Knowledge and Adoption of AI Research Assistants Among Postgraduate Students in Taraba State University Jalingo

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the knowledge and adoption of Artificial Intelligence (AI) research assistants such as ChatGPT, Elicit, and Scholarcy among postgraduate students of Taraba State University, Jalingo. The study was guided by the Diffusion of Innovation Theory, which explains how new technologies spread among users based on perceived usefulness, ease of use, and institutional support. Using a descriptive survey design, data were collected from a sample of 358 postgraduate students drawn from a population of 3,367 across all programmes in the College of Postgraduate Studies. The findings revealed that a majority of the students were familiar with AI research assistants and actively used them for tasks such as literature review, idea generation, and academic writing. However, challenges such as inadequate training, limited internet access, and unclear institutional policies hindered optimal use. The study concludes that while postgraduate students demonstrate a growing interest and reliance on AI tools for research, institutional support, digital literacy programmes, and ethical guidelines are crucial to promote responsible and effective use. It recommends that universities should integrate AI literacy and ethical standards into postgraduate training, enhance infrastructure, and encourage supervisors to support AI-assisted academic work to strengthen research quality and innovation.

Keywords: *Artificial Intelligence, AI Research Assistants, Postgraduate Students, Knowledge, Adoption, Taraba State University, Diffusion of Innovation Theory*

1. INTRODUCTION

The growing presence of artificial intelligence (AI) in higher education has changed how students approach research, writing, and learning. AI research assistants such as ChatGPT, Elicit, and Scholarcy are increasingly being used by postgraduate students to support tasks like literature search, idea generation, data organisation, and writing guidance. These tools, powered by machine learning and natural language processing, are reshaping the traditional research process by making it faster and more interactive (Dwivedi et al., 2023; Zhai, 2023). For postgraduate students, who often face pressure to produce high-quality research within tight timeframes, AI assistants offer opportunities to improve productivity and access vast amounts of knowledge with relative ease (Gupta et al., 2024).

Scholars have argued that while AI tools can enhance research effectiveness, their adoption is shaped by students' awareness, digital literacy, and perceptions of credibility. Some studies highlight that postgraduate students use AI research assistants to simplify literature review and brainstorming, but concerns remain regarding ethical issues, accuracy, and over-dependence on these systems (Kasneci et al., 2023; Farrokhnia et al., 2023). Other research suggests that adoption is not only influenced by the perceived usefulness of AI tools but also by institutional support and the extent to which lecturers encourage or discourage their use (Tack & Piech, 2024). These debates show that the integration of AI research assistants in academic work is complex, involving both opportunities for academic growth and challenges around trust, originality, and responsible use.

The researcher views that, this is very relevant because many postgraduate students in Taraba State University, Jalingo, are at a stage where they must balance coursework, independent research, and professional responsibilities. I have personally observed that some students are eager to embrace AI tools, while others hesitate due to lack of knowledge or fear of being accused of academic dishonesty. I believe that understanding the extent of knowledge and adoption among postgraduate students is crucial, as it can reveal not only how students are engaging with these tools but also the challenges that may hinder their effective use.

The significance of this study lies in its focus on postgraduate students in Taraba State University, an institution where access to research materials and resources is often limited compared to larger universities in Nigeria. By examining knowledge and adoption of AI research assistants in this context, the study sheds light on how digital innovations are shaping academic practices in a semi-urban environment. This is particularly important because existing literature has largely concentrated on AI use in developed countries or elite institutions, leaving a gap in understanding its impact in universities situated in less-resourced settings (Aljanabi, 2023; Ameen et al., 2024). Addressing this gap will contribute to the growing body of work on AI in education and help provide insights into how postgraduate students in Jalingo are adapting to global technological trends.

