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REFRAMING AI-ASSISTED PLAGIARISM IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A SEMI-SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF PEDAGOGICAL, DISCIPLINARY, AND INSTITUTIONAL PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract

The rapid adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) based writing tools in higher education has intensified concerns regarding academic integrity, particularly AI-assisted plagiarism, commonly termed AI-giarism. Despite growing scholarly attention, existing research on AI-giarism remains fragmented, conceptually ambiguous, and methodologically limited, revealing a clear gap in integrative and theory-informed synthesis. Current studies predominantly rely on perception-based, cross-sectional designs and focus narrowly on student attitudes, with limited attention to disciplinary variation, pedagogical practice, and institutional policy alignment. Addressing this gap, this study presents a semi-systematic literature review of nine peer-reviewed and Scopus-indexed studies published between 2020 and 2025. The novelty of this review lies in its integrative analysis of conceptual definitions, methodological trends, disciplinary contexts, and institutional perspectives, positioning AI-giarism as a pedagogical and governance-related challenge rather than a purely technological or compliance issue. The findings inform a structured agenda for future research emphasising conceptual clarification, validated measurement, longitudinal inquiry, and policy-aligned ethical frameworks in higher education.

Keywords: AI-assisted plagiarism; AI-giarism; academic integrity; higher education; semi-systematic literature review; generative AI

INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement and widespread adoption of artificial intelligence AI based writing tools have profoundly reshaped academic writing practices in higher education. Tools capable of generating, paraphrasing, editing, and refining text are now routinely used by students across disciplines, offering new forms of learning support while simultaneously challenging long-established assumptions about authorship, originality, and academic integrity. As these technologies become increasingly accessible and sophisticated, higher education institutions face growing uncertainty in determining when AI use constitutes legitimate academic assistance and when it crosses the boundary into academic misconduct.

Within this evolving landscape, the concept of AI-assisted plagiarism often referred to as AI-giarism has emerged to capture ethically ambiguous practices in which AI-generated or AI-supported text blurs traditional definitions of plagiarism. Unlike conventional plagiarism, which is grounded in direct textual appropriation and human authorship, AI-giarism raises more complex questions concerning attribution, agency, and responsibility. These questions are particularly salient in writing-intensive and language learning contexts, where AI tools are frequently perceived by students as pedagogical aids rather than deceptive shortcuts.

In response to these challenges, scholarly interest in AI use and academic integrity has grown rapidly. Recent studies have begun to examine students' perceptions of AI-assisted writing, disciplinary differences in ethical judgment, and institutional responses to generative AI technologies. However, existing research remains fragmented and conceptually unstable. Much of the literature relies on cross-sectional quantitative surveys, convenience sampling, and



unvalidated instruments, offering limited insight into how AI-giarism is conceptualised, ethically interpreted, and pedagogically managed across higher education contexts. Moreover, the dominant focus on student perceptions has resulted in comparatively limited engagement with educator perspectives, institutional governance, and policy design.

The rapid pace of technological change has further exacerbated these limitations. While AI tools evolve quickly, institutional academic integrity frameworks often lag behind, resulting in policy ambiguity and inconsistent pedagogical practices. Faculty members are frequently required to exercise discretionary judgment in the absence of clear AI-specific guidelines, contributing to uneven enforcement and student confusion. At the same time, detection-based responses to AI-assisted plagiarism have gained prominence, despite growing concerns regarding their fairness, transparency, and pedagogical validity, particularly for multilingual and second-language learners.

Against this backdrop, there is a pressing need to consolidate existing research, clarify conceptual boundaries, and systematically identify gaps that constrain coherent educational and policy responses. Rather than treating AI-giarism solely as a technological or compliance-based problem, there is increasing recognition that it must be understood as a pedagogical and institutional issue embedded within broader transformations of academic writing and assessment.

Accordingly, this study undertakes a semi-systematic literature review to synthesise current research on AI-giarism in higher education. Focusing on empirical and conceptual studies published between 2020 and 2025, the review examines how AI-giarism is conceptualised, the methodological approaches employed, the disciplinary and geographic contexts represented, and the extent to which pedagogical and institutional perspectives are integrated. By analysing a focused corpus of highly relevant studies, this review aims to provide a coherent overview of an emergent field, identify dominant trends and persistent limitations, and establish a structured agenda for future research.

Literature Review

Recent scholarship has increasingly examined the implications of generative artificial intelligence (AI) for academic integrity in higher education, particularly in relation to AI-assisted plagiarism, commonly referred to as AI-giarism. Early empirical studies have focused predominantly on students' perceptions of AI use in academic writing, revealing widespread ethical ambiguity rather than clear intent to commit misconduct. Research conducted in language education and English as a Foreign Language contexts indicates that students often perceive AI writing tools as legitimate pedagogical support for grammar, paraphrasing, and idea generation, while simultaneously expressing concern about originality and authorship (Bui & Tong, 2025; Nelson et al., 2025; Lau et al., 2025).

