalghoum et al., 2025; Syarifaturrahmatullah et al., 2025; Yahya et al., 2025).

Code	Item	Mean	SD
C13	AI oversimplifies religious ideas	3.69	1.03
C14	AI presents cultural stereotypes	3.52	1.07
C15	AI reflects biased perspectives	3.62	1.05
C16	AI misunderstands culture-specific terms	3.81	0.97
C17	Worry AI misrepresents my culture/religion	3.96	0.94
C18	Noticed contradictions/errors in cultural info	3.67	1.03

Perceived Learning Value of AI for Text Interpretation (D19–D24)

Students generally valued AI for learning support, particularly for context and background understanding. The strongest item in this construct was that AI helps

with cultural and historical context (D19; M = 3.95, SD = 0.92). Students also agreed that AI is better for context than for deep interpretation (D24; M = 3.86, SD = 0.95), which suggests that students position AI as a support tool rather than an authority for literary meaning. Items on comparison across texts and cultures also received positive ratings (D21; M = 3.57, SD = 1.05), and many students agreed that AI supports learning without replacing their own interpretation (D22; M = 3.54, SD = 1.08). Interest increase was more moderate (D23; M = 3.42, SD = 1.12), meaning AI may help comprehension, but it does not always create stronger motivation for reading. Overall, these findings fit the educational idea that tools can support understanding and reduce difficulty in early reading stages, but higher-level interpretation still requires human judgment and critical reading (Muttaqin et al., 2026; Setiawan et al., 2023; Shalghoum et al., 2025).

Code	Item	Mean	SD
D19	AI helps cultural/historical context	3.95	0.92
D20	AI helps generate discussion questions	3.67	1.03
D21	AI helps compare cultures across texts	3.57	1.05
D22	AI supports learning without replacing interpretation	3.54	1.08
D23	AI increases interest in cultural background	3.42	1.12
D24	AI better for context than deep interpretation	3.86	0.95

Governance and Responsible-Use Expectations (E25–E30)

This construct had the strongest agreement across the whole questionnaire. Students strongly agreed that they trust AI explanations about religion and culture only after confirming with sources (E25; M = 4.24, SD = 0.83) and that AI should clearly state uncertainty when discussing sensitive cultural information (E26; M = 4.32, SD = 0.79). Students also showed very strong support for lecturer guidance (E27; M = 4.40, SD = 0.74) and for AI literacy training (E29; M = 4.45, SD = 0.71). Monitoring AI use in sensitive topics was also rated high (E28; M = 4.27, SD = 0.83). Preference for education-focused AI tools designed with cultural sensitivity was also strong (E30; M = 4.16, SD = 0.89). This pattern is consistent with international guidance that emphasizes transparency, training, and ethical governance when AI is used in education (Abdulghani et al., 2025; Lestari et al., 2025).

Code	Item	Mean	SD
E25	Trust AI only after confirming sources	4.24	0.83
E26	AI should state uncertainty on sensitive info	4.32	0.79
E27	Lecturers should provide AI guidelines	4.40	0.74
E28	AI use should be monitored in sensitive topics	4.27	0.83
E29	Students need AI literacy training	4.45	0.71
E30	Prefer education-focused culturally sensitive AI tools	4.16	0.89

Scale-Level Descriptive Statistics

Composite score results for each scale

Composite scores were calculated by averaging the items in each subscale, which is a common approach when reliability is acceptable (DeVellis & Thorpe, 2021). The highest overall scale was Governance and Responsible Use Expectations (M = 4.31, SD = 0.62), showing strong support for guidance, training, and cautious use. Learning Value was also relatively high (M = 3.67, SD = 0.77), and AI Use and

Self-efficacy was similarly high (M = 3.68, SD = 0.80), suggesting frequent use combined with moderate confidence. Bias/Misrepresentation Risk was also high (M = 3.71, SD = 0.81), indicating that students recognize risks while still using AI. Perceived Cultural Sensitivity was the lowest scale (M = 3.30, SD = 0.72), which suggests that students are not fully confident that AI handles religion, identity, and tradition with the required nuance. The full scale means, standard deviations, and reliability coefficients are presented in table 4.

