INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CONTEMPORARY AFRICA RESEARCH NETWORK
Publication of Contemporary Africa Research Network (CARN)
Volume 3 (2), 2025
ISSN: 1115 – 585x
Available online: https://journals.iapaar.com/index.php/ijcarn/issue
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.

Academic Integrity in the Age of AI: Educator and Student Opinions on Plagiarism Detection Tools

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Abstract

This study examines educators' and students' perceptions of AI-powered and traditional plagiarism detection tools in Nigerian universities, focusing on their effectiveness in identifying AI-generated content. Using a descriptive survey design, data was collected using a questionnaire from 120 lecturers and 450 students across six federal universities. The instrument was validated and a reliability test was conducted yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.84. the data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation and inferential statistics of independent t-test. The results revealed significant differences in confidence levels, with lecturers demonstrating stronger belief in both AI-powered and traditional detection tools compared to students. The findings highlight a critical perception gap, where educators' institutional experience fosters trust in these systems, while students exhibit skepticism due to concerns about accuracy and fairness. The study concludes that overreliance on detection technologies without addressing stakeholder perception gaps may undermine academic integrity efforts. Recommendations include among others include adopting multi-layered assessment strategies combining AI detection with human evaluation, fostering dialogue and writing skill development is advised, while developers should improve algorithmic transparency.

Keywords: academic integrity, AI, plagiarism, detection tools

Introduction

Academic integrity has long been the cornerstone of credible education, ensuring that learning is built on honesty, trust, and originality (Pigott & Polanin, 2020). Academic integrity constitutes the fundamental ethical framework governing scholarly conduct, encompassing principles of honesty, trustworthiness, and intellectual accountability in educational practice (Bertram Gallant, 2017). The International Center for Academic Integrity (ICAI, 2021) conceptualizes it as a commitment to six core values: honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and courage. This ethical paradigm operates at multiple levels of academic practice, from student learning behaviors to institutional quality assurance mechanisms (Macfarlane, 2016). Its maintenance proves essential for ensuring the credibility of academic credentials and the validity of knowledge production processes in higher education (Bretag, 2016).

The digital transformation of education has introduced unprecedented challenges to traditional conceptions of academic integrity. Contemporary scholars characterize the current era

as a "post-plagiarism" landscape, where artificial intelligence tools can generate sophisticated academic work that evades conventional detection methods (Eaton, 2021). Research indicates that 58% of university students consider AI-assisted writing to constitute a form of academic misconduct, while 22% perceive it as an acceptable learning aid (Cotton et al., 2023). This technological disruption necessitates re-examination of fundamental academic constructs, including the nature of authorship and the definition of original scholarship in an age of machine-generated content (Perkins et al., 2023).

The pedagogical significance of academic integrity extends beyond regulatory compliance to encompass fundamental learning processes. Constructivist learning theory emphasizes that meaningful knowledge acquisition requires authentic intellectual engagement, which academic integrity safeguards (Sotiriadou et al., 2020). When students submit work representing their genuine understanding, assessment outcomes accurately reflect learning progression and inform targeted instructional interventions (Newton & Lang, 2016). Conversely, contract cheating and AI-generated submissions create false indicators of competency that undermine the diagnostic function of assessment (Lancaster, 2023). This distortion particularly impacts formative assessment processes designed to scaffold skill development through iterative feedback cycles (Tai et al., 2023).

Institutional approaches to academic integrity have evolved from punitive, rule-based models toward educational, values-based frameworks (Stephens et al., 2021). Contemporary best practice emphasizes preventative strategies combining policy development, academic literacy instruction, and assessment redesign (Bretag et al., 2019). Evidence suggests that institutions implementing comprehensive academic integrity education programs experience 37% fewer misconduct cases compared to those relying solely on disciplinary measures (Morris, 2018). This paradigm shift reflects growing recognition that many integrity violations stem from skill deficits rather than ethical failings, particularly regarding proper source attribution and academic writing conventions (East & Donnelly, 2018).

Emerging technologies present both challenges and opportunities for academic integrity practice. While AI text generators complicate authorship verification, machine learning algorithms also enable more sophisticated plagiarism detection (Rogerson, 2023). Blockchain technology shows promise for creating tamper-proof credentialing systems, and learning analytics can identify anomalous patterns in student performance (Ifenthaler & Schumacher, 2023). However, technological solutions must be implemented judiciously to avoid creating surveillance environments that erode trust—a fundamental pillar of academic integrity (Arnold et al., 2022). The most effective approaches balance technological tools with pedagogical strategies that foster intrinsic motivation for ethical scholarship (Stoesz & Yudintseva, 2023).

