Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Academic Integrity: A Systematic Review of Ethical Concerns in AI-Supported Assessment

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ABSTRACT:
Institutions of higher learning have been quick to adopt AI technologies, resulting in various and unsolved challenges of academic integrity. Ethical challenges related to AI-based assessment are dispersed in various domains without an integrated approach. This paper will provide an answer by conducting a systematic qualitative literature review of studies from peer-reviewed journals published from 2020 to 2026. PRISMA 2020 and ENTREQ guidelines were used along with the thematic synthesis methodology. All in all, 32 studies were reviewed. Theme robustness was established with the use of the CERQual method and sensitivity analysis. Five themes were identified: (1) disruption of authorship and originality; (2) ethics of detection and surveillance of AI; (3) issues of fairness and inequities; (4) failure of institutional frameworks for integrity; (5) changing the moral agency of educators and learners. AI technologies did not just create new means of cheating but challenged the very nature of what assessment does. For this reason, the MDIC Framework is presented, which includes a policy checklist, assessment redesign heuristics, and role-responsibility matrix..

Keywords: Academic integrity, AI detection and surveillance ethics, AI-supported assessment, Authorship and originality, Fairness and equity

1. Introduction

The fast adoption of AI systems in higher education has led to one of the greatest disruptions of academic assessment that we have ever witnessed (Allison et al., 2025; Baig & Yadegaridehkordi, 2024; Moorhouse et al., 2023). With the launch of ChatGPT at the end of 2022, the process of generating fluent academic text by students happens in seconds, posing challenges to the validity of conventional assessment (Cotton et al., 2024; Perkins, 2023) and making integrity — described by the ICAI (2023) as "honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and courage" — an issue for debate (Allison et al., 2025; Gruenhagen et al., 2024). The following questions shape the ongoing debate: What does it mean to assess capability when AI is capable of performing that task for the student (Currie et al., 2023; Gruenhagen et al., 2024)? Whose responsibility is it when there is uncertainty whether the student's

work was performed with AI help (Corbin et al., 2025; Rowland, 2023); How to respond to the challenges posed by the integrity framework designed in the pre-AI era (Moorhouse et al., 2023; Smit et al., 2025)?

What is more, generative AI stands out from previous disruptions as it performs the intellectual work that the assessment is supposed to assess rather than disguises its results (Moorhouse & Kohnke, 2024). The debate often focuses on the problem of student cheating while neglecting issues of algorithmic bias, accountability, and conducting fair misconduct proceedings on the side of the institution (Chaudhry et al., 2022; Foltynek et al., 2023). For the purpose of the current review, two theoretical approaches are employed: values-based approach to integrity (Bretag, 2019; ICAI, 2021) and critical educational technology perspective (Selwyn, 2019; Williamson et al., 2020). Although the growing literature on this topic exists, a careful qualitative synthesis of these concerns is still needed (Al-Shamaileh et al., 2026; Dai et al., 2026). In order to carry out such a synthesis, thematic approach to analysis (Thomas & Harden, 2008) will be conducted with the help of PRISMA 2020 (Page et al., 2021) and ENTREQ (Tong et al., 2012) guides. The following questions will guide the analysis of the articles: what ethical concerns arise between 2020 and 2026; how they correspond to established integrity and assessment ethics frameworks; and which analytical insight is provided by synthesis beyond the scope of individual articles. The conclusion will present the Multi-Dimensional Integrity Challenge (MDIC) Framework.

2. Background of the Study

The concept of academic integrity has always been associated with such values as honesty, trust, fairness, responsibility, and respect (ICAI, 2021), and its implementation was mainly based on policies aimed at combating plagiarism and contract cheating (Newton, 2018). However, generative AI technology has upset the balance because it executes cognitive functions, such as drafting an argument, summarizing sources, writing coherent texts, which are usually evaluated through assessments (Perkins, 2023; Tlili et al., 2023). The early approaches to addressing the problem were oriented solely at prevention and punishment, which was widely criticized as being reactive and unconstructive in terms of pedagogy (Rudolph et al., 2023); currently, scholars call for a more radical rethinking of the ways of conducting assessments in this context (Corbin et al., 2025; Moorhouse et al., 2023).

3. Method

This qualitative systematic review applies thematic synthesis (Thomas & Harden, 2008) to produce analytical themes, reported following PRISMA 2020 (Page et al., 2021) and ENTREQ (Tong et al., 2012); Figure 1 shows the study-selection flow.

