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Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Academic Integrity: Challenges, Solutions and Best Practices

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Abstract

This research explored the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in maintaining academic integrity, particularly focusing on detecting plagiarism and academic misconduct. The paper revealed that the integration of AI in educational environments has transformed how institutions monitor and address academic dishonesty, providing tools like Turnitin and Grammarly to detect plagiarism more effectively. These systems utilize advanced algorithms and machine learning to identify copied or paraphrased content and that AI tools also offer authorship verification by analyzing writing styles to combat contract cheating, where students outsource their work. It further exposes the fact that the use of AI in education raises concerns about privacy, fairness, and academic freedom, especially when surveillance systems are involved. In other words, ethical dilemmas arise when AI over-monitors students or exhibits bias against non-native speakers therefore, balancing the benefits of AI with student rights is crucial, calling for transparency, human oversight, and minimal data collection. Despite these challenges, AI remains a powerful tool for upholding academic standards. Recommendations are hence, proffered on how AI

implementation must be managed to protect student's privacy and trust while enhancing academic accountability and integrity.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Academic Integrity, Plagiarism, Contract Cheating.

Introduction

Academic integrity is a cornerstone of any educational process, ensuring that the pursuit of knowledge is conducted with honesty and fairness. Historically, the concept of academic integrity has been pivotal in preserving the authenticity and credibility of scholarly work. Arguably, the issue of academic integrity in recent time seems to have been downplayed as academic achievements have been given primus over value (integrity). The resultant effect of this is the high rate of dishonesty currently prevalent in the work places and the society at large. Gallant (2018) averred that students cannot be genuinely successful in their work life if they disregarded academic integrity in their school activities. In the history of formal educational institutions, academic pursuit has been guided by principles of honesty, trust, and responsibility. Before now, academic dishonesty was easily detected through simple manual comparison and seriously frowned at when detected among students. However, with the proliferation of the internet and digital technologies in the late 20th century, the landscape of academic integrity changed dramatically. Plagiarism, once detectable through manual comparison, became more difficult to identify as students gained easy access to vast amounts of information online. Early plagiarism detection efforts relied on manual review, but the development of artificial intelligence software for digital plagiarism detection in the late 1990s, such as Turnitin, marked a significant evolution. These systems began to use algorithms to compare student submissions against large databases of academic work, identifying copied content and flagging it for review. AI in the form of advanced algorithms and machine learning techniques allow for real-time analysis of student submissions, identifying not only verbatim copying but also paraphrasing and contract cheating, where students outsource their work to third parties (Newton, 2018). In other words, AI is greatly aiding educational institutions and educators in general in dictating cheating and checkmating academic dishonesty.

What is Artificial Intelligence (AI)?

Artificial Intelligence (AI) otherwise called machine intelligence can be defined as the recreation or mimicking of human or animal intelligence in machines. It is also any condition that enables machines to perform tasks which humans are known to perform (Falode, Faseke, and Ikeanyichukwu, 2021). It means, making machine, which is an inanimate object to behave in an animate manner. It is the simulation of animate activities in machines. When a machine is programmed to carry out such tasks as learning, problem solving, natural language processing, perception, reasoning, analysis and any other operation and activity that basically require human intelligence to perform, such is called artificial or machine intelligence. AI has been widely held as an aspect of the field of information and computer technology concerned with the creation of intelligent machines that can operate and interact with their environment in similar manners as humans (Afolabi, Martins, Owoseni, Samuel and Oputa, 2024; Mohammed and Shehu, 2023; Anazodo, Adewole and Dako, 2022; Zhang, Pan, Wu & Skibniewski, 2021; Mobayo, Aribisola, Yusuf, and Belgore, 2021). Since its inception, AI has aided man in advancement of all sectors of the human society such as health, banking, security, manufacturing, entertainment, agriculture, fraud detection and in education.

The rise of AI in education has fundamentally transformed how institutions detect and address academic dishonesty, yet it also raises new questions about surveillance, fairness, and the rights of students and the faculty. In other words, the integration of AI into education has introduced both opportunities and challenges when it comes to upholding academic integrity. In one aspect, AI has greatly improved the efficiency and accuracy of detecting plagiarism and other forms of misconduct. The other aspect is that the rise of AI surveillance in education has sparked debates about academic freedom, privacy, and fairness. Anih and Ukeh (2024) revealed that AI tools like Grammarly and Turnitin have become staples in academic institutions, providing educators with sophisticated resources to combat misconduct. Additionally, Lancaster and Clarke (2016) in their work have proved that AI-powered systems are now capable of authorship verification, using stylistic analysis to determine if a student is the true author of their submission, which has been instrumental in detecting cases of contract cheating.