However, the rapid rise of artificial intelligence (AI) has introduced both opportunities and challenges in maintaining these ethical standards. With AI-powered tools now capable of generating essays, solving complex problems, and even mimicking human writing styles, the boundaries between original work and academic dishonesty have blurred. This shift calls for a

renewed examination of how educators and students perceive the role of AI in upholding or undermining academic integrity.

Humans are undeniably living in the "Age of AI," where intelligent systems permeate every aspect of education, from personalized learning to automated assessments (Burns, 2023). AI's ability to process vast amounts of data and perform tasks traditionally reserved for humans has revolutionized classrooms, but it has also raised critical questions about authenticity and accountability. While AI can enhance efficiency, its misuse threatens to erode the very foundations of academic credibility. As institutions grapple with these changes, understanding how key stakeholders educators and students navigate this new terrain becomes essential.

Plagiarism, the act of presenting someone else's work as one's own, has always been a persistent issue in academia (Mishra, 2022). However, AI complicates this problem by making it easier to produce seemingly original content without proper attribution. Students may unintentionally or deliberately use AI-generated text, while educators face the challenge of distinguishing between human and machine-produced work. This dynamic creates a pressing need for robust mechanisms to detect and deter plagiarism in ways that keep pace with technological advancements.

Plagiarism detection has evolved from manual cross-referencing to sophisticated AI-driven analysis, capable of scanning millions of documents in seconds (ClickUp, 2024). Modern tools like Turnitin employ machine learning and natural language processing to identify unoriginal content, paraphrased text, and even AI-generated writing. While these technologies offer unprecedented accuracy, their effectiveness depends on how well they are integrated into educational practices and whether they are trusted by those who use them.

The emergence of AI-powered plagiarism detection tools represents a significant evolution from traditional text-matching systems, reflecting the changing landscape of academic integrity challenges in the digital age. Traditional plagiarism detection tools like Turnitin (Neendoor, 2024) primarily functioned by comparing submitted texts against databases of existing works to identify verbatim matches and improperly cited paraphrasing. These systems excelled at detecting conventional forms of plagiarism but faced limitations in identifying more sophisticated forms of academic misconduct, particularly as AI writing tools became more prevalent (Bassey, 2024). The technological foundation of these traditional systems relied on pattern recognition within known textual corpora, making them less effective against novel forms of content generation that don't directly copy existing materials (ClickUp, 2024).

AI-powered plagiarism detection tools represent a paradigm shift by incorporating machine learning and natural language processing capabilities to analyze writing at a more fundamental level (Burns, 2023). These advanced systems can detect anomalies in writing style, syntax patterns, and semantic coherence that may indicate AI-generated content, even when the text doesn't directly match existing sources (Mahendra, 2023). Unlike their predecessors that focused on textual similarity, modern AI detection tools attempt to discern the very nature of content creation, distinguishing between human and machine-generated writing through sophisticated algorithmic analysis (Huseyn, 2024). This capability has become increasingly crucial as AI writing assistants

can now produce original-appearing text that bypasses traditional plagiarism checks while still constituting academic dishonesty when presented as student work (Education Advice, 2024).

Plagiarism detection tools are now indispensable in maintaining academic standards, but their adoption is not without controversy (Neendoor, 2024). Some educators praise them for deterring dishonesty and streamlining grading, while others criticize them for fostering a punitive atmosphere or failing to keep up with emerging AI threats. Similarly, students may view these tools as necessary safeguards or as invasive surveillance that undermines trust. These differing perspectives highlight the need for a balanced approach that considers both technological capabilities and human concerns.

The opinions of educators and students are pivotal in shaping how plagiarism detection tools are used and improved in the AI era. Teachers bring firsthand experience in assessing work and identifying misconduct, while students offer insights into how these tools affect their learning experiences and perceptions of fairness. By examining their views, this study seeks to uncover whether current AI-driven solutions are meeting the needs of all stakeholders or if gaps remain that require attention. Against this backdrop, this research explores the intersection of academic integrity, AI advancements, and stakeholder perspectives by investigating the following question:

Research Questions

1. How do educators and students differ in their mean perceptions of the effectiveness of AI-powered plagiarism detection tools in identifying AI-generated content?

2. What is the average level of confidence (mean score) that educators and students have in traditional plagiarism detection tools' ability to distinguish between human-written and AI-generated academic work?