1.2 Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study are to;

i. To assess the level of knowledge postgraduate students at Taraba State University have about AI research assistants.

ii. To examine the extent of adoption of AI research assistants among postgraduate students.

ii. To identify the challenges postgraduate students face in using AI research assistants.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by the Diffusion of Innovation Theory (DOI), developed by Everett Rogers in 1962. The theory explains how new ideas, technologies, or practices spread within a social system over time. Rogers identified that the adoption of an innovation depends on certain key factors, which include the perceived advantage of the innovation, its compatibility with users' needs and values, its complexity or simplicity, the possibility of trying it out, and the visibility of its results. He also categorised adopters into five groups: innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards. These groups represent how quickly different people take up an innovation, with some being quick to embrace new ideas while others are more resistant (Rogers, 2003; Surry & Brennan, 2020).

The relevance of the Diffusion of Innovation Theory to this research lies in its ability to explain how postgraduate students at Taraba State University get to know about and adopt AI research assistants. For example, some students may be innovators who are eager to try AI tools like ChatGPT, Elicit, or Scholarcy as soon as they become available. Others may wait until they see classmates benefiting from these tools before deciding to adopt them. The framework also makes it possible to examine how knowledge about AI research assistants spreads among students, and how perceptions of usefulness, ease of use, and academic credibility influence adoption decisions (Aljanabi, 2023; Haleem et al., 2022). In this way, the theory provides a clear guide for understanding both the awareness and adoption levels of AI tools in the context of postgraduate research.

Despite its wide acceptance, the Diffusion of Innovation Theory has faced criticisms. One major criticism is that it assumes adoption happens in a relatively linear and predictable manner, whereas in real life, adoption is often influenced by complex cultural, institutional, and social factors that cannot be neatly fitted into adopter categories. Some scholars argue that the model does not fully address issues of access, inequality, and resistance that might limit the spread of innovations in less resourced environments such as Nigerian universities (Verma & Dahiya, 2022; Ameen et al., 2024). Others point out that the theory focuses more on the characteristics of the innovation rather than on the broader context, such as policies, regulations, or ethical debates, which are especially relevant when studying AI (Kasneci et al., 2023).

2. REVIEW OF EMPIRICAL STUDIES

A 2024 exploratory study investigated university students' knowledge, concerns, and ethics around ChatGPT. The researchers used a cross-sectional survey combined with focus group discussions to capture both broad and detailed perspectives. The main objective was to assess awareness, ethical concerns, and perceived usefulness of ChatGPT. Findings revealed that students generally had high levels of awareness but also expressed serious worries about ethics and uncertainty over what counted as acceptable use in assessments. However, the study relied heavily on self-reported data and focused more on attitudes than on actual behaviour, leaving unanswered questions about how awareness translates into real adoption or the barriers students face in

research contexts. This study will address that gap by assessing both knowledge and actual adoption of AI research assistants among postgraduate students in Taraba State University, while also exploring the challenges that limit their use (Acosta-Enriquez et al., 2024).

In another study, Stöhr et al. (2024) conducted a mixed-methods study on the use of AI chatbots in higher education. Data were collected through an online questionnaire and follow-up interviews to examine how frequently students used chatbots, the purposes they served, and attitudes towards them. The objective was to map usage patterns and identify key factors influencing acceptance. Results showed that many students relied on chatbots for brainstorming and drafting, yet concerns persisted regarding factual accuracy and academic integrity. Although the study sampled widely across departments, it did not specifically target postgraduate students and paid limited attention to how institutional guidance or supervisor expectations influenced adoption. This creates a gap which the present study intends to fill by focusing directly on postgraduate students at Taraba State University and examining how institutional and supervisory support shape both knowledge and adoption.

Katsantonis et al. (2024) carried out an empirical survey of students' attitudes towards AI, applying principal component analysis to capture cognitive, behavioural, and emotional dimensions of student attitudes. The aim was to understand how demographic and educational variables shaped responses to AI tools. Findings showed positive cognitive attitudes but mixed behavioural intentions, with actual adoption depending largely on perceived usefulness and trust. While the study offered a solid attitudinal framework, it did not sufficiently examine barriers such as digital literacy, affordability, or connectivity challenges that might limit AI adoption. This leaves a gap which the current study addresses by going beyond attitudes to investigate knowledge levels, patterns of adoption, and specific challenges postgraduate students in Taraba State University face when using AI research assistants.