While AI tools are effective at detecting misconduct, their implementation raises ethical questions. Selwyn (2019) argued that AI tools create an environment of constant surveillance, which may undermine the trust between students and educators. Furthermore, concerns have been raised about the potential for bias in AI algorithms, particularly when it comes to detecting non-standard writing styles or language usage by non-native speakers, which could lead to unfair accusations of plagiarism. Thus, while AI offers powerful solutions for upholding academic integrity, its use must be carefully managed to balance the rights of students with the need for academic accountability. Unfortunately researchers seem to ignore this aspect of educational challenges. Consequently, there is dearth of research expositions on the challenges and solutions AI offers in detecting various forms of academic dishonesty such as plagiarism. Given this gap, this paper explores the intersection of artificial intelligence (AI) and academic integrity, focusing on the challenges and solutions AI offers in detecting plagiarism and other forms of academic misconducts. In other words, the paper addresses how AI tools can be used to uphold academic integrity while balancing the ethical concerns associated with their implementation, such as academic freedom and privacy.

Conceptualizing Academic Integrity in the Digital Age

Academic integrity is foundational to the educational process, serving as the bedrock upon which trust in scholarly work is built. Bretag (2016) defines academic integrity as the fundamental principles and values of honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility in teaching, learning and research. To the International Center for Academic Integrity (ICAI) (2021) academic integrity is the commitment to the fundamental value of trust, fairness, honesty, responsibility, respect and courage in the academic communities. It serves as a foundational guide for proper behavior among students and other members of the academic environment/ institutions. It ensures that knowledge is pursued honestly and that assessments reflect genuine learning and effort. It entails that students and researchers must acknowledge the original owners of an academic work when referenced in their own work and consistently adhere to rules, regulations and policies guiding their academic activities and productions. The importance of academic integrity cannot be overstated, as it safeguards the value of academic qualifications and fosters a culture of responsibility and fairness. Without adherence to these principles, the credibility of educational institutions would be undermined, leading to a devaluation of academic achievements and the erosion of public trust in education (Bretag, 2016). Academic integrity is thus essential not only for individual students but for the entire academic ecosystem. The digital age, characterized by the rapid proliferation of information technology, has fundamentally altered the scope of academic integrity. The internet has made access to information easier than ever before, transforming

both the way students learn and how academic misconduct is carried out. While technology has facilitated greater access to knowledge and resources, it has also opened new avenues for dishonest behaviour.

Before the advent of digital tools, academic misconduct primarily involved copying from books, journals, or other printed materials, and plagiarism detection relied heavily on human oversight. With the rise of the internet however, students gained unprecedented access to vast amounts of content, including academic papers, essays, and other sources that could be easily copied and pasted into their work without attribution (Brimble, 2016). The most well-known form of academic misconduct is plagiarism, which involves presenting someone else's work or ideas as one's own without proper acknowledgement. Plagiarism has been exacerbated by the ease with which students can access and copy material from online sources. Digital tools, like search engines make it simple for students to locate specific information, and with a few keystrokes, content can be inserted into academic assignments, often without proper citations. In response, educational institutions have adopted AI-powered plagiarism detection and surveillance tools such as Turnitin and Copyscape to checkmate this behaviour. These tools compare student submissions against vast databases of academic and non-academic content, flagging any matches to help educators identify unoriginal work (Sutherland-Smith, 2019).

Nevertheless, plagiarism is only one form of academic misconduct. Cheating, which involves using unauthorized resources or assistance during examinations or assignments, has also evolved in the digital age. Online platforms have facilitated new methods of cheating, such as sharing answers through messaging apps or accessing unauthorized materials during online assessments. Additionally, the rise of contract cheating where students pay third parties to complete their assignments poses a serious challenge to academic integrity. Free online platforms offering assignments and bespoke essay-writing services that make it difficult for educators to detect with an increasing number of students turning to these services to circumvent academic rigour has exacerbated the problem. Hence, contract cheating has become a growing concern. Research by Lancaster and Clarke (2016) shows that contract cheating is on the rise, as students can easily outsource their academic work, undermining the entire assessment process. Also, Newton (2018) found that up to 15% of students globally admit to using contract cheating services at some point in their academic careers. This growing issue is not confined to a single country or region but is a global concern that undermines academic standards across educational institutions (Lancaster & Clarke, 2016). As a result, institutions are seeking more advanced tools, including AI, to identify and address this form of academic misconduct.