Research Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference in educators and students mean perceptions of the effectiveness of AI-powered plagiarism detection tools in identifying AI-generated content

2. There is no significant difference in the average level of confidence (mean score) that educators and students have in traditional plagiarism detection tools' ability to distinguish between human-written and AI-generated academic work.

Methodology

The study was conducted in Nigeria, focusing on federal universities across the six geo-political zones of the country. Nigeria's diverse educational landscape provides a rich context for examining how lecturers and students perceive AI-powered plagiarism detection tools. By selecting institutions from different regions, the study ensures a broad representation of perspectives, enhancing the generalizability of the findings.

A descriptive survey design was adopted for this research, as it allows for the systematic collection of quantitative data to analyze the perceptions and attitudes of the target population. This approach is particularly suitable for investigating differences in opinions between lecturers

and students regarding the effectiveness of plagiarism detection tools. The design facilitates the comparison of mean scores and standard deviations, enabling a clear interpretation of the data.

The study targeted lecturers and students in the Faculty of Education across six federal universities, one from each geo-political zone in Nigeria. A total of 570 respondents consisting of 120 lecturers and 450 students were selected using a stratified random sampling technique to ensure proportional representation from each university. This sampling method enhances the validity of the findings by minimizing bias and ensuring that the sample reflects the diversity of the population.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to address the research questions and hypotheses. The instrument comprised three main sections: demographic information, perceptions of AI-powered plagiarism detection tools, and confidence in traditional plagiarism detection tools. A 5-point Likert scale was employed to measure responses, ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." The questionnaire was distributed both electronically and in hard copies, depending on accessibility, and data collection was completed over four weeks to maximize participation.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the instrument, the questionnaire was reviewed by experts in educational technology and academic integrity. Their feedback was incorporated into the final version. To ascertain the reliability of the instrument, the instrument was administered to 30 lecturers and 50 students that were not part of the study and Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated to assess internal consistency, yielding a value of 0.82, which indicates high reliability.

Descriptive statistics, including mean scores and standard deviations, were used to summarize the responses and assess the central tendencies and variability in the data. These measures helped answer the research questions by quantifying the perceptions and confidence levels of both lecturers and students. Additionally, an independent samples t-test was conducted to test the hypotheses, comparing the mean scores between the two groups to determine if any observed differences were statistically significant. The analysis was performed using SPSS version 26, with a significance level set at $p < 0.05$. Ethical considerations were strictly adhered to, including obtaining informed consent, ensuring confidentiality, and allowing participants to withdraw at any time. Data were stored securely to protect respondents' anonymity.

Results

Research Question 1

How do educators and students differ in their mean perceptions of the effectiveness of AI-powered plagiarism detection tools in identifying AI-generated content?

Table 1: Descriptive statistics comparing lecturers' and students' perceptions of the effectiveness of AI-powered plagiarism detection tools in identifying AI-generated content

Group	n	$\bar{x}$ (Mean)	SD	Mean Difference
Lecturers	120	3.85	0.72	
				0.47

Students	450	3.38	0.89

The results indicate that lecturers ($\bar{x}$ = 3.85, SD = 0.72) generally perceive AI-powered plagiarism detection tools as more effective than students ($\bar{x}$ = 3.38, SD = 0.89), with a mean difference of 0.47. This suggests that educators, who are more familiar with academic integrity policies and assessment practices, may have greater confidence in these tools compared to students. The lower standard deviation among lecturers implies more consensus in their views, whereas students exhibit slightly more variability in their perceptions.

Research Question 2

What is the average level of confidence (mean score) that educators and students have in traditional plagiarism detection tools' ability to distinguish between human-written and AI-generated academic work?

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of average level of confidence (mean score) that educators and students have in traditional plagiarism detection tools' ability to distinguish between human-written and AI-generated academic work

Group	n	$\bar{x}$ (Mean)	SD	Mean Difference
Lecturers	120	4.12	0.65	
				0.59
Students	450	3.53	0.82	

The results reveal a notable difference in confidence levels between lecturers and students regarding traditional plagiarism detection tools' ability to distinguish human-written from AI-generated work. Lecturers demonstrated significantly higher confidence (M = 4.12, SD = 0.65) compared to students (M = 3.53, SD = 0.82), with a mean difference of 0.59. This substantial gap suggests that educators, likely due to their professional experience with these tools, maintain stronger belief in their effectiveness, while students appear more skeptical. The lower standard deviation among lecturers indicates greater consensus in their views, whereas students' higher variability may reflect diverse personal experiences or levels of trust in institutional systems.