These findings suggest that AI-giarism is frequently experienced as an uncertain ethical boundary rather than a deliberate violation of academic norms. Beyond language-focused contexts, disciplinary differences play a critical role in shaping interpretations of AI-assisted plagiarism. Studies in computing and business education demonstrate that students' ethical judgments regarding AI use are highly context-dependent and influenced by assessment type, professional expectations, and disciplinary values (Harrington et al., 2025; Kopperoinen, 2025). In legal education, longitudinal evidence further suggests that prolonged exposure to AI tools does not necessarily resolve ethical uncertainty, highlighting the persistence of conceptual ambiguity surrounding AI use in high-stakes academic and professional settings (Schrepel,



2025).

In parallel, policy- and institution-focused research has begun to interrogate how higher education systems respond to AI-related academic integrity challenges. Chan (2023) argues for comprehensive AI policy education frameworks that prioritise ethical literacy over detection and punishment. However, empirical evidence indicates a misalignment between institutional guidelines and classroom practice, with faculty members often exercising discretionary judgment due to the absence of clear AI-specific policies (Alsharefeen, 2025). This inconsistency contributes to uneven enforcement and reinforces student confusion regarding acceptable AI use.

Collectively, the literature reveals that research on AI-giarism remains recent, fragmented, and methodologically exploratory. While existing studies provide valuable descriptive insights, they lack integrative, theory-driven frameworks capable of aligning student practices, disciplinary norms, and institutional governance. This gap underscores the need for systematic synthesis and more robust research designs to advance understanding of AI-assisted plagiarism in higher education.

METHOD

Guided by contemporary review methodology frameworks, this study followed core principles of systematic reviewing, including transparent documentation of search procedures, explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria, and structured synthesis of findings using an extraction grid. The extraction framework captured key characteristics of each study, including theoretical orientation, research design, participant focus, methodological approach, and contributions to knowledge, in line with best practices for evidence synthesis (Snyder, 2019; Zunder, 2021). The screening and reporting process was informed by the PRISMA guidelines, which remain widely recognised as a benchmark for transparency and replicability in review research (Moher et al., 2009).

However, despite alignment with many systematic review principles, this study does not fully meet all criteria of a strict systematic review. Specifically, due to time and resource constraints, the literature search was limited to Scopus and Google Scholar, and doctoral dissertations were excluded. As a result, the review is best characterized as a semi-systematic literature review. Recent methodological literature argues that semi-systematic approaches are particularly appropriate for rapidly evolving research domains, where the objective is not exhaustive coverage but conceptual clarification, thematic synthesis, and identification of research gaps (Snyder, 2019; Toyama & Yamazaki, 2021).

A semi-systematic review, when guided by a systematic protocol, allows researchers to balance methodological rigor with practical constraints while maintaining transparency and analytical depth. Such an approach is especially suitable for emerging fields, as it enables the mapping of research trends, synthesis of the current state of knowledge, and development of a structured agenda for future research (Snyder, 2019; Zunder, 2021). Accordingly, this methodological approach is well suited to the present review, which aims to examine recent developments, dominant themes, and unresolved gaps in the literature to inform future empirical, theoretical, and policy-oriented scholarship.

Data Sources and Search Strategy

Document retrieval was conducted using two major academic databases, Google Scholar and Scopus, selected for their complementary coverage of peer-reviewed and high-impact research in



the areas of artificial intelligence, academic writing, plagiarism, and higher education. Given the rapidly evolving nature of AI-assisted writing technologies, the search was limited to studies published between 2020 and 2025 to ensure relevance to contemporary academic practices and policy debates.

Keyword searches were intentionally narrow and conceptually specific, combining terms such as *AI-assisted plagiarism*, *AI writing*, *academic integrity*, *student perceptions*, and *higher education*. The precision of these search strings was designed to capture only studies explicitly engaging with AI-related academic integrity issues, rather than broader or tangential discussions of artificial intelligence in education. As a result, the search strategy prioritised conceptual relevance over volume, which is appropriate for an emerging and under-researched field.

Inclusion Criteria

For Google Scholar, the application of the predefined keywords yielded a small but highly relevant pool of studies. Following title and abstract screening, seven articles were identified as directly aligned with the focus of this review on AI-assisted plagiarism and academic integrity in higher education.

In parallel, Scopus was searched using comparable keyword combinations, publication year filters, and document type restrictions limited to journal articles. This search resulted in two Scopus-indexed studies that explicitly examined AI-assisted writing, plagiarism, or ethical challenges in higher education contexts. Studies were included if they:

1. focused on higher education settings;
2. explicitly addressed AI use in academic writing or plagiarism-related concerns; and
3. were published in peer-reviewed or Scopus-indexed outlets.

