Future of AI in Libraries

Summary of McCrary (2026)

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Academic Insights

This summary explains how the future of education with AI reshaping student agency in academic research. AI systems are now deeply embedded in library databases used by students. These systems guide searching, ranking, and summarising of sources. The study identifies three AI types used in academic platforms. These include machine learning systems, large language models, and generative AI. Each system performs cognitive tasks that were earlier handled by students. As a result, decision making gradually shifts from learners to machines. The study introduces the idea of composite agency. Research is no longer fully student driven but shared between humans and AI systems. Many students are unaware of this shift. This lack of awareness reduces autonomy and weakens critical inquiry. The study concludes that libraries and educators must actively teach AI literacy. Transparency and choice must be protected. AI should support thinking and not replace it.

Apply These Now
• Make AI involvement in research tools visible
• Offer non-AI research pathways

Add These in Your Lesson
• Compare AI guided and manual searches
• Reflect on who made key research decisions

Avoid This Mistake
• Assuming AI supported search automatically builds research skills

Keywords
AI in education, student agency, academic research, AI literacy

Reference
McCrary, Q. D. (2026). Are we ghosts in the machine? AI, agency, and the future of libraries. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship, 52*, 103181. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2025.103181

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