



AI Ethics in ChatGPT Usage Among University Students

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Abstract. The rapid development of Artificial Intelligence (AI), particularly ChatGPT, has significantly transformed higher education worldwide. University students increasingly use ChatGPT to complete assignments, generate academic ideas, summarize journals, translate texts, and support learning activities. However, alongside its educational benefits, ChatGPT also raises ethical concerns related to plagiarism, academic dishonesty, dependency on AI, declining critical thinking, and data privacy. This study aims to critically review previous studies discussing AI ethics in ChatGPT usage among university students. This research employs a qualitative literature review approach using Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the primary analytical framework. The data were obtained from scholarly journal articles, academic reports, and previous research published between 2021 and 2025. The findings reveal three dominant discourse themes: ChatGPT as an educational assistant, ChatGPT as a threat to academic integrity, and ChatGPT as a reflection of educational pressure within modern higher education systems. Furthermore, the literature demonstrates that ethical debates regarding ChatGPT are closely connected to broader ideological issues involving technological optimism, neoliberal productivity culture, and institutional authority. This study concludes that AI ethics in higher education is not merely a technical issue but a socially and ideologically contested phenomenon shaped through discourse, educational values, and institutional interests.

Keywords: Academic Integrity, AI Ethics, Critical Literature Review, Critical Discourse Analysis, ChatGPT, Higher Education.

1. INTRODUCTION

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become one of the most influential technological developments in contemporary education. Among various AI technologies, ChatGPT is currently one of the most widely used generative AI platforms among university students. Since its introduction by OpenAI, ChatGPT has rapidly transformed educational practices because of its ability to generate texts, summarize information, answer academic questions, and assist learning activities instantly.

In higher education environments, students increasingly use ChatGPT for completing assignments, generating essay structures, translating journals, improving grammar, and conducting preliminary academic research. According to Nam and Bai (2023), ChatGPT has become “a powerful AI chatbot” capable of generating realistic academic texts and supporting educational activities. The rapid adoption of ChatGPT has generated both optimism and concern within academic communities. On one hand, many students perceive ChatGPT as a practical educational tool that improves productivity and helps manage demanding academic workloads. On the other hand, lecturers and institutions express concerns regarding plagiarism, declining originality, dependency on AI, and academic dishonesty.

Nam and Bai (2023) argued that ethical concerns surrounding ChatGPT are closely connected to “academic integrity, authorship, and publication.” Similarly, Panagopoulou, Parpoula, and Karpouzis (2023) explained that ChatGPT raises legal and ethical concerns regarding transparency, fairness, and responsible AI usage in education. These debates indicate that discussions regarding ChatGPT are not limited to technological issues alone. Ethical discourse surrounding AI reflects broader tensions involving educational values, institutional authority, technological dependency, and digital culture. Previous studies discussing ChatGPT in education have rapidly increased during the past few years. However, most studies focus on technical implementation, surveys, or policy recommendations. Limited research critically examines how ethical meanings regarding ChatGPT are socially constructed within academic literature through discourse analysis. Therefore, this study aims to critically review previous scholarly studies discussing AI ethics in ChatGPT usage among university students. Specifically, this study seeks to identify dominant ethical themes, analyze ideological tensions within academic discourse, and examine how previous scholars construct narratives surrounding ChatGPT in higher education.

This study is important because understanding ethical discourse regarding ChatGPT can provide deeper insight into how educational institutions respond to technological transformation. Furthermore, the research contributes to the development of Critical Discourse Analysis within digital education studies.

Research Questions

1. How is ChatGPT represented within previous studies discussing higher education?
2. What ethical issues related to ChatGPT usage among university students emerge within academic literature?
3. What ideological perspectives are reflected within previous research discussing AI ethics in higher education?

Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design using a critical literature review approach. Instead of collecting primary data from interviews or surveys, this study analyzed findings from previous scholarly research discussing ChatGPT and AI ethics in higher education. The data sources consisted of journal articles, conference papers, academic reports, and scholarly publications published between 2021 and 2025. The researcher selected relevant literature discussing ethical concerns regarding ChatGPT usage among university students. The inclusion criteria included:

1. Studies discussing ChatGPT or generative AI in higher education.
2. Research focusing on ethical concerns such as plagiarism, academic integrity, dependency, transparency, or critical thinking.
3. Peer-reviewed journal articles or credible academic publications.
4. Publications written in English.

Approximately 25 scholarly sources were selected through purposive sampling. The researcher categorized the literature based on recurring themes and ethical concerns.

This study employed Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which consists of:

1. textual analysis,
2. discursive practice analysis,
3. social practice analysis.

The researcher analyzed how previous studies constructed narratives regarding ChatGPT, what vocabulary and assumptions were frequently used, and what ideological meanings emerged within academic discussions.