Regrettably, unlike traditional forms of cheating or plagiarism, contract cheating often involves the submission of original work that has been completed by someone else, making it difficult to detect using conventional plagiarism detection tools. Also these services often operate anonymously hence, educational institutions are usually unable to trace the transactions. Consequently, the traditional approaches to detecting plagiarism, such as text-matching software, are insufficient, as contract cheating involves the submission of custom-written content that does not trigger plagiarism detection algorithms. The digital age has thus expanded the scope and complexity of academic misconduct, necessitating the need for educators and institutions to adopt new strategies to protect academic integrity. The good news however, is that while technology has enabled these forms of misconduct, it also offers tools to combat them. AI and machine learning are now used not only to detect plagiarism but also to identify patterns in student submissions that may suggest contract cheating or other dishonest practices. These tools according to Dawson and Sutherland-Smith (2018) analyze

writing style, structure, and even the metadata of documents to determine the originality of the work.

AI Tools for Detecting Plagiarism and Academic Misconduct

AI-driven tools such as Turnitin, Grammarly and Copyscape have become integral to educational systems worldwide, helping institutions maintain academic integrity by surveying students academic activities and identifying unoriginal content in student submissions. These tools rely on advanced algorithms and machine learning techniques to detect patterns of similarities between a student's work and vast databases of existing content, making them invaluable in combating plagiarism and other dishonest practices. Turnitin is one of the most widely recognized AI-powered plagiarism detection tools. Established in the late 1990s, Turnitin compares student submissions to a vast repository of academic papers, web pages, and other digital content. It uses sophisticated algorithms to detect matches between a submitted document and content in its database pointing out instances of similarity. Grammarly, primarily known as a grammar-checking tool, also incorporates plagiarism detection by scanning content against an extensive database of online sources. Similarly, Copyscape offers an AI-powered plagiarism detection service that identifies content copied from websites, making it particularly useful for detecting plagiarism in online publications (Eaton, 2020).

These AI tools operate using a combination of algorithms, data mining, and machine learning techniques. At their core, these systems rely on text-matching algorithms that compare a student's submission against an enormous datasets of previously submitted academic papers, journal articles, books, and websites. The algorithms break the text into smaller chunks, known as tokens, and search for matches within the database. When a match is found, the system flags the corresponding section as potentially plagiarized. Hu and Lei, (2021) in their research revealed that machine learning further enhances these tools by allowing them to learn from previous comparisons, improving their ability to identify paraphrasing and other forms of academic misconduct that might escape simple text-matching algorithms. In addition to text-matching, modern AI-driven plagiarism detection tools employ natural language processing (NLP) techniques to identify more sophisticated forms of plagiarism. NLP allows the tools to analyze the structure and semantics of the text, helping to detect cases where students have attempted to disguise plagiarism by paraphrasing or rearranging sentences. This advanced level of analysis enables AI to catch plagiarism that may not involve direct copying of text but rather subtle alterations of existing content (Dawson & Sutherland-Smith, 2018).

While these AI tools are highly effective at detecting plagiarism, they are not without limitations. One major challenge lies in their reliance on existing databases. If a plagiarized source is not included in the tool's database, it will not be detected. Additionally, AI tools may struggle with detecting plagiarism in languages other than English or disciplines with niche terminology and phrasing. Moreover, these tools as observed by Lancaster and Clarke (2016) are less effective at identifying contract cheating, where students outsource their assignments to third parties who produce original content on their behalf. In such cases, since the content is not copied from an existing source, AI-driven tools may fail to flag it as plagiarism. Despite these limitations, AI-driven plagiarism detection tools have proven to be effective in maintaining academic integrity. Many academic institutions in both developed and developing countries have adopted these tools as part of their standard assessment processes. For instance, a study conducted at the University of South Australia demonstrated that the use of Turnitin significantly reduced instances of plagiarism, particularly when students were made aware that their submissions would be checked for originality. This

approach not only discouraged academic dishonesty but also encouraged students to develop better citation and referencing skills Bretag, Mahmud, Wallace, Walker, McGowan, East & James, 2019).