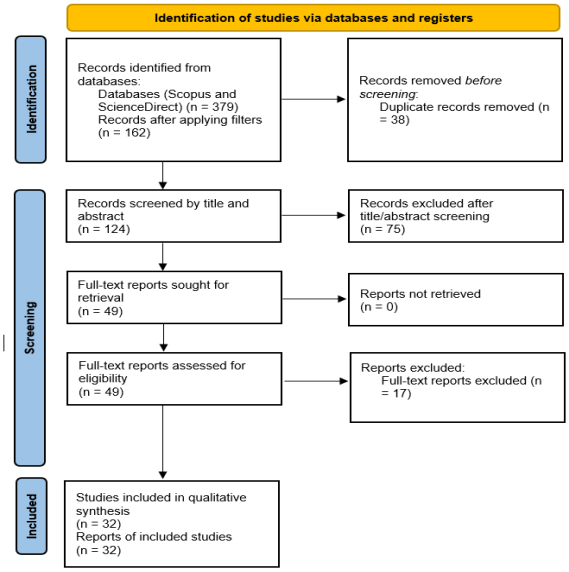

Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 flow diagram.

Scopus and ScienceDirect databases were searched for peer-reviewed articles in English (2020–2026) by constructing Boolean search strings of AI-related terms ("artificial intelligence", "generative AI", "ChatGPT", "large language model", "AI tools", "automated assessment"), integrity terms ("academic integrity", "misconduct", "cheating", "plagiarism", "contract cheating"), higher-education terms, and ethics terms ("ethics", "fairness", "equity", "authorship"); references were scanned. Articles published between 2020 and 2026 in English that used qualitative, conceptual or mixed methodological approaches to assess the ethical aspects of AI in the context of higher-education assessments were selected; quantitative, out-of-context, non-assessment and grey literature were excluded. The search revealed 379 results, narrowed down to 162 results and 124 results after deduplication; 49 articles were retrieved for reading, of which 17 were excluded, resulting in 32 articles included. Selection was carried out independently by two reviewers (Cohen's $\varkappa = .83$). Quality assessment was performed for empirical studies using CASP (CASP, 2018) and for conceptual articles using Hawker et al. (2002); all 32 articles had quality scores ≥6/10 (Table 1). Standard data extraction form included author(s), year of publication, country, methodology.

Table 1. Quality Appraisal Score Distribution Across 32 Included Studies.

Quality Score Range	CASP (Empirical)	Hawker (Conceptual)	Total (n)
10/10 (Excellent)	5	3	8
8–9/10 (Strong)	9	6	15
6–7/10 (Acceptable)	5	4	9
Below 6 (Excluded)	3	2	5 (excluded)

The process of synthesis involved three steps (Thomas & Harden, 2008), namely line-by-line coding, categorization into descriptive themes and further interpreting into analytical themes of higher order, with empirical as well as conceptual papers coded together using NVivo 14. The level of confidence was determined through CERQual (Lewin et al., 2018; see Table 2). Sensitivity analysis through resynthesis of empirical papers alone (n = 23) after removal of papers from the lowest quality tertile (n = 9) confirmed the stability of the five themes identified.

4. Data Analysis

Thematic synthesis of the 32 studies produced five analytical themes through line-by-line coding, descriptive grouping, and higher-order interpretation. Table 2 summarises the themes with CERQual confidence ratings and contributing study counts.

Table 2. Summary of Analytical Themes with CERQual Confidence Ratings and Study-Type Breakdown.

Theme	Empirical (n)	Conceptual (n)	Total (n)	CERQual
1. Destabilisation of Authorship & Originality	18	10	28	High
2. Ethical Ambiguities of AI Detection & Surveillance	13	9	22	Moderate
3. Fairness, Equity & Differential AI Access	11	8	19	Moderate
4. Inadequacy of Institutional Integrity Frameworks	20	10	30	High
5. Repositioning of Moral Agency	15	10	25	High

5. Results and Discussion

The 32 studies spanned education (n = 12), computing (n = 8), and business (n = 6), with others from humanities, health, and law; geographically the UK (n = 9), US (n = 8), and Australia (n = 6) dominated, with five from Asia, three from Europe, and one from Africa. Five themes emerged.