Abbas et al. (2024) conducted a multi-country analysis of ChatGPT use among university students, employing online surveys and experimental tasks. Their objectives were to explore motivations for adopting ChatGPT and to test its impact on study habits and short-term learning outcomes. The study found that students often used ChatGPT to speed up tasks, and that its influence could be both positive and negative, depending on how it was applied. However, this study was conducted in relatively resourced environments and concentrated on short-term use, without considering how adoption develops in less resourced contexts where institutional policies and infrastructure may differ. The present study fills this gap by examining adoption in the specific context of Taraba State University, where access and long-term use are shaped by local conditions and challenges.

Sova (2024) examined the adoption of AI tools in higher education using structural equation modelling. The research surveyed students in applied economics programmes and tested predictors such as perceived usefulness, trust, accessibility, and adoption intention. Findings showed that usefulness and access were the strongest predictors, while ethical and accuracy concerns reduced the likelihood of adoption. While this model provided useful insights, it focused largely on undergraduates in a single discipline and did not account for postgraduate contexts or infrastructural limitations. The present research addresses this by concentrating

on postgraduate students across different fields in Taraba State University and linking adoption to challenges such as poor connectivity, limited digital training, and supervisory attitudes.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a descriptive survey research design, which is appropriate for assessing the current level of knowledge, awareness, and adoption of AI research assistants among postgraduate students of Taraba State University, Jalingo, at a single point in time. The study population comprises all postgraduate students of the College of Postgraduate Studies, estimated at 3,367 across all programmes, including Postgraduate Diploma, Master's, and PhD (College of Postgraduate Studies, 2025). From this population, the sample size was determined using the Taro Yamane formula, which is widely applied in social science research to calculate representative samples from large populations while maintaining a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. Applying the formula generated a sample size of approximately 358 respondents, which is considered statistically adequate for this study. A simple random sampling technique will be employed to ensure fair representation of postgraduate students across different departments, programmes, and gender groups within the university. The main instrument for data collection will be a structured questionnaire designed in line with the objectives of the study to obtain relevant information on students' knowledge, level of adoption, perceived usefulness, and challenges associated with the use of AI research assistants such as ChatGPT, Elicit, and Scholarcy. Data collected from the respondents will be analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and means to summarise responses, while inferential statistical tools such as chi-square and regression analysis will be employed to test the relationships between students' knowledge, adoption level, and challenges encountered in the use of AI research assistants among postgraduate students of Taraba State University, Jalingo.

4. DATA PRESENTATION

Table 1: What is your gender?

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	200	55.9
Female	158	44.1
Prefer not to say	0	0.0
Total	**358**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Out of the 358 respondents, 55.9% were male while 44.1% were female. This shows that male postgraduate students participated slightly more in the study, though both genders were fairly represented.

Table 2: What is your age range?

Age range	Frequency	Percentage (%)
18–25 years	75	20.9
26–35 years	170	47.5
36–45 years	80	22.3
46 years and above	33	9.3
Total	**358**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The findings indicate that most respondents (47.5%) fall within the 26–35 years age range, showing that the majority of postgraduate students are young adults actively engaged in academic research and professional development.

Table 3: What is your programme of study?

Programme	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Postgraduate Diploma	92	25.7
Master's Degree	194	54.2
PhD	62	17.3
Others	10	2.8
Total	**358**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Results show that most respondents (54.2%) are Master's degree students, followed by Postgraduate Diploma students (25.7%) and PhD candidates (17.3%). This suggests a balanced representation across postgraduate levels at Taraba State University.

Table 4: How familiar are you with AI research assistants such as ChatGPT, Elicit, or Scholarcy?

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very familiar	130	36.3
Somewhat familiar	145	40.5
Slightly familiar	55	15.4
Not familiar at all	28	7.8
Total	**358**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Findings show that 40.5% of respondents are somewhat familiar with AI research assistants, while 36.3% are very familiar. This indicates that most postgraduate students have a reasonable level of knowledge and awareness of AI-based research tools.