Due to the high specificity of the search terms and the emergent nature of AI-giarism as a research domain, all retrieved studies met the inclusion criteria. Consequently, a total of nine studies were included for further analysis.

Exclusion Criteria

Exclusion criteria were defined to enhance conceptual clarity and methodological rigor. Studies were to be excluded if they:

1. focused exclusively on technical AI development without educational relevance;
2. examined AI use outside higher education contexts;
3. discussed academic integrity without reference to AI or writing practices; or
4. consisted of editorials, opinion pieces, or non-peer-reviewed content.

However, because the search strategy employed highly targeted keywords, none of the retrieved records met these exclusion conditions. All studies explicitly addressed AI-assisted writing or plagiarism-related issues in higher education and demonstrated clear conceptual alignment with the review focus. No duplicate records were identified across databases, and no studies were excluded during screening. The absence of exclusions reflects the rarity and specificity of research in this field, rather than a lack of methodological rigor.

Procedure

Figure 1 presents the PRISMA-style flowchart illustrating the document selection process across the stages of identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. The procedure comprised



three main stages:

First, a systematic search was conducted in Google Scholar and Scopus using predefined keywords and publication year limits. Key bibliographic information including article title, authors, year of publication, journal or source, and abstract was extracted and recorded in a structured spreadsheet.

Second, inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied through manual review of titles and abstracts to confirm relevance and conceptual alignment. Given the narrow scope of the search terms, all retrieved studies satisfied the eligibility requirements.

Finally, the nine full-text articles were retrieved and analysed in depth. These studies were subjected to descriptive and thematic synthesis to identify conceptual trends, methodological approaches, stakeholder emphases, and research gaps related to AI-assisted plagiarism and academic integrity in higher education. The entire search and screening process covered publications from 2020 to 2025, ensuring that the review reflects the most current developments in this emerging and under-researched field.

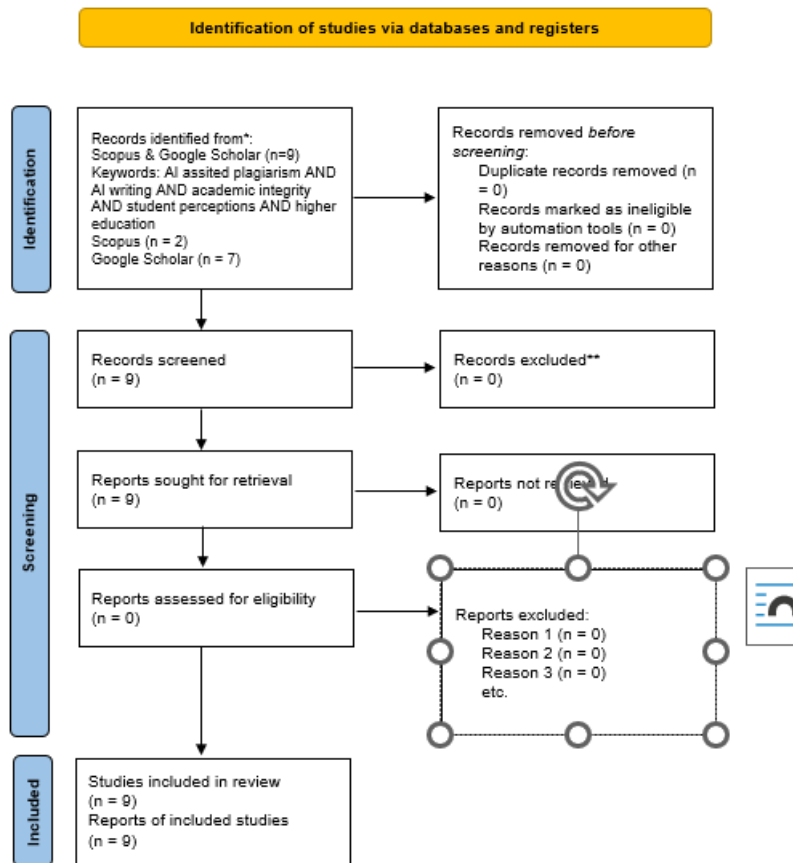


Figure 1: PRISMA flow chart

Results

Figure 2 summarises the final set of nine studies included in this systematic literature review, representing the outcome of the PRISMA-guided identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion process. The table reflects a highly selective corpus, derived from two



complementary academic sources Google Scholar and Scopus, chosen to balance comprehensive coverage of emerging scholarship with indexing in high-impact journals. Seven studies were retrieved through Google Scholar, capturing early-stage, policy-oriented, and discipline-specific research on AI-assisted plagiarism and academic integrity, while two Scopus-indexed studies represent peer-reviewed contributions published in internationally recognised journals.