Research Hypotheses

There is no significant difference in educators and students mean perceptions of the effectiveness of AI-powered plagiarism detection tools in identifying AI-generated content

Table 3: independent t-test analysis to analyze the difference between lecturers' and students' perceptions of the effectiveness of AI-powered plagiarism detection tools

Group	n	$\bar{x}$ (Mean)	SD	t-value	df	p-value	Decision
Lecturers	120	3.85	0.72	5.62			
					568	< 0.001	Reject H_0
Students	450	3.38	0.89				

The independent samples t-test revealed a statistically significant difference between the two groups ($t(568) = 5.62$, $p < 0.001$), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. This indicates

that educators and students do not share the same perceptions of these tools, with lecturers demonstrating stronger belief in their efficacy.

There is no significant difference in the average level of confidence (mean score) that educators and students have in traditional plagiarism detection tools' ability to distinguish between human-written and AI-generated academic work

Table 4: independent t-test analysis average level of confidence (mean score) that educators and students have in traditional plagiarism detection tools' ability to distinguish between human-written and AI-generated academic work

Group	n	x̄ (Mean)	SD	t-value	df	p-value	Decision
Lecturers	120	4.12	0.65				
				7.84	568	<0.001	Reject H_0
Students	450	3.53	0.82				

The statistical analysis reveals a significant difference between lecturers' and students' confidence in traditional plagiarism detection tools ($t(568) = 7.84$, $p < 0.001$), leading to rejection of the null hypothesis. The large t-value and extremely small p-value indicate this finding is robust and unlikely due to chance.

Discussion of the Findings

The findings revealing significant differences between educators' and students' perceptions of AI-powered plagiarism detection tools merit thorough examination through multiple analytical lenses. Educators' stronger belief in these tools (M=3.85) compared to students (M=3.38) aligns with professional realities where faculty members routinely employ these systems for academic oversight, developing institutional trust through repeated exposure to their operational mechanisms. This professional familiarity likely contributes to their more favorable assessment, as they witness first-hand the tools' evolving capabilities in flagging AI-generated content through advanced linguistic pattern recognition and metadata analysis.

The educational sector's growing institutional investment in AI detection infrastructure, including integration with learning management systems and grading workflows, further reinforces educators' confidence through systemic validation. Students' relative skepticism may stem from several factors: their position as subjects rather than administrators of these systems creates inherent power dynamics that breed suspicion; exposure to media reports about false positives in AI detection may undermine confidence; and the opacity of algorithmic decision-making processes fosters distrust among digitally-native learners accustomed to transparency. The significant mean difference (0.47) and robust statistical confirmation ($t=5.62$, $p<0.001$) gain deeper meaning when contextualized within the broader academic integrity landscape. Educators' lower standard deviation (0.72 vs 0.89) suggests professional consensus emerging from shared experiences in assessment contexts, while students' greater variability reflects diverse personal encounters with these tools - some may have faced false accusations, others may have successfully circumvented detection, and many likely possess only theoretical knowledge without practical experience.

These findings both corroborate and complicate existing literature on technology acceptance in academic settings. They support studies like Arnold et al. (2022) that identified power asymmetries in educational surveillance technologies, where tool administrators (educators) demonstrate higher confidence than surveilled populations (students). However, they challenge assumptions in Stoesz and Yudintseva's (2023) work suggesting that digital-native students would naturally embrace educational technologies more readily than faculty. The divergence emerges because AI detection tools represent a unique category of educational technology - one designed primarily for compliance monitoring rather than learning enhancement, triggering different adoption dynamics. The results align partially with Cotton et al.'s (2023) findings about student ambivalence toward AI in academia, but extend them by quantifying the educator-student perception gap specifically regarding detection tools rather than AI use generally. The professional knowledge of assessment design helps explain why educators maintain confidence despite known technological limitations - they recognize these tools as one component in a holistic integrity strategy combining technological, pedagogical, and policy interventions. Students, lacking this systemic view, may evaluate the tools in isolation, magnifying perceived shortcomings.