Table 4. Scale construction and reliability

Scale	Items	k	Mean	SD	Cronbach's α
AI Use & Self-efficacy	A1–A5	5	3.68	0.80	0.82
Cultural Sensitivity	B6–B12	7	3.30	0.72	0.79
Bias/Misrepresentation Risk	C13–C18	6	3.71	0.81	0.81
Learning Value	D19–D24	6	3.67	0.77	0.83
Governance & Responsible Use	E25–E30	6	4.31	0.62	0.86

Highest- and lowest-rated items across the questionnaire

Across all items, the strongest agreement was for the need for AI literacy training (E29; M = 4.45, SD = 0.71) and the need for lecturers to provide guidelines (E27; M = 4.40, SD = 0.74). Students also strongly supported AI stating uncertainty (E26; M = 4.32, SD = 0.79). These results show a clear message from students that AI should be used with structured support and clear boundaries. In contrast, the lowest item mean was for AI discussing tradition without stereotyping (B12; M = 3.02, SD = 1.08), followed closely by AI discussing identity issues in a balanced way (B11; M = 3.10, SD = 1.09). This suggests that students are more skeptical about AI performance in deeper cultural nuance, even if they see AI as polite and helpful for general context.

Group Differences

Faculty differences (Arts vs. Education vs. Languages & Translation)

Faculty comparisons were conducted using one-way ANOVA to test differences in composite scale scores across the three faculties (Field, 2018). Significant differences were found for Perceived Cultural Sensitivity, Bias/Misrepresentation Risk, and Learning Value. For Cultural Sensitivity, Languages and Translation students reported higher perceptions (M = 3.45, SD = 0.71) compared with Arts (M = 3.20, SD = 0.73) and Education (M = 3.25, SD = 0.70), and the overall difference was significant, $F(2, 497) = 6.80$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .027$. For Learning Value, Languages and Translation again reported higher scores (M = 3.85, SD = 0.76) than Arts (M = 3.55, SD = 0.78) and Education (M = 3.60, SD = 0.75), with a significant difference, $F(2, 497) = 8.95$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .035$. Bias/Misrepresentation Risk also differed by faculty, $F(2, 497) = 3.20$, $p = .041$, $\eta^2 = .013$, with Languages and Translation reporting slightly higher risk awareness (M = 3.80, SD = 0.80) than Arts (M = 3.60, SD = 0.83). Governance and Responsible Use did not show a significant faculty difference, $F(2, 497) = 2.05$, $p = .130$, indicating that strong demand for guidance and training was shared across faculties. The ANOVA results (means by faculty, F, p, and η^2) are presented in table 5.

Table 5. Faculty differences (ANOVA) on main scales

Outcome scale	Arts Mean (SD) n=180	Education Mean (SD) n=160	Languages Translation Mean (SD) n=160	F (2,497)	p	η^2
Cultural	3.20	3.25 (0.70)	3.45 (0.71)	6.80	.001	.027

Sensitivity	(0.73)					
Bias/Misrep Risk	3.60 (0.83)	3.75 (0.79)	3.80 (0.80)	3.20	.041	.013
Learning Value	3.55 (0.78)	3.60 (0.75)	3.85 (0.76)	8.95	<.001	.035
Governance/ Responsible Use	4.25 (0.64)	4.40 (0.60)	4.28 (0.61)	2.05	.130	.008

Post-hoc comparisons for significant faculty effects

Post-hoc Tukey tests were used to locate where the significant differences occurred. For Cultural Sensitivity, the main significant difference appeared between Languages and Translation and Arts, with Languages and Translation reporting higher scores. For Learning Value, Languages and Translation was significantly higher than both Arts and Education, suggesting that students in this faculty may be more experienced in using AI for language-related tasks such as translation, vocabulary, and contextual explanation, which can make AI feel more useful in their learning context. For Bias/Misrepresentation Risk, the post-hoc results suggested a small but meaningful difference between Languages and Translation and Arts, indicating that students who work more with language and cross-cultural meaning may also be more sensitive to risks of misinterpretation and bias.

Gender differences

Gender differences were examined using independent-samples t-tests. Most scales did not show statistically significant differences between male and female students. AI Use and Self-efficacy was slightly higher for males (M = 3.78, SD = 0.80) than females (M = 3.65, SD = 0.78), but this difference was not significant, t = 1.58, p = .116. Cultural Sensitivity also showed no difference, t = -0.54, p = .591, and Learning Value was almost identical, t = -0.12, p = .901. Bias/Misrepresentation Risk was slightly higher among females (M = 3.75, SD = 0.80) than males (M = 3.60, SD = 0.82), but the difference did not reach significance, t = -1.78, p = .077. The only significant gender difference appeared in Governance and Responsible Use Expectations, where females reported slightly higher scores (M = 4.34, SD = 0.60) than males (M = 4.20, SD = 0.65), t = -2.12, p = .035, though the effect size was small (d = -0.23). This result may suggest that female students in this sample expressed stronger preference for caution, guidance, and training when AI is used with religion, identity, and tradition topics.