No	Title	Authors	Year	Sources
1	The impact of AI writing tools on academic integrity: unveiling English-major students' perceptions and practical solutions	TTU Bui; TVA Tong	2025	Google scholar
2	Students' Perceptions of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) Use in Academic Writing in English as a Foreign Language	AS Nelson; PV Santamaría; JS Javens; M Ricaurte	2025	Google scholar
3	Did Alice Do Wrong? Cross-Cultural Differences in Student Perceptions of Generative AI Use in University Computing Education	B Harrington; I Zlotnikova; G Nadarajan	2025	Google scholar
4	Are business school students using AI to cheat in academia?	A Kopperoinen	2025	Google scholar
5	A comprehensive AI policy education framework for university teaching and learning	CKY Chan	2023	Google scholar
6	Faculty as street-level bureaucrats: discretionary decision-making in the era of generative AI	R Alsharefeen	2025	Google scholar
7	Generative AI in legal education: A two-year experiment with ChatGPT	T Schrepel	2025	Google scholar
8	Students' Perceptions of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) Use in Academic Writing in English as a Foreign Language	Nelson, A.S.; Santamaría, P.V.; Javens, J.S.; Ricaurte, M.	2025	Scopus
9	Language Course Writing Task and AI-Generated Writing Detection: An Ethical Concern	Lau, Y.L.; Abu Bakar, A.L.; Chau, S.K.; Sik, R.Y.; Yap, J.T.K.; Yong, H.W.; Tan, J.C.; Ambikapathy, A.	2025	Scopus

Figure 2: Database Table

Based on data on Figure 2, the core analysis was conducted based on five key analytical features commonly employed in systematic and semi-systematic literature reviews of emerging research domains. First, year of publication was examined to trace the temporal development and growth of scholarly interest in *AI-giarism as an emerging research construct*, rather than as an established theory. Second, country context was analysed to identify the national and institutional settings in which AI-giarism research has been conducted, recognising that interpretations of academic integrity are shaped by local educational cultures rather than a single theoretical tradition. Third, methodology was examined by categorising data collection methods and analytical approaches in order to identify dominant research designs and methodological trends within the field. Fourth, key themes were derived through thematic synthesis of research findings to capture recurring conceptual concerns and areas of convergence across studies. Finally, scholarly contributions were analysed to identify how individual studies uniquely advance understanding of AI-assisted plagiarism, whether through conceptual clarification, empirical insight, or policy-oriented discussion.

Year of Publication

An analysis of publication years based on data on Figure 2 indicates that research on AI-giarism is a very recent and rapidly emerging field. Of the nine studies included in the review, eight were published in 2025, with only one study published earlier, in 2023. This sharp temporal



concentration suggests that scholarly engagement with AI-assisted plagiarism has intensified only after the widespread public adoption of generative AI tools such as ChatGPT. The absence of publications prior to 2023 highlights that AI-giarism is not an established theoretical domain but an emergent response to technological disruption in academic writing practices. Rather than reflecting a mature research trajectory, the publication trend demonstrates a reactive surge, driven by urgent ethical, pedagogical, and policy concerns in higher education. Consequently, the literature remains exploratory and formative, with limited longitudinal or cumulative theoretical development.

Country of Research

No	Region	Countries Represented
1	Southeast Asia	Vietnam, Malaysia
2	East Asia	Hong Kong (China)
3	Europe	Finland, United Kingdom
4	North America	United States
5	International / Cross-cultural	Multi-country contexts

Figure 3: Countries

As Figures 3 shows the geographic distribution of the nine studies included in this review indicates that research on AI-giarism in higher education is geographically limited but internationally dispersed, with a strong concentration in Global North and Asia-Pacific regions. The studies originate from a small number of countries, reflecting both the emergent nature of the research topic and the uneven global development of AI-related academic integrity discourse.

Within the Asia-Pacific region, several studies are situated in Southeast and East Asia, including Vietnam, Malaysia, and Hong Kong (China). These studies predominantly focus on language education and EFL academic writing contexts, where AI writing tools are perceived as pedagogically supportive in addressing linguistic challenges faced by students. The prominence of Asian contexts highlights the heightened relevance of AI-assisted writing technologies in multilingual and second-language learning environments.

In contrast, studies conducted in European and North American contexts, including Finland, the United Kingdom, and the United States, tend to focus on disciplines such as computing, business, and legal education. In these settings, AI use is more frequently framed in relation to academic misconduct, professional ethics, and institutional governance. This reflects the presence of more formalised academic integrity frameworks and regulatory traditions within Western higher education systems. Notably, several studies adopt cross-cultural or international perspectives, either through comparative research designs or by examining diverse student populations across institutions. However, the limited number of studies restricts systematic cross-national comparison and prevents robust conclusions regarding regional differences in AI-giarism interpretations.

