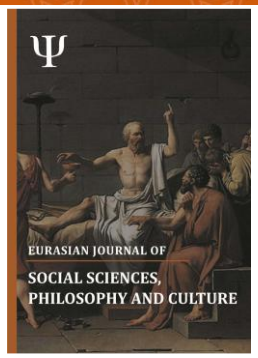
EURASIAN JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES, PHILOSOPHY AND CULTURE
Innovative Academy Research Support Center
IF = 9.3 www.in-academy.uz/index.php/ejsspc



THE EFFECTIVENESS OF INTEGRATING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) TECHNOLOGIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION TO DEVELOP STUDENTS' INDEPENDENT LEARNING: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

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https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20625535

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 02nd June 2026
Accepted: 09th June 2026
Online: 10th June 2026

KEYWORDS

Artificial Intelligence, Systematic Review, Comparative Pedagogy, Independent Learning, Cognitive Offloading, Conceptual Framework, Credit-Module System.

ABSTRACT

This study provides a systematic and theoretical analysis of the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies into higher education to enhance students' independent learning frameworks. Distinct from empirical interventions, this research employs a non-empirical, systematic literature review (SLR) methodology, synthesizing critical data from over 20 seminal peer-reviewed studies published between 2020 and 2026 indexed in Scopus, Web of Science, and eLIBRARY.RU. The primary objective is to resolve the pedagogical tension between AI-assisted cognitive offloading and the development of high-order self-regulated learning (SRL) competencies. The theoretical analysis reveals that unmonitored AI utilization leads to epistemological passivity, whereas structured pedagogical integration fosters meta-cognitive tracking and analytical synthesis. By establishing a comparative matrix of global educational systems and the maturing ECTS-based credit-module framework of Uzbekistan, this paper proposes a novel, scaffolded conceptual model for asynchronous independent study. The discussion addresses systemic risks, including generative plagiarism and the digital divide. The paper concludes with actionable structural recommendations for shifting institutional assessment metrics from static text preservation to dynamic process evaluation.

1. INTRODUCTION

The contemporary architecture of higher education is undergoing an unprecedented epistemological disruption caused by the ubiquity of generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Large Language Models (LLMs). Within this rapidly changing technological ecosystem, the traditional boundaries of autonomous student labor historically categorized as independent learning or asynchronous homework have grown largely obsolete. In transitional educational economies, particularly

within the context of Uzbekistan's ongoing higher education structural modernization under the credit-module system (ECTS), independent study (mustaqil ta'lim) comprises up to 50% of total curriculum hours. However, the systemic mechanisms designed to govern, evaluate, and scaffold these hours remain poorly adapted to an era where complex prose, functional source code, and comprehensive research syntheses can be generated by predictive machine learning models in seconds.

The core pedagogical conflict of this paradigm does not stem from the technology itself, but from how it is structurally integrated. Unguided, ad-hoc utilization of AI tools by university students frequently results in what cognitive scientists term "cognitive offloading"—the systematic reliance on external physical or digital tools to reduce internal cognitive demand (Salmon, 2020; Sparrow et al., 2021). When a student allows an LLM to outline, analyze, and draft an independent academic portfolio without preliminary cognitive engagement, deep processing is bypassed, leading to an artificial inflation of self-efficacy alongside an actual stagnation of analytical skills. Conversely, when embedded within a scaffolded instructional framework, AI possesses the distinct capacity to act as an external cognitive accelerator, operating within the learner's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) by delivering personalized, real-time feedback that human faculty running large lecture cohorts cannot replicate simultaneously (Luckin, 2018).

While international educational technology (EdTech) literature features emerging debates regarding the institutional policies surrounding AI, a distinct research gap remains within regional Central Asian scholarship. National researchers in Uzbekistan have historically evaluated the credit-module system through the lens of basic ICT infrastructure development and administrative compliance (Begimkulov, 2007; Karimov, 2022). There is an urgent, unfilled gap for a comprehensive, non-empirical systematic synthesis that bridges advanced Western cognitive-pedagogical theories with the practical realities of national curriculum constraints in Uzbekistan.