Table 7. Gender differences (t-test) on main scales

Outcome scale	Male Mean (SD) n=124	Female Mean (SD) n=376	t	df	p	Cohen's d
AI Use & Self-efficacy	3.78 (0.80)	3.65 (0.78)	1.58	205.6	.116	0.17
Cultural Sensitivity	3.27 (0.72)	3.31 (0.71)	-0.54	207.5	.591	-0.06
Bias/Misrep Risk	3.60 (0.82)	3.75 (0.80)	-1.78	205.7	.077	-0.19
Learning Value	3.66 (0.78)	3.67 (0.77)	-0.12	207.7	.901	-0.01
Governance Responsible Use	4.20 (0.65)	4.34 (0.60)	-2.12	196.7	.035	-0.23

Lecturer Interview Results

Perceived benefits of AI in literature/culture learning

Across the ten lecturer interviews, most participants described AI as a useful support tool for students, especially in courses that require heavy reading in English and frequent writing tasks. Nine lecturers stated that AI can help students reach basic understanding faster by providing background information about historical periods, cultural customs, and key concepts that appear in texts. This was seen as helpful in the Libyan EFL context, where students may struggle with unfamiliar cultural references and limited access to academic resources. Eight lecturers also said AI helps students with language support such as vocabulary, paraphrasing, and improving clarity in written responses, and they considered this benefit important for students who feel anxiety when writing about complex literature and cultural issues.

Perceived risks in religion, identity, and tradition topics

At the same time, lecturers expressed strong concerns about using AI when texts involve religion, identity, and tradition. Eight lecturers reported that AI explanations can oversimplify sensitive issues and reduce complex religious meanings to short "general summaries," which may lead students to misunderstand the text or the cultural context. Seven lecturers stated that AI sometimes uses wording that is not appropriate for religious topics, not necessarily in an intentionally offensive way, but because the tool may not recognize what is culturally respectful in a Libyan classroom. Six lecturers also mentioned that AI can present a Western-centered framing when interpreting tradition or identity, and this can influence students' interpretation because AI answers appear confident and authoritative. These concerns connect with wider research on representational harm and bias in AI outputs, where language models may reproduce stereotypes or dominant narratives from their training data (Bender et al., 2021; Blodgett et al., 2020; Rahman, 2020).

Classroom strategies used by lecturers

Most lecturers reported that they already apply practical strategies to reduce risk when students use AI. Nine lecturers emphasized verification as the first rule, meaning students should cross-check AI outputs with credible sources such as textbooks, academic articles, and lecturer-provided readings. Many lecturers said they encourage students to treat AI as a "starting point" rather than a final reference. Several lecturers explained that they give guidance on how students can ask more careful questions, including asking AI to provide multiple interpretations and to cite sources, although they also noted that AI may still provide false citations. In addition, lecturers described setting boundaries for acceptable use. For example, they allow AI for brainstorming, vocabulary explanation, or background context, but they discourage using AI to produce full interpretations or complete written assignments because this may reduce critical thinking and raise academic integrity concerns. These strategies reflect the importance of governance and transparency in educational AI use (Al Dokali et al., 2025; Holmes et al., 2019).

Recommendations for institutional policy and student training

All interviewed lecturers (10 out of 10) recommended that the University of Zawia should develop clear institutional guidance for AI use in humanities courses, with special attention to sensitive topics. They suggested that policy should clarify what is permitted and what is not permitted in assignments, and it should define ethical boundaries, especially for translation tasks involving religious or culturally

loaded terms. Lecturers also strongly recommended structured student training in AI literacy. This training, according to their views, should include how to evaluate accuracy, how to identify bias and stereotyping, how to verify information, and how to use AI responsibly without replacing personal interpretation. Some lecturers also proposed short workshops for staff, because teachers themselves need practical understanding of AI limitations and classroom management strategies when students bring AI into literature and culture learning.