Overall, the geographic distribution reveals a concentration of AI-giarism research in specific national and institutional contexts, with notable absences from regions such as Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East. This imbalance underscores a significant gap in the literature and highlights the need for broader cross-cultural research to develop globally relevant academic integrity frameworks in the context of AI-assisted writing.



Methodology

Analysis of the methodological approaches across the nine studies reveals a clear dominance of empirical perception-based research, particularly quantitative survey designs. Five of the nine studies employ cross-sectional quantitative methodologies, primarily using questionnaires to capture students' perceptions of AI use, academic integrity, and ethical boundaries. These studies are concentrated in language education, computing, and business disciplines, reflecting an early research tendency to map attitudes and beliefs in response to emerging AI technologies.

No	Title	Year	Source	Methodology Type	Methodological Description
1	The impact of AI writing tools on academic integrity: unveiling English-major students' perceptions and practical solutions	2025	Google Scholar	Quantitative + Qualitative (Mixed)	Survey-based student perception study complemented by discussion of pedagogical solutions
2	Students' Perceptions of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) Use in Academic Writing in English as a Foreign Language	2025	Google Scholar	Quantitative	Cross-sectional survey examining EFL students' perceptions of AI use
3	Did Alice Do Wrong? Cross-Cultural Differences in Student Perceptions of Generative AI Use in University Computing Education	2025	Google Scholar	Quantitative (Comparative)	Survey-based cross-cultural comparison of student ethical judgments
4	Are business school students using AI to cheat in academia?	2025	Google Scholar	Quantitative	Questionnaire-based investigation of student AI use and cheating perceptions
5	A comprehensive AI policy education framework for university teaching and learning	2023	Google Scholar	Qualitative (Conceptual/Policy Analysis)	Conceptual framework development based on literature and policy analysis
6	Faculty as street-level bureaucrats: discretionary decision-making in the era of generative AI	2025	Google Scholar	Qualitative	Interview-based or interpretive analysis of faculty decision-making
7	Generative AI in legal education: A two-year experiment with ChatGPT	2025	Google Scholar	Qualitative (Longitudinal Case Study)	Longitudinal pedagogical experiment and reflective analysis
8	Students' Perceptions of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) Use in Academic Writing in English as a Foreign Language	2025	Scopus	Quantitative	Validated survey-based empirical study (Scopus-indexed)
9	Language Course Writing Task and AI-Generated Writing Detection: An Ethical Concern	2025	Scopus	Qualitative + Applied Analysis	Ethical analysis combined with instructional and detection-oriented discussion

Figure 4: Methodology

Qualitative methodologies are also present but less frequent. Three studies adopt qualitative or interpretive approaches, including policy analysis, faculty-focused inquiry, and longitudinal case studies. These qualitative studies shift attention away from student behaviour toward institutional governance, pedagogical experimentation, and ethical decision-making, offering deeper contextual insights that are largely absent from survey-based research.

Only one study explicitly adopts a mixed-methods design, integrating quantitative student data with qualitative interpretation and pedagogical recommendations. Notably, none of the included studies employ experimental, quasi-experimental, or longitudinal quantitative designs, nor do they report the use of rigorously validated instruments specifically designed to measure AI-giarism. This methodological pattern indicates that current research on AI-giarism remains exploratory rather than explanatory, prioritising descriptive insight over causal inference.

As illustrated in Figure 4, the methodological distribution of the reviewed studies reflects the emergent and exploratory nature of AI-giarism as a research construct. The literature is dominated by cross-sectional quantitative survey designs, indicating an initial emphasis on mapping perceptions rather than developing explanatory or theory-driven accounts. In contrast, the limited application of mixed-methods, longitudinal, and theoretically grounded approaches reveals a substantial methodological gap within the field. Addressing this gap requires future research to integrate qualitative depth with quantitative rigor, particularly through the development of validated measurement instruments, the adoption of longitudinal designs to capture ethical reasoning over time, and the inclusion of multi-stakeholder perspectives that



extend beyond student populations to encompass educators, institutional leaders, and policy actors.

Key Themes

Thematic analysis of the nine studies reveals four interrelated themes that collectively characterise current research on AI-giarism in higher education. These themes reflect shared conceptual concerns across disciplinary contexts while also highlighting important points of divergence in how AI-assisted plagiarism is understood and addressed.