Table 5: How often do you use AI research assistants in your academic work (assignments, literature review, thesis, etc.)?

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Daily	105	29.3
Weekly	115	32.1
Occasionally	85	23.7
Rarely	38	10.6
Never	15	4.2
Total	**358**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The results indicate that 32.1% of respondents use AI research assistants weekly, and 29.3% use them daily. This suggests that a large proportion of postgraduate students actively rely on AI tools for various aspects of their academic work.

Table 6: Which academic tasks do you mostly use AI research assistants for?

Tasks	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Literature review and summaries	120	33.5
Idea generation/brainstorming	72	20.1
Organising references or notes	56	15.6
Drafting and editing academic work	68	19.0
Data analysis or coding support	32	8.9
None of the above	10	2.8
Total	**358**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Findings show that the majority of respondents (33.5%) use AI research assistants mainly for literature review and summarisation, followed by

20.1% who use them for idea generation. This indicates that postgraduate students largely apply AI tools to simplify research-related reading and writing tasks.

Table 7: In your opinion, how useful are AI research assistants for improving the quality of your academic work?

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very useful	165	46.1
Moderately useful	125	34.9
Slightly useful	48	13.4
Not useful at all	20	5.6
Total	**358**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The data reveal that 46.1% of the respondents find AI research assistants very useful in improving their academic work, while 34.9% consider them moderately useful. This suggests that most postgraduate students perceive AI tools as effective in enhancing productivity and research quality.

Table 8: What challenges do you face when using AI research assistants?

Challenges	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Lack of knowledge or training on how to use them	82	22.9
Limited internet access or poor connectivity	65	18.2
Concerns about accuracy and reliability of information	72	20.1
Fear of academic dishonesty or plagiarism issues	60	16.8
Limited institutional support or guidance	45	12.6
All of the above	34	9.5
Total	**358**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The findings indicate that the most common challenge faced by postgraduate students (22.9%) is the lack of adequate training or knowledge on how to use AI tools effectively. This is followed by concerns about reliability and accuracy (20.1%). These challenges reflect a need for more structured institutional support and AI literacy programmes.

Table 9: What level of support do you receive from lecturers or supervisors regarding the use of AI research assistants?

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly encouraged	88	24.6
Somewhat encouraged	112	31.3
Neutral	80	22.3
Discouraged	50	14.0
Strongly discouraged	28	7.8
Total	**358**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Results show that 31.3% of the respondents reported being somewhat encouraged by their lecturers or supervisors to use AI research assistants, while 24.6% stated they were strongly encouraged. This suggests that most academic

supervisors at Taraba State University have a generally positive but cautious attitude towards the use of AI tools in research.

Table 10: In your view, what would make AI research assistants more effective for postgraduate research?

Suggestions	Frequency	Percentage (%)
More awareness and training workshops	96	26.8
Improved internet access and digital facilities	70	19.6
Clear institutional policies on ethical use	58	16.2
Integration into postgraduate curriculum	60	16.8
All of the above	74	20.7
Total	**358**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The data reveal that most respondents (26.8%) believe that more awareness and training workshops would make AI research assistants more effective for postgraduate studies, followed by 20.7% who suggested a combination of all listed strategies. This highlights the importance of structured institutional support and digital inclusion initiatives in fostering responsible AI adoption.

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

i. Objective One: To assess the level of knowledge postgraduate students at Taraba State University have about AI research assistants

This objective sought to determine how knowledgeable postgraduate students at Taraba State University are about AI research assistants such as ChatGPT, Elicit, and Scholarcy. Data presented in Table 4 addressed this objective. The findings showed that 36.3% of respondents were very familiar with AI research assistants, while 40.5% were somewhat familiar. Only 15.4% were slightly familiar, and 7.8% were not familiar at all. These results indicate that a majority of postgraduate students possess a reasonable level of awareness and understanding of AI tools. This suggests that the rapid global exposure to artificial intelligence in education has reached Taraba State University, with students recognising the usefulness of these technologies in research and academic work. However, the presence of a minority with limited or no knowledge implies that there are still gaps in AI literacy among postgraduate students. This could be due to factors such as limited digital skills, lack of institutional sensitisation, or poor internet access. The findings therefore show that while most postgraduate students have substantial knowledge of AI research assistants, continuous awareness campaigns and digital literacy training would help ensure more inclusive knowledge distribution across all departments and programmes.