Triangulation: convergence and divergence with survey results

When comparing lecturer themes with the student survey, there was strong convergence in several areas. First, lecturers' view that AI is mainly helpful for cultural and historical context strongly matches student results where the highest learning value item was AI support for context (D19) and where students also agreed that AI is better for context than deep interpretation (D24). Second, lecturer concerns about oversimplification, misunderstandings of culture-specific terms, and Western-centered framing align with the survey pattern showing high perceived misrepresentation risk, including high agreement on misunderstanding cultural terms (C16) and worry about misrepresentation (C17). Third, lecturers' emphasis on verification and guidelines matches the students' strong governance expectations, especially the high agreement on confirming sources (E25) and the need for lecturer guidance and training (E27, E29).

A small divergence appeared in the level of trust in AI "respectfulness." Some students rated AI as generally respectful in religious discussion (B6), while lecturers were more cautious, explaining that respectful language is not enough if the interpretation is inaccurate or culturally insensitive in meaning. This difference suggests that students may judge sensitivity mainly through polite wording, while lecturers focus more on deeper cultural accuracy and interpretive responsibility. This point is important because it indicates that AI literacy training should not only teach students how to avoid offensive language, but also how to recognize subtle bias, oversimplification, and the limits of AI knowledge in religion and identity topics (Bender et al., 2021; Ibrahim et al., 2025).

Overall pattern of usefulness versus risk

This study aimed to understand how students perceive AI when it explains texts that include religion, identity, and tradition. The results show a clear "benefit–risk" pattern. On the benefit side, students reported that AI is useful mainly for cultural and historical context, and this was reflected in the high rating for AI helping context understanding and the view that AI is better for context than deep interpretation. This matches the idea that digital tools often function as learning support that helps students access background information quickly. On the risk side, students also reported high concerns about misrepresentation, especially misunderstanding culture-specific terms, oversimplifying religious ideas, and producing biased perspectives. This combination suggests that students are not rejecting AI, but they are using it with caution because they know that cultural meaning is sensitive and not only factual. Similar discussions appear in the literature where AI is described as helpful in productivity, but also risky in accuracy and bias, especially when the system produces fluent language that looks correct (Bender et al., 2021; Yahya et al., 2025).

Strong demand for guidance and training in sensitive topics

One of the strongest findings in this study is the high demand for guidance and training. Students strongly agreed that lecturers should provide AI-use

guidelines and that students need AI literacy training. They also strongly preferred that AI should clearly state uncertainty when discussing sensitive content. This is important because it shows students want "structured use" rather than informal use. International guidance also emphasizes that educational AI should be supported by policy, transparency, and capacity building so that learners can evaluate AI outputs critically, especially in domains related to identity and values (Holmes et al., 2019; Maati et al., 2025). In our context, students' strong agreement on verification also indicates a serious attitude toward responsible learning and not only convenience.

Why Students Perceive AI as Helpful for Context More Than Deep Interpretation

Scaffolding and cognitive support in EFL literature reading

In EFL literature learning, students often face two challenges at the same time: language difficulty and cultural unfamiliarity. AI can reduce the burden by explaining vocabulary, summarizing key points, and giving quick background. This is similar to the concept of scaffolding, where learners receive support to reach understanding that they cannot reach alone at the beginning, then they gradually build independent skills (Swe Dberg, 1978). Also, cognitive load theory helps explain why students value AI for context, because reading literature in a second language can create heavy mental load, and external support can reduce confusion and free attention for comprehension (Sweller, 1988). Because of this, students may see AI as a practical tool for "getting into the text" rather than a tool for final interpretation.

The role of language difficulty and time-saving needs in the Libyan context

The Libyan university context can increase the value of quick explanation. Students often manage multiple courses, and in many cases they have limited access to academic databases or recent books compared with larger international universities. In this situation, AI becomes attractive because it provides immediate help. This does not mean students fully trust it, but it means AI fits the reality of time pressure and language difficulties. Research on AI adoption in education shows that perceived usefulness and convenience are key reasons for student use, even when concerns about ethics or accuracy exist (Al Dokali et al., 2025; Masoud & Almajri, 2025). Therefore, the high learning value scores in this study can be understood as a response to local learning needs.

AI as support for background knowledge, not as an "interpretation authority"

A key point in the results is that students see AI more as a tool for background knowledge than for deep interpretation. Literature and culture learning require nuance, ambiguity, and critical engagement with multiple meanings, which is different from short factual explanation. Many students reported that AI supports learning without replacing their own interpretation, which shows they still see interpretation as a human role. This is important because it suggests students can distinguish between "information" and "meaning-making." In literature education, interpretation involves values, discourse, and positioning, and it is shaped by social context (Byram & Grundy, 2003). AI can support access to information, but it cannot replace human responsibility in interpreting religion and identity topics with care.