1. Student Perceptions and Ethical Ambiguity

Across the majority of student-focused studies, AI use in academic writing is characterised by ethical uncertainty rather than deliberate misconduct. Research conducted in language education and EFL contexts demonstrates that students commonly perceive AI writing tools as legitimate learning supports, particularly for grammar checking, paraphrasing, idea generation, and language accuracy (Bui & Tong, 2025; Nelson et al., 2025; Lau et al., 2025). However, these same students simultaneously express concern about plagiarism, originality, and authorship, indicating an unresolved tension between learning assistance and academic integrity.

Studies in computing and business education similarly report that students' ethical judgments are context-dependent, shaped by task type, assessment stakes, and disciplinary expectations (Harrington et al., 2025; Kopperoinen, 2025). Rather than demonstrating clear ethical positions, students frequently describe uncertainty regarding where acceptable AI use ends and misconduct begins. This ambiguity suggests that AI-giarism is not perceived as a fixed category but as a negotiated ethical boundary, influenced by instructional cues and institutional norms.

2. Disciplinary Variation in Ethical Interpretation

The reviewed studies consistently indicate that interpretations of AI-giarism vary substantially across disciplinary contexts. In language and EFL education, AI tools are often framed as pedagogical resources that support learning outcomes, particularly in multilingual contexts where linguistic competence is still developing (Bui & Tong, 2025; Nelson et al., 2025; Lau et al., 2025). Within these settings, AI use is more readily normalised, provided that it does not involve direct submission of unedited AI-generated text.

In contrast, studies situated in computing, business, and legal education adopt a more critical stance toward AI use. These disciplines emphasise individual problem-solving, professional responsibility, and accountability, leading to stronger associations between AI assistance and cheating or ethical violation (Harrington et al., 2025; Kopperoinen, 2025; Schrepel, 2025). This disciplinary divergence underscores the inadequacy of uniform institutional plagiarism policies and highlights the need for context-sensitive integrity frameworks.

3. Policy Practice Misalignment

A recurring theme across policy-oriented and faculty-focused studies is the misalignment between institutional policy discourse and everyday teaching practice. While universities increasingly issue broad AI guidelines, these policies often lack clarity regarding acceptable pedagogical use, leaving instructors to interpret and enforce rules independently (Chan, 2023).



Faculty-focused research illustrates how instructors act as “street-level bureaucrats”, exercising discretionary judgment when evaluating AI-assisted student work in the absence of explicit institutional guidance (Alsharefeen, 2025). This discretionary enforcement results in inconsistent academic integrity practices across courses and programmes, further contributing to student confusion. Longitudinal evidence from legal education suggests that even sustained engagement with AI tools does not automatically resolve these inconsistencies, reinforcing the need for explicit pedagogical alignment between policy and practice (Schrepel, 2025).

4. Limitations of Detection-Based Approaches

Several studies critically examine the growing reliance on AI-generated text detection tools as a response to AI-giarism. Research focusing on writing assessment and detection technologies raises ethical and pedagogical concerns regarding false positives, transparency, and fairness, particularly in language learning contexts (Lau et al., 2025). Detection-oriented approaches are shown to risk disproportionately penalising students who rely on AI for linguistic support rather than deceptive intent.

More broadly, the literature questions the effectiveness of surveillance-based responses to AI-assisted plagiarism, arguing that detection tools address symptoms rather than underlying ethical reasoning (Chan, 2023; Bui & Tong, 2025). Collectively, these studies suggest that punitive and technological solutions alone are insufficient and may undermine trust between students and institutions. Instead, the findings point toward the need for ethics-centred, pedagogically grounded approaches that prioritise ethical literacy, transparency, and responsible AI use.

Together, these four themes demonstrate that AI-giarism in higher education is best understood as a context-dependent, pedagogical, and institutional challenge, rather than a purely technological or compliance-based issue. The thematic convergence across the nine studies highlights a shared recognition of ethical ambiguity, disciplinary variation, policy gaps, and the limitations of detection-driven responses, while simultaneously revealing substantial opportunities for theory-driven and practice-oriented future research.

Contribution of the Studies

Despite the limited number of publications, the nine studies included in this review make distinct and complementary contributions to the emerging field of AI-giarism research in higher education. Studies situated in language education and EFL contexts provide particularly nuanced insights into how AI writing tools reshape notions of authorship, originality, and learning support. Research focusing on English-major and EFL students demonstrates that AI is frequently integrated into writing practices as a pedagogical scaffold rather than a deceptive shortcut, highlighting tensions between linguistic assistance and traditional definitions of plagiarism (Bui & Tong, 2025; Nelson et al., 2025; Lau et al., 2025). These studies contribute empirical evidence that challenges deficit-oriented interpretations of student AI use and foregrounds learning-oriented motivations underlying AI adoption.