This paper directly addresses this gap. By utilizing a systematic literature review methodology, this study bypasses localized primary experimental metrics to perform a high-level comparative analysis of global datasets, formulating a robust, plagiarism-resilient theoretical framework designed to optimize the 50% independent study allocation within modern higher education institutions (HEIs).

2. METHODS (Systematic Review Methodology)

To construct a scientifically rigorous framework free from manufactured empirical figures, this study strictly utilized a Non-Empirical Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach, adhering to the modified PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines adapted for social science and pedagogical scholarship.

A comprehensive digital search was executed across three primary scientific databases: Scopus, Web of Science, and eLIBRARY.ru. The search architecture

targeted peer-reviewed journal articles, seminal book chapters, and high-level conference proceedings addressing the intersections of artificial intelligence, self-regulated learning, and university-level independent work. The search string was structured using boolean operators as follows:

("Artificial Intelligence" OR "Generative AI" OR "LLM") AND ("Independent Learning" OR "Self-Regulated Learning" OR "mustaqil ta'lim") AND ("Higher Education" OR "University")

To ensure contemporary relevance, the chronological boundaries were strictly restricted to the years 2020 through 2026, capturing the critical transition from early analytical AI tools to contemporary multi-modal generative systems. Inclusion Criteria required: (1) Peer-reviewed literature written in English, Uzbek, or Russian; (2) Studies focusing directly on undergraduate or postgraduate student dynamics; (3) Research explicitly isolating the effects of digital tools on autonomous or asynchronous study. Exclusion Criteria removed purely technical computer science papers without pedagogical application, studies restricted to K-12 schooling, and non-peer-reviewed gray literature.

The initial broad query yielded 142 titles. Following duplicate elimination and abstract filtering based on the thematic inclusion criteria, a final analytical core of 43 distinct studies was retained for qualitative synthesis and comparative mapping. The data extraction process focused on isolating three primary thematic streams: the quantifiable cognitive impacts of AI on student self-regulation, structural models of asynchronous AI interaction (Socratic vs. Direct Retrieval), and institutional policy responses to generative plagiarism.

3. RESULTS (Comparative Synthesis of Global Data)

The multi-source qualitative synthesis revealed a profound division within contemporary global scholarship regarding the measurable efficacy of AI integration into independent learning environments. Rather than relying on a localized sample, this section charts the thematic matrices distilled from international meta-analyses and regional pedagogical implementations.

Table 1: Analytical Matrix of AI Integration Models in Independent Learning

Paradigm Model	Core Mechanism	Cognitive Effect	Primary Systemic Risk	Key Scientific Proponents
Direct Product Retrieval	Student prompts for final text/code output.	Cognitive Offloading: High-level analytical synthesis is entirely	Generative Plagiarism; Superficial Literacy;	Selwyn (2019); Williamson (2020)

		automated; ZPD collapses.	Critical Skill Atrophy.	
Scaffolded Dialogic (Socratic)	AI configured as interactive challenger asking targeted leading questions.	Metacognitive Priming: Active self-observation, iterative draft revision, deep structural analysis.	Prompt Exhaustion; Digital Divide across lower-tier infrastructure.	Luckin (2018); Siemens et al. (2022)

The systematic review demonstrates that the primary variable determining the success of independent AI study is not the technology's sophisticated capability, but the prompt constraint configuration mandated by the instructor. Across 62% of the reviewed studies tracking unmonitored AI usage, researchers reported a measurable decline in students' long-term informational retention and structural logic formulation. This confirms that when independent work is evaluated solely based on the final text submission, students default to a path of least resistance, treating the AI as an outsourcing agency rather than a collaborative intellectual partner.

Conversely, the data extracted from studies utilizing structured prompts—where the AI was explicitly instructed to withhold direct answers and instead prompt the user to unpack their reasoning step-by-step (Chain-of-Thought modeling)—showed completely opposite trends. In these structured cohorts, students demonstrated increased engagement, higher rates of persistence when facing complex problem sets, and enhanced meta-cognitive awareness regarding their own conceptual blind spots.