In another case, the University of Oxford implemented a multi-layered approach to plagiarism detection by using both AI-powered tools and human oversight. Faculty members were trained to use Turnitin's detailed reports to not only identify cases of plagiarism but also provide feedback to students on how to improve their writing and citation practices. Macfarlane, (2020) found that this combination of AI tools and human intervention proved to be effective in promoting academic integrity while also supporting student learning.

AI Tools and Strategies to Detect Contract Cheating

In response to the difficulties in checking the rise of contract cheating using conventional plagiarism detection tools, special AI tools have been developed to detect discrepancies in writing style and authorship, offering a more sophisticated approach to academic integrity. One of the key strategies employed by AI is **textual analysis**, where machine learning algorithms analyze the linguistic features of a student's writing, such as sentence structure, vocabulary usage, and stylistic tendencies. By comparing multiple submissions from the same student, AI can detect shifts in writing style that may indicate the work was completed by someone else. For instance, Dawson and Sutherland-Smith (2018) discovered that tools like Turnitin Authorship Investigation (TAI) utilize natural language processing (NLP) to create a writing profile for each student. This profile is then used to compare new submissions, identifying inconsistencies that could suggest contract cheating.

Another strategy involves **authorship identification**. AI tools use machine learning techniques to develop a unique "fingerprint" of a student's writing style over time. This involves tracking factors such as word choice, sentence complexity, and syntactic structures across multiple assignments. When a student submits a piece of work that significantly deviates from their established writing profile, it raises red flags. These tools can identify whether a particular submission aligns with the student's previous work or if it appears to have been written by a different individual. By using statistical models and linguistic algorithms, AI-driven authorship verification has become a powerful tool in combating contract cheating (Harwell, 2020).

Challenges in detecting Contract Cheating using Textual Analysis and Authorship Identification in Differentiating Legitimate Assistance from Cheating

One of the primary challenges in detecting contract cheating is distinguishing between legitimate assistance and dishonest behaviour. Students often seek help with their assignments, whether through tutoring, writing centres, or peer review. While these forms of assistance are generally acceptable, they can sometimes blur the line between collaboration and cheating. For instance, a student may receive significant help in editing or rewriting an assignment, which may alter the writing style enough to trigger AI-based authorship detection systems. In such cases, AI tools may falsely flag legitimate help as potential cheating, leading to unfair accusations against the student (Quraishi, 2021). Additionally, contract cheating services have evolved to circumvent detection. Some essay mills now offer services where writers work with students over some time to gradually complete assignments, making it harder for AI tools to detect discrepancies in authorship. Moreover, ghostwriters often mimic the student's writing style, further complicating detection efforts. This makes it difficult for AI systems to distinguish between genuine improvements in a student's writing abilities and outsourced work. Since the purchased work is often original and free from plagiarism, traditional AI-driven plagiarism checkers fail to flag these assignments.

Ethical Concerns about the use of AI tools in Checkmating Academic Dishonesty and Misconducts in Educational Environments.

While some AI tools like Turnitin, Grammarly, Copyscape, Proctorio and others are primarily designed for surveillance to identify instances of plagiarism, Examination, assignment or contract cheating, they often involve intrusive data collection and monitoring. These tools analyze not only the content of student submissions but also behavioural data, such as typing patterns and online activity during exams (Selwyn, 2019). This protocol creates a concern that AI integrity checkers may infringe on students' privacy and create an environment of constant scrutiny. This can foster a culture of distrust. When students know they are being closely monitored by AI systems, they may feel as though they are guilty until proven innocent. This can undermine the educational process, shifting the focus from learning to avoidance of detection by AI algorithms. Zimmer (2020) raised a concern that these AI tools may disproportionately affect certain groups of students, such as those with learning disabilities, non-native speakers, or students from marginalized backgrounds, whose behaviour or writing patterns may be more likely to trigger false positives.

This concern is particularly pronounced in online learning environments, where students' activities can be monitored in ways that would be unthinkable in traditional classrooms. For example, remote proctoring tools use AI to monitor students during online exams, tracking their eye movements, facial expressions, and even the ambient noise in their environment. While these tools are designed to prevent cheating, they have been criticized for being overly invasive and for generating false positives that unfairly penalize students. In one case, a student was flagged for suspicious behaviour during an exam because the AI detected a shadow passing across the screen, which was later revealed to be the result of lighting changes in the room (Harwell, 2020). These examples highlight the potential for AI surveillance to misinterpret innocent actions as signs of misconduct, raising concerns about the fairness of such systems.