Cross-disciplinary studies conducted in computing, business, and legal education extend this understanding by introducing comparative ethical perspectives. By examining AI use across disciplines with differing epistemic traditions and assessment cultures, these studies demonstrate that AI-giarism cannot be adequately explained through a single ethical or regulatory framework (Harrington et al., 2025; Kopperoinen, 2025; Schrepel, 2025). Instead, they reveal how disciplinary norms, professional accountability, and assessment stakes shape divergent



interpretations of AI-assisted writing as either acceptable academic support or academic misconduct.

Policy-oriented and institutionally focused studies make a further critical contribution by shifting analytical attention away from individual student behaviour toward structural, pedagogical, and governance-related challenges. Conceptual and faculty-focused research illustrates how the absence of clear, pedagogically grounded AI policies positions instructors as discretionary decision-makers, resulting in inconsistent interpretations and enforcement of academic integrity norms across institutions (Chan, 2023; Alsharefeen, 2025). Longitudinal evidence from professional education contexts further suggests that prolonged exposure to AI tools does not automatically resolve ethical ambiguity, reinforcing the need for explicit ethical guidance and instructional alignment (Schrepel, 2025).

Taken collectively, these contributions reposition AI-giarism as a pedagogical and institutional phenomenon, rather than merely a technological or compliance-based concern. The reviewed studies consistently indicate that ethical challenges associated with AI-assisted plagiarism emerge at the intersection of student learning practices, disciplinary expectations, instructional design, and institutional governance (Bui & Tong, 2025; Chan, 2023; Harrington et al., 2025).

Overall, the analysis demonstrates that AI-giarism research is highly recent, geographically dispersed but limited in scope, methodologically exploratory, and thematically centred on ethical ambiguity and policy practice misalignment (Nelson et al., 2025; Kopperoinen, 2025; Alsharefeen, 2025). Importantly, the small size of the corpus should not be interpreted as a limitation of the review, but rather as a key empirical finding reflecting the nascent state of the field. This limited yet conceptually rich body of literature underscores an urgent need for theory-driven, longitudinal, and cross-cultural research to advance understanding of AI-assisted plagiarism and to support the development of coherent, pedagogically informed academic integrity frameworks in higher education (Lau et al., 2025; Schrepel, 2025).

DISCUSSION

Conceptualisation of AI-giarism in Higher Education

The first research objective sought to systematically synthesise how AI-giarism is conceptualised within higher education research. The findings of this review indicate that AI-giarism is not conceptualised as a clearly bounded or universally defined form of academic misconduct. Instead, it is consistently framed as an ethically ambiguous practice emerging from the intersection of AI-mediated writing technologies and traditional academic integrity norms. Across the reviewed studies, AI-assisted plagiarism is rarely described as deliberate deception; rather, it is positioned along a continuum between legitimate academic support and unethical misrepresentation (Bui & Tong, 2025; Nelson et al., 2025; Lau et al., 2025).

Student-focused studies reveal that learners experience significant uncertainty regarding acceptable AI use, particularly in writing-intensive and language learning contexts. In EFL and academic writing settings, AI tools are frequently perceived as pedagogical scaffolds that assist with grammar, paraphrasing, and idea development, rather than as mechanisms for cheating (Bui & Tong, 2025; Nelson et al., 2025). At the same time, students express concern about originality and authorship, indicating unresolved tension between learning support and integrity expectations. This pattern suggests that AI-giarism is experienced not as a violation of clearly



understood rules, but as a negotiated ethical boundary shaped by instructional practices and institutional ambiguity.

The review further demonstrates that disciplinary context plays a decisive role in shaping conceptualisations of AI-giarism. In language and EFL education, AI assistance is often normalised due to its perceived pedagogical value in multilingual environments (Lau et al., 2025). In contrast, studies situated in computing, business, and legal education adopt a more restrictive interpretation of AI use, emphasising individual accountability, professional ethics, and originality (Harrington et al., 2025; Kopperoinen, 2025; Schrepel, 2025). These disciplinary differences indicate that AI-giarism cannot be understood through a single ethical framework and that existing plagiarism definitions are insufficiently flexible to accommodate AI-mediated writing practices across contexts.

Collectively, these findings address the first research objective by demonstrating that AI-giarism is best understood as a context-dependent and pedagogically mediated phenomenon. Rather than representing a new category of misconduct, AI-giarism reflects deeper conceptual tensions between evolving writing technologies and legacy academic integrity frameworks.

Research Trends, Methodological Gaps, and Implications for Future Research and Policy

The second research objective aimed to identify dominant trends, methodological limitations, and conceptual gaps in the existing literature in order to inform a future research and policy agenda. The review reveals that research on AI-giarism remains methodologically exploratory and heavily reliant on cross-sectional quantitative survey designs. Most empirical studies focus on mapping student perceptions and attitudes toward AI use, providing valuable descriptive insight but limited explanatory depth (Nelson et al., 2025; Harrington et al., 2025; Kopperoinen, 2025). Longitudinal, experimental, and theory-driven designs are notably absent, restricting understanding of how ethical reasoning develops over time or responds to instructional and policy interventions.