Explaining High Concern About Misrepresentation and Bias

Oversimplification, stereotyping, and cultural generalization

Students' concern about misrepresentation is consistent with research that shows language technologies can reproduce stereotypes and biased associations. Even when AI uses polite language, it may still generalize cultures or present simplified narratives that are not accurate. Critical research in NLP argues that bias is not only a technical issue but also a social and political issue, because language systems reflect power relations in the data used to train them (Blodgett et al., 2020). When students in this study reported concern about stereotypes and biased perspectives, they were not only worrying about "incorrect answers," but also about how cultures are represented.

Religion and tradition as high-stakes content in students' learning experience

In Libya, religion and tradition are not only academic topics; they are part of social identity and everyday life. So, when AI explains religious concepts or traditions in texts, errors or insensitive framing can create strong discomfort and distrust. The high worry about misrepresenting culture or religion shows that cultural sensitivity is a high-stakes issue for students. From a cultural studies perspective, identity is shaped through representation, and misrepresentation can harm how groups are understood and respected (Husin et al., 2025; Masuwd, 2025; Pulungan et al., 2025). For this reason, students' concerns should be treated as valid educational and ethical concerns, not only as "technology anxiety."

Trust, uncertainty, and the problem of confident errors

Another reason for high concern is the problem of confident errors. Generative AI can produce fluent answers that sound certain even when they include mistakes or unsupported claims. This is discussed in the literature as a risk of "hallucination" and overconfidence in AI outputs (Ji et al., 2023). In sensitive topics, this is more serious because an incorrect explanation can be accepted by students and then repeated in classroom discussion. The strong student agreement that AI should state uncertainty and that they trust AI only after confirming sources reflects awareness of this problem. It also suggests that educational use must include practices for verification and source evaluation.

Interpreting Faculty Differences

Why Languages & Translation students show higher perceived learning value

The study found that Languages and Translation students reported higher learning value and higher perceived cultural sensitivity than students in Arts and Education. One possible explanation is that Languages and Translation students use AI more often for language-related tasks like translation, paraphrasing, and vocabulary, so they experience direct usefulness. Also, translation training increases attention to nuance in meaning and cultural context. This may make these students more able to use AI strategically while still noticing risks. In addition, their curriculum may give more exposure to cross-cultural communication, which can improve their ability to evaluate whether AI explanations fit the text context (Byram & Grundy, 2003).

Education students' stronger governance expectations

Education students showed relatively strong governance expectations in the faculty comparisons, even when the overall scale did not differ strongly by faculty. This pattern is understandable because education students often think about

teaching responsibility, classroom ethics, and how tools affect learners. They may see AI use not only as personal study support, but also as something that needs rules and training. In educational research, technology integration is often linked to the need for policy and teacher guidance, not only access (Masuwd, 2025). Therefore, it is reasonable that Education students emphasize training and monitoring more clearly.

Arts students' positioning toward interpretation and cultural debate

Arts students in this study tended to report lower perceived cultural sensitivity and lower learning value compared with Languages and Translation. One possible explanation is that Arts students may be more focused on debate, critical interpretation, and theoretical perspectives, so they may be more skeptical of simplified AI outputs. In disciplines that value interpretive complexity, students may see AI summaries as reducing ambiguity and weakening the depth of reading. This fits the idea that literature interpretation is not a single answer task but a discussion space that requires careful argument and contextual reading (Byram & Grundy, 2003; Manshur et al., 2025; Paisun et al., 2024).

Interpreting Gender Differences

Patterns of risk-awareness and precaution in responsible use

Most gender differences were not significant, which suggests that male and female students share similar patterns of AI use and evaluation. The only significant difference was for governance and responsible use, where female students scored slightly higher, although the effect size was small. This may reflect stronger precaution and risk-awareness rather than major differences in ability or interest. In sensitive cultural topics, small differences may appear because students respond differently to possible harm and disrespect. However, since the effect size is small, this result should be interpreted carefully and not overstated.

Cultural explanation without stereotyping in discussing gender effects

When discussing gender differences, it is important not to stereotype male or female students as "more ethical" or "less ethical." The current data only suggests a small difference in preference for guidance and training. In future studies, it would be useful to explore whether gender interacts with other factors such as faculty, academic year, AI experience, and personal confidence in critical evaluation. This would help avoid simple explanations and provide a more accurate understanding of student behaviour.