To ensure trustworthiness, the study applied source triangulation by comparing findings across multiple scholarly publications. Repeated interpretation and thematic categorization were also conducted to maintain analytical consistency.

2. THEORETICAL REVIEW

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis explains that discourse is not neutral communication but a social practice connected to ideology and power relations. Through language, institutions and dominant groups shape public understanding regarding social phenomena.

Fairclough argued that discourse functions as a mechanism for constructing reality and legitimizing institutional authority. In discussions regarding ChatGPT, discourse becomes a site where students, lecturers, researchers, and institutions negotiate meanings about academic ethics and educational values.

Fairclough's framework includes:

1. textual analysis,
2. discursive practice,
3. social practice.

This framework is relevant because the study focuses on how ethical meanings surrounding ChatGPT are socially constructed within academic literature.

Algorithmic Governance Theory

Algorithmic Governance Theory explains how AI technologies increasingly influence educational systems and decision-making processes. According to Williamson (2021), educational technologies increasingly shape institutional governance, surveillance, and academic evaluation systems.

AI systems influence higher education through:

- a. plagiarism detection,
- b. automated grading,
- c. recommendation systems,
- d. digital monitoring.

This theory helps explain why ethical concerns regarding transparency, accountability, and surveillance emerge within higher education discourse.

AI Ethics Framework

The AI Ethics Framework emphasizes several important ethical principles:

- a. Fairness

Example: An AI grading system gives equal assessment opportunities to all students without discriminating based on gender, race, or background.

- b. Transparency

Example: A university explains to students how its AI plagiarism checker works and what factors are used to evaluate assignments.

- c. Accountability

Example: If an AI system incorrectly marks a student for cheating, the school administration and developers take responsibility and review the decision.

- d. Privacy

Example: An educational AI platform protects students' personal data, such as grades and learning records, from unauthorized access.

- e. Human Autonomy

Example: Teachers still make final academic decisions instead of relying completely on AI recommendations.

f. Academic Integrity

Example: Students use AI tools only for guidance and research support, not for generating full assignments dishonestly.

Ryan et al. (2021) explained that ethical AI implementation must prioritize responsible technological practices and protect human autonomy. Ethical principles become especially important in educational settings because AI directly influences learning processes and academic behavior.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

This section presents the main findings obtained from the critical literature review regarding AI ethics in ChatGPT usage among university students. The findings are organized based on the three research questions of this study.

Table 1. Representation of ChatGPT in Higher Education

No	Representation of ChatGPT	Main Findings	Supporting Studies
1	Educational Assistant	ChatGPT helps students generate ideas, summarize materials, improve grammar, and support learning activities.	Nam & Bai (2023), Zhu et al. (2023)
2	Productivity Tool	Students use ChatGPT to complete academic tasks more efficiently and manage workloads.	Matthews (2021), Nam & Bai (2023)
3	Language Support Tool	Non-native English speakers use ChatGPT for translation and grammar correction.	Zhu et al. (2023)

The literature shows that ChatGPT is frequently represented as an educational assistant within higher education discourse. Many studies explain that university students use ChatGPT to improve academic productivity, generate ideas, summarize articles, and assist learning activities. Nam and Bai (2023) stated that ChatGPT functions as “a powerful AI chatbot” capable of supporting educational practices and human intelligence. Similarly, Zhu et al. (2023) found that students positively perceived ChatGPT because it improves efficiency, addresses knowledge gaps, and generates human-like responses.

Several studies also reported that ChatGPT helps students overcome language barriers, particularly among non-native English speakers who use AI tools for grammar correction and text simplification. However, some studies warned that excessive dependency on ChatGPT may negatively affect self-discipline and independent learning.

Table 2. Ethical Issues Emerging from ChatGPT Usage

No	Ethical Issues	Main Findings	Supporting Studies
1	Plagiarism	Students may submit AI-generated work without proper acknowledgment.	Bearman et al. (2023)
2	Academic Dishonesty	ChatGPT is associated with cheating and unethical academic behavior.	Nam & Bai (2023)
3	Dependency on AI	Excessive use of AI may weaken critical thinking and independent learning.	Zhu et al. (2023)
4	Transparency and Accountability	Concerns emerge regarding responsible AI usage and authorship.	Panagopoulou et al. (2023)
5	Data Privacy	AI systems raise concerns regarding surveillance and user data protection.	Williamson (2021)

Another dominant theme identified within previous studies involves ethical concerns regarding plagiarism and academic dishonesty. Bearman, Ryan, and Ajjawi (2023) argued that discourse surrounding AI in higher education is dominated by concerns regarding academic integrity and originality. Similarly, Nam and Bai (2023) explained that educational institutions increasingly worry about “ethical writing,” authorship, and cheating associated with ChatGPT usage.