Methodological limitations are compounded by the lack of validated instruments specifically designed to measure AI-related academic integrity constructs. Few studies report formal validation procedures, raising concerns about construct clarity and comparability across contexts. Only one study adopts a mixed-methods approach, integrating empirical findings with pedagogical interpretation (Bui & Tong, 2025). This methodological concentration reflects the early stage of the field and highlights the need for more robust research designs capable of supporting theory building and policy development.

A further gap identified in the literature concerns the limited integration of institutional and pedagogical perspectives. While policy-oriented research argues for comprehensive AI policy education frameworks that move beyond detection and punishment (Chan, 2023), faculty-focused studies reveal a persistent misalignment between institutional guidelines and teaching practice. Instructors frequently act as discretionary decision-makers in the absence of clear AI-specific policies, resulting in inconsistent enforcement of academic integrity norms and reinforcing student uncertainty (Alsharefeen, 2025). Longitudinal evidence from legal education further demonstrates that familiarity with AI tools alone does not resolve ethical ambiguity, underscoring the need for explicit pedagogical alignment between policy, assessment, and instruction (Schrepel, 2025).

The literature also highlights the limitations of detection-centred responses to AI-assisted plagiarism. Studies examining AI-generated text detection raise ethical and pedagogical concerns related to fairness, transparency, and disproportionate impacts on language learners (Lau et al.,



2025). Detection-based approaches are shown to address surface-level symptoms rather than underlying ethical reasoning and risk undermining trust between students and institutions (Bui & Tong, 2025; Chan, 2023).

Taken together, these findings address the second research objective by demonstrating that current AI-giarism research is recent, methodologically constrained, and conceptually fragmented. The small corpus of studies is not a weakness of this review, but a substantive finding that reflects the nascency of the field. Advancing research on AI-assisted plagiarism will require theory-driven, longitudinal, and cross-cultural studies that integrate student learning, disciplinary norms, and institutional governance. Such an agenda is essential for developing pedagogically informed and ethically coherent academic integrity frameworks in the age of generative AI.

SUGGESTIONS

In response to the first research objective, the review demonstrates that AI-giarism is not conceptualised as a clearly bounded or universally agreed form of academic misconduct. Instead, it is consistently framed as an ethically ambiguous and context-dependent phenomenon that emerges from the interaction between generative AI technologies and traditional academic integrity frameworks. Across disciplinary contexts, AI-assisted writing is positioned along a continuum between legitimate pedagogical support and unethical misrepresentation, rather than as a binary case of cheating. Student-focused studies reveal that ethical uncertainty, rather than deliberate misconduct, characterises most AI-related academic integrity concerns, particularly in writing-intensive and language learning contexts. These findings indicate that existing plagiarism definitions and integrity policies are increasingly misaligned with AI-mediated academic practices.

Addressing the second research objective, the review reveals that current research on AI-giarism is methodologically exploratory and heavily reliant on cross-sectional perception-based survey designs. While such studies provide important descriptive insights, they offer limited explanatory power and insufficient theoretical grounding. The literature is further constrained by the absence of validated measurement instruments, limited use of mixed-methods and longitudinal designs, and an overemphasis on student perspectives at the expense of pedagogical and institutional analysis. Policy- and faculty-focused studies highlight a persistent misalignment between institutional guidelines and teaching practice, with instructors frequently exercising discretionary judgment in the absence of clear AI-specific policies. Detection-based responses to AI-assisted plagiarism are shown to be ethically and pedagogically limited, reinforcing the need for approaches that prioritise ethical literacy over surveillance and punishment.

Taken together, the findings position AI-giarism as a pedagogical and institutional challenge rather than a purely technological or compliance-based issue. Importantly, the small size of the reviewed corpus should not be interpreted as a limitation of this study, but rather as a key empirical finding reflecting the nascent state of the field. The concentration of research in specific regions, disciplines, and methodological traditions underscores the urgency of more systematic and theory-driven inquiry.

Based on these conclusions, future research is expected to move beyond descriptive mapping toward explanatory and integrative frameworks that account for disciplinary norms, institutional governance, and ethical reasoning processes. There is a clear need for the development and validation of AI-giarism-specific measurement instruments, longitudinal



studies examining the evolution of ethical understanding over time, and cross-cultural research that captures global diversity in academic integrity traditions. Equally important is research that foregrounds pedagogical design, assessment practices, and faculty decision-making as central to ethical AI use in higher education. By advancing such an agenda, future scholarship can contribute to the development of coherent, context-sensitive, and pedagogically grounded academic integrity frameworks capable of responding to the transformative impact of generative AI on higher education.

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