Lecturer Perspectives as Explanatory Evidence

How lecturer themes clarify student survey patterns

Lecturer interviews strongly supported the student survey pattern. Lecturers reported that AI is helpful for scaffolding context and language support, which matches students' high rating for context learning value. Lecturers also highlighted risks such as oversimplification, culturally sensitive missteps, and Western-centric framing, which matches students' high perceived risk and worry about misrepresentation. This convergence strengthens the credibility of the findings, because both groups describe similar issues from different viewpoints.

Lecturer role in mediating ethical AI use and respectful classroom dialogue

Lecturers described themselves as mediators who can turn AI use into a safe learning activity rather than a risky shortcut. Their emphasis on verification, boundaries, and respectful discussion shows that teacher guidance is essential. This aligns with educational views that technology cannot replace pedagogy; instead, teachers shape how tools are used through tasks, rules, and feedback (Holmes et

al., 2019; Maati et al., 2025). When the topic is religion or identity, the lecturer role becomes more important because classroom discourse requires respect and careful framing.

Practical classroom guidance for religion, identity, and tradition topics

Lecturers suggested practical steps such as requiring students to cross-check AI outputs, limiting AI use to brainstorming and context support, and discouraging AI-generated full interpretations or full assignment writing. They also emphasized that students should learn how to ask careful prompts, request multiple viewpoints, and avoid provocative framing. These suggestions are consistent with international advice that encourages responsible use, transparency, and skill development in generative AI (Alriteemi et al., 2025; Kasheem et al., 2025; Lestari et al., 2025).

Implications for Teaching, Curriculum, and Policy at the University of Zawia

Suggested guidelines for ethical AI use in literature and culture learning

Based on the results, the university should consider clear guidelines that define acceptable and unacceptable AI use in literature and culture courses. Guidelines can allow AI for vocabulary, background context, and brainstorming, but they should require students to cite real sources and to produce their own interpretation and argument. Guidelines should also include a specific note about sensitive topics, stating that religious and cultural explanations must be checked and discussed respectfully, and that students should not rely on AI as a final authority. This fits with the idea that AI governance in education should be proactive and values-based (Masoud & Almajri, 2025; Unesco, 2022).

AI literacy training needs (verification, sources, prompts, cultural respect)

Students' strong demand for training suggests that short workshops or course-integrated training sessions are needed. Training should focus on how to verify AI outputs, how to evaluate reliability, how to identify bias and stereotyping, and how to use strong prompts responsibly. It should also teach students that AI may provide confident answers without evidence, and that they must look for supporting sources. Research on AI in higher education also highlights that institutional capacity-building is required so that AI becomes a support for learning rather than a threat to integrity (Al Dokali et al., 2025; Yahya et al., 2025).

Implications for translation tasks involving religious/cultural terms

For the Faculty of Languages and Translation, the findings have a special implication. Translation tasks often include religious terms and culturally loaded expressions where small changes can alter meaning. Therefore, if students use AI translation, they must be trained to check meaning, register, and cultural appropriateness. AI outputs should be treated as drafts that require human revision and cultural judgment. This is important because translation is not only linguistic replacement; it is cultural mediation, and sensitive content requires careful responsibility (Alrumayh et al., 2025; Idris et al., 2022). For this reason, translation courses may need specific policies and assessment designs that encourage responsible AI use while protecting academic integrity and cultural respect.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how students at the University of Zawia perceive generative AI when it is used to support learning in literature and culture courses, especially when texts include religion, identity, and tradition. Overall, the findings show a balanced picture. Students widely use AI for academic purposes and they

see clear benefits, mainly in helping them access cultural and historical context, clarify difficult language, and support writing and translation tasks. At the same time, students show strong awareness that AI can misrepresent culture and religion through oversimplification, stereotyping, and misunderstanding culture-specific terms. In the Libyan context, these risks are not small, because cultural and religious meanings are sensitive and closely connected to students' identity and classroom respect. Therefore, the main conclusion is that AI can be a helpful learning aid, but it cannot be treated as an interpretation authority, and it must be integrated with careful verification and ethical guidance.

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Author contribution

Khuloud Alouzi & Mowafg Masuwd: data curation, writing-original draft preparation, **Abdulrauf Atia & Sara Omran**: conceptualization, methodology, **Safa Alrumayh & Hajer Albshkar**: visualization, **Entisar Alatrish**: editing, analysis.

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The data and the grammatical structure in this article have been validated and verified by English language experts and no AI-generated sentences are included in this article.

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