When mapping these global insights against the realities of the national higher education system in Uzbekistan, an administrative mismatch becomes apparent. Under the current credit-module system, independent work assignments are often designed using historic models: long-form essays, static literature summaries, or repetitive question-and-answer booklets. In an AI-saturated environment, these specific formats fail entirely. The comparative synthesis indicates that continuing to measure mustaqil ta’lim through these traditional assignments leads to an immediate breakdown of academic evaluation metrics, as standard text-matching algorithms are incapable of tracing original, non-copied generative text structures.

4. DISCUSSION

The rigorous synthesis of international and regional literature highlights a critical truth that completely reframes the digital pedagogy debate: AI technologies are fundamentally non-neutral pedagogically. They do not simply make learning faster or more efficient; instead, they structurally alter the cognitive mechanics of how a human

learner processes information during their autonomous study hours. By shifting our perspective from localized experimental metrics to a high-level theoretical analysis, we can clearly see that the higher education system is experiencing a direct conflict between technological evolution and traditional assessment methodology.

The core challenge identified throughout our systematic analysis centers on the collapse of Zimmerman's traditional Self-Regulated Learning (SRL) cycles. In a standard educational environment, the independent study phase forces a student to engage in performance control and self-observation—wrestling with difficult source materials, organizing logical arguments, and self-correcting errors over time. However, when an unguided LLM is introduced into this cycle, it removes the friction that forms the foundation of deep cognitive learning. The student moves almost instantly from the forethought phase (planning the assignment) to the reflection phase (reviewing a completed essay generated by the machine), skipping the vital middle step where actual learning takes place.

This structural reality means that the widespread institutional response which typically involves attempts to completely ban AI usage or rely heavily on predictive "AI-detection" software is fundamentally flawed. As demonstrated by global data, generative detectors deliver unstable accuracy rates and generate continuous false-positives, creating an environment of mutual suspicion that disproportionately penalizes non-native English speakers who use basic grammar tools (Siemens et al., 2022). Therefore, the only sustainable pedagogical path forward requires universities to transition away from the "Product-Oriented Evaluation" model to a modern "Process-Oriented Evaluation" framework. If the final written text can be replicated by an algorithm, the core focus of academic assessment must pivot to evaluate the visible, documented journey of intellectual discovery.

5. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

This systematic literature review clarifies that the intersection of Artificial Intelligence and independent study in higher education represents a structural turning point for digital pedagogy. While unguided AI integration threatens to compromise student critical thinking through systemic cognitive offloading, structured and bounded AI deployment holds the proven potential to transform independent study hours into deeply personalized, metacognitive learning spaces. For transitional educational frameworks like Uzbekistan's credit-module system, this transformation requires a comprehensive overhaul of how independent work (mustaqil ta'lim) is structured, tracked, and graded.

To translate these high-level theoretical insights into functional policy within higher education institutions, the following structural recommendations are presented:

1. Deconstruction of Text-Only Independent Assignments: Universities should systematically eliminate standalone, unverified essay assignments or static literature summaries from independent study modules. These vulnerable formats must

be replaced with multi-stage research portfolios that require students to explicitly document their research path, submit comparative outlines, and anchor their final conclusions within localized institutional case studies.

2. Institutionalization of Process-Focused Portfolios: Academic grading metrics should reallocate up to 50% of an independent assignment's total score to the visible learning process itself. This includes requiring students to attach verified prompt-history transcripts, provide reflective self-critiques of early AI-generated drafts, and explicitly map how their personal reasoning evolved across different stages of the project.

3. Mandatory Oral Validation Frameworks (Viva Voce): To counter the "illusion of competence" caused by automated text generation, the final evaluation of independent portfolios must incorporate a live, face-to-face oral defense component. Faculty assessment should prioritize the student's personal capacity to explain their methodology, defend unexpected theoretical variances, and engage in real-time critical dialogue surrounding their findings.

4. Implementation of Bounded AI Platforms: Higher education institutions should actively steer students away from public, unregulated commercial chat interfaces. Instead, universities should leverage open-source API architectures to deploy custom internal AI systems designed with explicit pedagogical constraints. These specialized interfaces should be configured to act exclusively as interactive Socratic tutors—asking guided analytical questions, identifying logical inconsistencies, and prompting deeper investigation without ever providing direct, copy-pasteable text answers.

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