ii. Objective Two: To examine the extent of adoption of AI research assistants among postgraduate students

This objective focused on determining how often postgraduate students use AI research assistants and the specific academic activities for which they employ them. Data presented in Tables 5, 6, and 7 addressed this objective. Table 5 revealed that 32.1% of respondents used AI research assistants weekly, 29.3% daily, 23.7% occasionally, while only 4.2% reported never

using them. This indicates a high adoption rate, showing that AI tools have become part of the students' routine academic practice. Table 6 further revealed that most respondents (33.5%) used AI tools primarily for literature review and summarisation, while others used them for idea generation (20.1%), drafting and editing (19.0%), and organising references (15.6%). This demonstrates that AI tools are mainly employed to simplify and accelerate the research and writing process. In Table 7, 46.1% of respondents found AI research assistants very useful, while 34.9% rated them moderately useful. These findings confirm that postgraduate students at Taraba State University have embraced AI tools for their efficiency, ease of use, and ability to improve academic output. However, occasional and rare users suggest that adoption is not yet universal, possibly because of infrastructural limitations, lack of confidence, or ethical concerns regarding AI use. Overall, the study reveals a growing integration of AI tools in postgraduate research practices, with positive attitudes towards their usefulness.

iii. Objective Three: To identify the challenges postgraduate students face in using AI research assistants

This objective aimed to explore the barriers that hinder postgraduate students from effectively using AI research assistants and the possible strategies to improve their use. Data presented in Tables 8, 9, and 10 addressed this objective. Table 8 revealed that 22.9% of respondents cited lack of training and knowledge as their major challenge, followed by 20.1% who mentioned concerns about accuracy and reliability, and 18.2% who reported limited internet access. Other challenges included fear of plagiarism (16.8%) and lack of institutional support (12.6%). These results suggest that, although students are increasingly adopting AI tools, their usage is constrained by knowledge gaps, infrastructural issues, and uncertainty about ethical boundaries. Table 9 further showed that 31.3% of respondents were somewhat encouraged by their lecturers or supervisors to use AI research assistants, while 24.6% were strongly encouraged. This suggests that institutional and supervisory support is generally positive but not yet consistent. Table 10 indicated that 26.8% of respondents believed that training workshops would enhance effective AI use, while 20.7% preferred a combination of awareness campaigns, improved facilities, and policy guidelines. These findings highlight the need for universities to institutionalise AI education through curriculum integration, training sessions, and clear ethical frameworks. It also underscores that increasing infrastructural support, particularly stable internet access and digital learning resources, would significantly improve adoption.

6. CONCLUSION

This study examined the knowledge and adoption of AI research assistants among postgraduate students of Taraba State University, Jalingo. The findings revealed that most postgraduate students are familiar with and actively use AI tools such as ChatGPT, Elicit, and Scholarcy, particularly for literature review, idea generation, and drafting academic work. The study also established that while the students recognise the usefulness of AI tools in enhancing research quality and productivity, challenges such as inadequate training, limited internet access, and unclear institutional policies hinder their optimal use. Guided by the Diffusion of Innovation Theory, the study concludes that awareness, perceived usefulness, and institutional encouragement play critical roles in driving AI adoption. It therefore recommends that the university should integrate