5.1 Theme 1: The Destabilisation of Academic Authorship and Originality

Captured in 28 studies (18 empirical, 10 theoretical; high CERQual), the first major theme relates to the erosion of authorship and originality. According to Perkins (2023), GenAI disrupts the epistemological grounds of assessment, whereas Tlili et al. (2023) state that the distinction between 'assistance' and 'substitution' is untenable from an empirical standpoint because authorship becomes a continuum of humans and AI. AI-written text becomes harder to differentiate from the text of students (Cotton et al., 2024); teaching assistants distinguished it only 50% of the time, and ChatGPT received the highest scores in 80% of classes (Parker et al., 2024), and both novice and experienced teachers demonstrated overconfidence and inability to reliably distinguish AI texts (Fleckenstein et al., 2024). Such an erosion results in the phenomenon of 'AIgiarism,' which challenges the limits of intellectual property (Hadinejad et al., 2025; Huang et al., 2025) and 'individual voice' (Mo & Crosthwaite, 2025), robs students of the epistemic challenge of education, interrupts memory and critical thinking processes (Barcaui, 2025), and facilitates 'article laundry.'

5.2 Theme 2: The Ethical Ambiguities of AI Detection and Surveillance

Detection technologies pose additional underreported ethical issues (Dalalah & Dalalah, 2023) since they incorrectly identify the work of non-native language speakers as AI-generated (Liang et al., 2023), thus, putting marginalised and neurodivergent students at a disadvantage. Furthermore, detection tools lack reliability, as paraphrasing attacks can circumvent them (Perkins et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2024), hence, preventing them from being used as evidence and prompting institutions like Vanderbilt to shut down the technologies due to a lack of trust (Parker et al., 2024). Not only do detection tools lack reliability, but they also have the potential to create a 'surveillance paradigm' that transforms writing into performance (Tsao, 2025), along with institutional automation of grades posing similar accountabilities.

5.3 Theme 3: Fairness, Equity, and Differential AI Access

A total of 19 studies (11 empirical, eight conceptual; moderate CERQual) on equity issues have been considered. The availability and capability to use AI in academic settings are unevenly distributed: wealthy, digitally adept, and fluent English-speaking students from institutions with sufficient resources will have better access and ability to prompt AI (Baek et al., 2024; Bencsik et al., 2026), whereas poor students will encounter challenges in connecting and subscribing, which results in a 'digital divide' whereby social advantage turns into an invisible academic advantage (Bencsik et al., 2026; Tsao, 2025). There is also a paradoxical situation for non-native English speakers who need GenAI as an indispensable 'tutor in the pocket' but are at the same time most exposed to being falsely accused (Baek et al., 2024; Liang et al., 2023; Zhang-Wu, 2026). Students with differences could be facilitated by AI in their learning process since traditional assessments pose a challenge to them (Zhao et al., 2025).

5.4 Theme 4: The Inadequacy of Institutional Integrity Frameworks

In 30 out of 32 studies (20 empirical and 10 conceptual; high CERQual), institutional structures are highly deficient. The rapid uptake of AI has resulted in a "policy vacuum" based on pre-AI policies (Balalle & Panniglia, 2025; Rudolph et al., 2023), the lack of clear definition of what is permissible in terms of AI engagement causes a "moral hazard," and the majority (94%) of students require clear guidelines (Smit et al., 2025). The time gap between the fast-paced development of AI and slower policy-making cycle results in "permanent policy lag" and crisis-oriented approach to policy making (McDonald et al., 2025). Shifting the decision-making process to

individual faculty members leads to inconsistencies (Hadinejad et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2024) and individualizes the failure for both students and educators (Tsao, 2025).

5.5 Theme 5: The Repositioning of Moral Agency

Addressed by 25 studies (15 empirical, 10 conceptual; high CERQual), moral agency is being redistributed. Ethical burden transfers from institutions to individual staff who must set and enforce their own standards without support (Balalle & Pannilage, 2025; Sun et al., 2026), 'individualising failure' onto teachers (Tsao, 2025) and adding 'invisible labour' to redesign 'AI-resilient' assessments (Schmidt et al., 2025). Student decisions are shaped by institutional signals and social norms, with descriptive norms outweighing official policy (Huang et al., 2025; Rizun et al., 2026); when rules seem arbitrary, students default to risk calculation rather than ethical reasoning (Balalle & Pannilage, 2025; Polyportis, 2026), though early ethics training sustains personal integrity (Huang et al., 2025). Shared-responsibility frameworks distribute accountability across developers, institutions, educators, and students (Eke, 2023; Lim et al., 2023), and participatory co-design fosters a culture of integrity (Hadinejad et al., 2025; Tsao, 2025).