Recommendations for Best Practices in the Use of AI Tools in Detecting academic Misconduct in school while respecting Academic Freedom of students

The following recommendations offer a pathway to balance the benefits of AI tools with the protection of students' rights.

1. **Transparency and Consent:** Educational institutions should be transparent about how AI tools are used, what data they collect, and how that data is analyzed. Students should be fully informed about the implications of using AI-powered systems and should have the ability to provide informed consent. Transparency builds trust and helps mitigate concerns about surveillance.
2. **Minimizing Data Collection:** Institutions should prioritize student privacy by minimizing the amount of data collected by AI systems. Instead of collecting extensive personal information, AI tools should focus on the specific behaviours relevant to academic integrity. Data should be anonymized wherever possible to protect students' identities.
3. **Bias Audits:** AI systems should be regularly audited for bias to ensure that they do not unfairly target certain groups of students. Institutions should work with AI developers to improve the fairness and accuracy of their tools, particularly when they are used in diverse educational environments.
4. **Student-Centered Approaches:** Institutions should adopt a student-centred approach to AI surveillance, focusing on education and support rather than

punishment. Rather than relying solely on AI to catch cheating, institutions should invest in resources that help students understand academic integrity and develop the skills they need to succeed honestly. In a nutshell, by adopting transparent, ethical, and student-centred practices, educational institutions can balance the benefits of AI tools and the rights of their students.

5. **Creating awareness to ensure Understanding of AI Capabilities and Limitations:** Faculty should be well-versed in the understanding of functionality and limitations of the AI tools they use. For example, tools like Turnitin provide similarity reports, but they do not make definitive claims about whether plagiarism has occurred. It is the faculty's responsibility to carefully review these reports and make informed decisions about potential academic misconduct. Also, Institutions should provide clear definitions of academic misconduct, including plagiarism, contract cheating, and other forms of dishonest behaviour. This ensures that AI systems are calibrated to detect behaviours that violate institutional policies and that students are aware of what constitutes a violation.
6. **Using AI as a Supplement, Not a Substitute:** AI tools should serve as supplements to, rather than replacements for, traditional methods of evaluating student work. Educators should continue to engage with students' assignments, checking for consistency, clarity, and effort in ways that go beyond AI algorithms. A case study is the University of Sydney which combined human oversight with AI tools improve the detection of academic misconduct. The university introduced a policy that required all AI-generated results to be reviewed by academic staff before taking any disciplinary action. Dawson (2021) revealed that this approach reduced the number of false accusations, built trust between students and faculty, and ensured that contract cheating cases were more thoroughly investigated.
7. **Providing Students with knowledge and Guidance on AI Tools:** Institutions can play a pivotal role in shaping students' ethical understanding of AI use by integrating discussions of ethics into the curriculum and how AI tools are used to detect academic misconduct, encouraging transparency and fostering a sense of responsibility. This is because, understanding how tools like plagiarism checkers work can help students avoid unintentional plagiarism, such as improper citation practices or paraphrasing errors. Ultimately, students should be encouraged to view AI as a tool that can support their learning, rather than a shortcut to success. By promoting ethical AI use, institutions can help students understand that while AI offers valuable assistance, personal integrity and original thought remain central to academic achievement.
8. **Offering Constructive Feedback:** If AI tools detect potential academic misconduct, faculty should provide students with constructive feedback. Educators should focus on helping students understand why their actions were problematic and how they can avoid similar issues in the future. More so, students accused of academic misconduct based on AI findings should be given the room to challenge AI-generated results, present their case and receive a fair review by faculty or academic integrity committees. This approach helps foster a culture of learning and growth rather than punishment.

Conclusion

AI has rapidly become a crucial tool in the fight against academic misconduct, offering advanced capabilities that help institutions uphold academic integrity. From detecting plagiarism and paraphrasing to identifying contract cheating, AI-driven systems such as Turnitin, Grammarly, and natural language processing (NLP) tools have empowered educators and administrators to monitor and assess student work more effectively. These technologies leverage sophisticated algorithms, data mining, and machine learning to scrutinize large volumes of content quickly and efficiently, flagging potential dishonesty. However, these technological advancements must be balanced with the ethical considerations, academic freedoms and best practices that define higher education.

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