AI literacy and ethical use into postgraduate training programmes and improve infrastructural support to promote responsible and effective utilisation of AI research assistants in academic work.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

i. The university should organise regular training workshops and awareness programmes to equip postgraduate students with the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively use AI research assistants such as ChatGPT, Elicit, and Scholarcy for academic purposes.
ii. The management of Taraba State University should improve internet connectivity and provide adequate digital facilities across departments to support seamless access to AI tools and online research resources.
iii. Clear institutional guidelines and policies should be established to promote the ethical and responsible use of AI research assistants, ensuring that students understand the boundaries between academic integrity and AI-assisted work.
iv. Lecturers and supervisors should be encouraged to integrate AI literacy into postgraduate coursework and supervision practices, helping students use these tools to enhance, rather than replace, critical thinking and originality in research.
v. Further studies should be conducted across other universities in Nigeria to compare levels of AI awareness, adoption, and challenges, thereby building a broader understanding of AI integration in postgraduate education nationwide.

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Appendix I: The Questionnaire

Faculty of Communication and Media Studies,

Department of Mass Communication,

Taraba State University, Jalingo

September, 2025.

Dear respondent,

I am a Postgraduate (M.Sc) student of the above-mentioned faculty and department. I am carrying out a research on "***knowledge and adoption of AI research assistants among postgraduate students in taraba state university jalingo"***. This research serves as part of the School of Postgraduate Studies requirement in the course Advance Communication Theories of Mass Communication Department, Taraba State University.

I solicit cooperation in attending to this questionnaire in view of helping me complete my research. Please, kindly note that the information you will provide will be used for no other purpose than for this research.

Thank you for your understanding as I look forward to your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Mimidoo Becky Anongu

(Researcher)

08023943314

Instruction:
Please tick (√) in the box as appropriately representing your response.

Section A: Demographic Information

1. Gender
   ☐ (a) Male
   ☐ (b) Female
   ☐ (c) Prefer not to say
2. Age Range
   ☐ (a) 18–25 years
   ☐ (b) 26–35 years
   ☐ (c) 36–45 years
   ☐ (d) 46 years and above
3. Programme of Study
   ☐ (a) Postgraduate Diploma
   ☐ (b) Master's Degree
   ☐ (c) PhD
   ☐ (d) Others (please specify) _____

Section B: Research Questions

4. How familiar are you with AI research assistants such as ChatGPT, Elicit, or Scholarcy?
   ☐ (a) Very familiar
   ☐ (b) Somewhat familiar
   ☐ (c) Slightly familiar
   ☐ (d) Not familiar at all
5. How often do you use AI research assistants in your academic work (assignments, literature review, thesis, etc.)?
   ☐ (a) Daily
   ☐ (b) Weekly
   ☐ (c) Occasionally
   ☐ (d) Rarely
   ☐ (e) Never
6. Which academic tasks do you mostly use AI research assistants for? (Tick as many as may apply)
   ☐ (a) Literature review and summaries
   ☐ (b) Idea generation/brainstorming
   ☐ (c) Organising references or notes
   ☐ (d) Drafting and editing academic work
   ☐ (e) Data analysis or coding support
   ☐ (f) None of the above
7. In your opinion, how useful are AI research assistants for improving the quality of your academic work?

☐ (a) Very useful
☐ (b) Moderately useful
☐ (c) Slightly useful
☐ (d) Not useful at all

8. What challenges do you face when using AI research assistants? (Tick as many as may apply)
   ☐ (a) Lack of knowledge or training on how to use them
   ☐ (b) Limited internet access or poor connectivity
   ☐ (c) Concerns about accuracy and reliability of information
   ☐ (d) Fear of academic dishonesty or plagiarism issues
   ☐ (e) Limited institutional support or guidance
   ☐ (f) All of the above
9. What level of support do you receive from lecturers or supervisors regarding the use of AI research assistants?
   ☐ (a) Strongly encouraged
   ☐ (b) Somewhat encouraged
   ☐ (c) Neutral
   ☐ (d) Discouraged
   ☐ (e) Strongly discouraged
10. In your view, what would make AI research assistants more effective for postgraduate research?
    ☐ (a) More awareness and training workshops
    ☐ (b) Improved internet access and digital facilities
    ☐ (c) Clear institutional policies on ethical use
    ☐ (d) Integration into postgraduate curriculum
    ☐ (e) All of the above