5.6 Proposed Framework: The Multi-Dimensional Integrity Challenge (MDIC)

The five themes show that incremental adjustments are insufficient for GenAI's disruption (Moorhouse et al., 2023). The MDIC Framework (Figure 2) integrates them across four interconnected dimensions guiding institutional response.

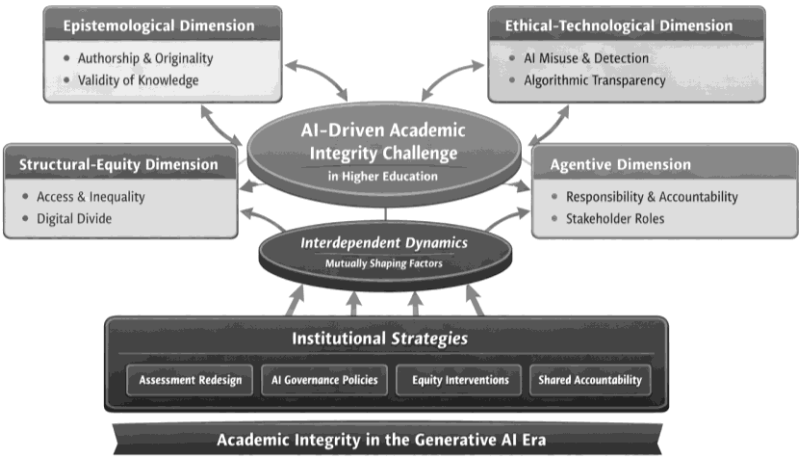

Figure 2. Multi-Dimensional Integrity Challenge (MDIC) Framework for Generative AI in Higher Education. Source: Author's compilation.

Epistemology Dimension looks at the issues surrounding instabilities in authorship and authentic knowledge performance (Perkins, 2023; Tlili et al., 2023); Ethical-Technological Dimension focuses on the ethical considerations surrounding the moral consequences of employing AI technology to commit and detect violations and its consequences for institution's liability (Chaudhry et al., 2022; Liang et al., 2023); Structural-Equity Dimension explores how differences in access and policy inadequacies exacerbate structural inequalities (Bencsik et al., 2026; Williamson et al., 2020); Agentive Dimension focuses on assigning moral responsibility to the developers of technologies, institutions, educators, and students (Eke, 2023; Lim et al., 2023). The aforementioned dimensions are interrelated, whereby structural inequalities inform epistemological instabilities, and policy ineffectiveness reinforces individual responsibility (Balalle & Pannilage, 2025).

5.7 MDIC Policy Checklist

Institutions developing or revising AI assessment integrity policies should address the following

checklist (Table 3), organised by MDIC dimension.

Table 3. MDIC Policy Checklist.

MDIC Dimension	Policy Checklist Item
Epistemological	Does the policy define legitimate AI assistance versus impermissible substitution for each assessment type, preventing the 'moral hazard' of opportunistic use? (Balalle & Pannilage, 2025; Jin et al., 2025; Rudolph et al., 2023; Tsao, 2025)
Epistemological	Are assessment-validity implications of advancing AI capabilities reviewed periodically so assessments remain credible? (Balalle & Pannilage, 2025; Tayan et al., 2024)
Ethical-Technological	Are detection tools validated against the institution's own student population before use to avoid bias against non-native speakers? (Balalle & Pannilage, 2025; Liang et al., 2023)
Ethical-Technological	Is there a due-process protocol requiring evidence beyond probabilistic detection scores, with transparent appeals? (Al-Shamaileh et al., 2026; Balalle & Pannilage, 2025; Cotton et al., 2024; Liang et al., 2023)
Ethical-Technological	Are institution-side AI uses, such as automated grading or feedback, disclosed to students with transparency statements? (Balalle & Pannilage, 2025; Chaudhry et al., 2022; Jin et al., 2025)
Structural-Equity	Has a formal equity impact assessment been conducted before adopting any AI-mediated assessment tool? (Balalle & Pannilage, 2025; Sun et al., 2026)
Structural-Equity	Is targeted support provided for students with lower AI literacy, including non-native and neurodiverse learners? (Balalle & Pannilage, 2025; Bencsik et al., 2026; Lyu et al., 2025; Polyportis, 2026)
Agentive	Do educators receive sustained, discipline-specific development on AI integrity rather than one-off workshops? (Al-Shamaileh et al., 2026; Balalle & Pannilage, 2025; Shahzad et al., 2025; Sun et al., 2026)
Agentive	Are students, educators, and support staff actively involved in policy co-design? (Balalle & Pannilage, 2025; Gruenhagen et al., 2024; Jin et al., 2025)
Agentive	Is there a shared-responsibility matrix clarifying obligations of developers, the institution, educators, and students? (Balalle & Pannilage, 2025)