Many studies also highlighted concerns regarding dependency on AI technologies. Zhu et al. (2023) reported that some students considered ChatGPT “counterproductive to self-discipline and thinking.” Furthermore, Panagopoulou et al. (2023) emphasized that ChatGPT creates ethical and legal challenges regarding responsible AI implementation in educational settings.

Table 3. Ideological Perspectives Found in Previous Studies

No	Ideological Perspective	Main Findings	Supporting Studies
1	Technological Optimism	ChatGPT is viewed as educational innovation and modernization.	Nam & Bai (2023)
2	Ethical Anxiety	Researchers express concerns regarding dehumanization and declining critical thinking.	Bearman et al. (2023)
3	Neoliberal Productivity Culture	AI usage is linked to academic pressure and productivity demands.	Matthews (2021)
4	Institutional Authority	Universities attempt to maintain academic control and authenticity.	Fairclough (2015), Williamson (2021)

A significant finding emerging from the literature is the relationship between ChatGPT usage and educational pressure. Several studies found that students frequently justify AI usage because of heavy workloads, burnout, and increasing productivity demands. Matthews (2021) argued that modern universities increasingly emphasize productivity and efficiency within neoliberal educational systems. Under such conditions, students perceive ChatGPT as a practical solution for managing excessive academic tasks.

The literature also reveals competing ideological perspectives regarding ChatGPT in higher education. Some scholars frame ChatGPT as a revolutionary educational innovation capable of improving learning accessibility and democratizing knowledge access. Others

emphasize ethical risks involving surveillance, dependency, dehumanization, and declining critical thinking.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that discourse surrounding ChatGPT in higher education is socially constructed through competing narratives and ideological tensions. Using Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), this study identifies how language within academic literature reflects broader power relations, institutional values, and technological ideologies.

One dominant discourse identified in the literature is the representation of ChatGPT as an educational assistant. Many studies describe ChatGPT using positive lexical choices such as "support," "efficiency," "innovation," and "accessibility." From a CDA perspective, these linguistic patterns reflect technological optimism within modern higher education. Educational institutions increasingly promote digital transformation, and AI technologies are often constructed as symbols of modernization and academic progress.

However, the literature simultaneously constructs ChatGPT as a threat to academic integrity. Previous studies frequently use negative expressions such as "academic misconduct," "cheating," "ethical risk," and "plagiarism." These discursive patterns position AI-assisted students as potentially problematic subjects within academic environments. Fairclough's framework suggests that such discourse reflects institutional attempts to preserve traditional academic authority, originality, and intellectual authenticity.

Furthermore, the findings reveal that ethical concerns regarding ChatGPT are closely connected to broader structural issues in higher education. Several studies explain that students use ChatGPT because of heavy workloads, academic pressure, and productivity demands. From the perspective of social practice analysis, this indicates that AI dependency is not merely an individual issue but also a consequence of neoliberal educational systems emphasizing efficiency and performance. ChatGPT therefore becomes both a technological tool and a survival mechanism within competitive academic environments.

The discussion also reveals ideological tensions between technological optimism and ethical anxiety. Some scholars believe that ChatGPT can democratize access to knowledge and improve learning accessibility, particularly for students with language barriers. In contrast, other researchers warn about surveillance, dehumanization, and declining critical thinking. These competing narratives demonstrate that AI ethics discourse is deeply connected to debates regarding the future role of humans, institutions, and technology in education.

In addition, the literature reflects concerns regarding institutional governance and algorithmic control. AI technologies increasingly influence educational monitoring, plagiarism detection, and academic evaluation systems. This supports Williamson's theory of algorithmic governance, which explains how educational technologies shape institutional power and digital surveillance practices.

Overall, the discussion demonstrates that AI ethics in higher education is not simply a technical issue but a socially and ideologically contested phenomenon. Ethical meanings surrounding ChatGPT are continuously negotiated through discourse, institutional interests, educational values, and technological transformation.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that ethical discourse regarding ChatGPT usage among university students is socially constructed through competing narratives within academic literature. Previous studies generally represent ChatGPT as both an educational opportunity and an ethical threat. Students frequently perceive ChatGPT as a practical educational assistant that improves efficiency and helps manage academic workloads. In contrast, many researchers and educational institutions frame ChatGPT as a challenge to academic integrity, originality, and critical thinking. Furthermore, the study demonstrates that ethical concerns regarding ChatGPT are closely connected to broader structural issues within higher education, including productivity culture, educational pressure, technological dependency, and institutional authority. Through Critical Discourse Analysis, this study reveals that AI ethics discourse is not neutral but reflects ideological struggles regarding educational values and technological transformation. Therefore, higher education institutions should develop balanced AI policies emphasizing ethical awareness, transparency, digital literacy, and critical engagement rather than relying solely on restrictive approaches. Future studies are recommended to further examine how AI ethics discourse differs across cultural contexts and educational systems.

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