5.8 Assessment Redesign Heuristics

Assessment redesign is the best strategy for sustainability (Mortlock & Lucas, 2024): mandate process indicators like drafts, portfolios, logs, and interaction history between candidates and AI (Rodger et al., 2025; Zhang-Wu, 2026); incorporate context-specificity through personal experience or local knowledge that cannot be imitated by AI (Kooli et al., 2025; Moorhouse et al., 2023); include oral or class-based tests to check authenticity of understanding (Niloy et al., 2024; Rodger et al., 2025); assess task performance using GenAI and modify the tasks based on their ease of completion in favor of higher-order thinking and creativity (Jin et al., 2025; Moorhouse et al., 2023); and conduct equity audits for fair assessment (Maleki, 2026; Moorhouse et al., 2023).

5.9 Role-Responsibility Matrix

Table 4 operationalises the agentive dimension by distributing accountability across the ecosystem of

actors (Balalle & Pannilage, 2025), recognising integrity as a systemic challenge requiring coordinated action from developers, institutions, and faculty (Eke, 2023; Hadinejad et al., 2025).

Table 4. Role-Responsibility Matrix for AI-Supported Assessment Integrity.

Actor	Primary Responsibility	Key Actions
AI Developers	Transparency & Auditability	Disclose training-data sources and model limitations, provide bias profiles, and supply validation datasets for calibrating detection on non-native speakers (Al-Shamaileh et al., 2026; Eke, 2023).
Institutions	Policy Clarity & Equity	Develop differentiated policies by assessment type, run equity impact assessments, fund universal tool access, and govern institution-side AI (Jin et al., 2025; Sun et al., 2026).
Educators	Assessment Design & Integrity Culture	Redesign assessments with process-based and authentic heuristics, model ethical AI use, give course-level guidance, and join participatory policy development (Moorhouse et al., 2023; Sun et al., 2026).
Students	Honest Representation	Disclose and acknowledge AI assistance and build critical AI literacy to verify and cross-check outputs (Anders & Speltz, 2025; Tayan et al., 2024).

6. Conclusion

In this review, 32 articles from peer-reviewed journals were considered to highlight the ethical considerations in AI-enabled assessments, demonstrating that the ethical issues are not only limited to academic malpractice but run much deeper. The five topics of erosion of authorship and originality, ethics of detection and surveillance, inequitable access, poor institutional governance, and changing moral responsibility can be resolved through using MDIC Framework, Policy Checklist, Assessment Redesign Heuristics, and Role-Responsibility Matrix, which are informed by CERQual and sensitivity analysis. Limitations are related to the limitation to publications in English (relevant given the emphasis on linguistic equity), search for data from only two databases, and the lack of grey literature and conference papers, which may exclude any policy-related analysis; the thematic map would be different in non-Anglophone countries, and considering the fast changes in AI, this study is based on the evidence available at a certain point in time. Further studies are therefore expected to make use of multilingual searches across multiple databases (e.g. Web of Science, ERIC, PsycINFO), pay attention to grey literature that is policy-related, and employ longitudinal and participatory approaches in different educational systems. It is recommended that universities have explicit, context-specific, and periodically revised AI integrity policies, informed by the MDIC Checklist, to define what is considered appropriate use, conduct a fair misconduct process, and set evidentiary standards, with the participation of both staff and students in developing such policies, while national entities, including the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education, can offer flexible sectoral guidelines. Ultimately, the most robust solution to this problem is the redesign of assessments to maintain their validity in light of AI, along with the accountability of institutions in grading and analytics via transparency, human oversight, equity auditing, and appeals.

Author Declaration

A.L.W.: Literature search, study design, data analysis, and writing. C.D.: Data collection, data interpretation, and figure preparation. J.: Proofreading and editing, literature search, and study design.

Declaration Statement

This article has not been previously published, in whole or in part, and is not under review elsewhere. All sources have been duly acknowledged and cited. The authors take full

responsibility for the integrity and accuracy of the content. This manuscript used ChatGPT (OpenAI, GPT-4) and Grammarly Premium for language refinement and idea organisation; all AI-assisted outputs were reviewed, edited, and verified by the authors.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest, financial or otherwise, associated with this manuscript. No financial support, sponsorship, or institutional funding was obtained for this study, and the views expressed are solely those of the authors.

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