The striking disparity in confidence levels between educators ($M=4.12$) and students ($M=3.53$) regarding traditional plagiarism detection tools' efficacy against AI-generated content reveals fundamental tensions in academic integrity paradigms during technological disruption. This 0.59-point mean difference, statistically robust at $t(568)=7.84$, $p<0.001$, reflects more than simple measurement variation - it exposes critical fractures in how different academic stakeholders perceive the evolving threats to scholarly authenticity. Educators' relatively high confidence likely stems from years of institutional reliance on tools like Turnitin that have proven effective against conventional plagiarism, creating professional comfort with their text-matching algorithms. Their position as assessment gatekeepers grants them visibility into detection successes but potentially blinds them to emerging vulnerabilities, as their workflow typically doesn't involve systematically testing tools against sophisticated AI outputs. Students' significantly lower confidence suggests they either possess firsthand experience of these tools' limitations against AI content or intuitively recognize that systems designed for human-to-human text comparison cannot seamlessly adapt to machine-generated writing. This perceptual gap mirrors Rogers' Diffusion of Innovation theory, where educators as institutional decision-makers exhibit "late majority" characteristics in maintaining confidence in existing systems, while students as digital natives demonstrate "innovator" skepticism about legacy technologies facing disruptive challenges.

The findings powerfully contradict assumptions in early AI-in-education literature that positioned traditional plagiarism detectors as adequate safeguards. They align more closely with recent work by Rogerson (2023) demonstrating how generative AI exploits fundamental weaknesses in lexical matching algorithms, and Bassey's (2024) warnings about the "pattern recognition gap" between human-authored and machine-generated texts. The results particularly challenge institutional narratives that have positioned traditional plagiarism tools as comprehensive solutions, suggesting instead that their continued uncritical adoption may create false security among faculty while students recognize their obsolescence. This divergence becomes

especially problematic when considering assessment validity - if educators trust tools that students know can be circumvented, it creates asymmetric information that undermines the deterrent effect of plagiarism policies. The professional experience of academic integrity officers would suggest this confidence gap may explain rising AI misuse cases, where students perceive low detection risks despite official prohibitions.

These findings gain deeper significance when examining the standard deviation patterns. Educators' lower variability (SD=0.65) suggests institutional normalization of these tools through training and policy documents has created relative consensus, while students' wider dispersion (SD=0.82) likely reflects diverse personal experiences - some may have successfully submitted AI-generated work undetected, others may know peers who have, while some may simply distrust all institutional surveillance technologies on principle. This variability pattern mirrors Ifenthaler and Schumacher's (2023) findings about uneven technological literacy across student populations.

The results carry important implications for academic integrity policy, suggesting that maintaining outdated detection systems without transparent communication about their capabilities and limitations may erode institutional credibility more severely than acknowledging their evolving inadequacies. From a professional standpoint, these findings argue for urgent reassessment of plagiarism detection investments, with resources potentially better directed toward pedagogical approaches like authentic assessment redesign and AI literacy education that don't rely solely on technological detection. The study ultimately reveals that the AI era has created a crisis of confidence in traditional academic integrity mechanisms, requiring fundamental rethinking of how institutions balance technological, pedagogical and policy responses to maintain meaningful standards of original scholarship.

Conclusions

The findings of this study lead to several critical conclusions about stakeholder confidence in plagiarism detection tools in the AI era. First, the significant gap between educators' and students' confidence levels in both AI-powered and traditional detection tools reveals a fundamental disconnect in how these technologies are perceived within academic communities. Educators maintain substantially stronger belief in these systems' effectiveness, likely due to their professional experience and institutional positioning, while students demonstrate notable skepticism that reflects either firsthand experience with the tools' limitations or intuitive understanding of their technological constraints. Second, the particularly large confidence disparity regarding traditional plagiarism detectors suggests these conventional systems may be losing credibility among students as AI-generated content becomes more sophisticated, potentially undermining their deterrent value. Third, the consistency of these perception gaps across different types of detection technologies indicates that the challenge extends beyond specific tools to broader issues of trust and transparency in academic integrity systems. Fourth, the patterns in response variability suggest that institutional normalization of these tools has created relative consensus among educators, while students' more diverse experiences lead to wider-ranging opinions. These conclusions collectively indicate that maintaining academic integrity in the AI age requires more than technological solutions - it demands addressing the perceptual divides between

stakeholders through improved communication, education about tool capabilities and limitations, and potentially rethinking assessment approaches to reduce over-reliance on detection systems. The study ultimately concludes that while plagiarism detection tools remain important components of academic integrity strategies, their effectiveness depends as much on stakeholder buy-in and appropriate implementation as on their technical capabilities.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following practical recommendations were made:

1. Institutions should conduct workshops to educate both faculty and students about how AI-powered and traditional plagiarism detection tools work, including their strengths, limitations, and appropriate use. Clear guidelines should be provided on interpreting detection reports to minimize false accusations.
2. Academic Institutions adopt multi-layered detection approaches, since traditional tools are less trusted by students, institutions should integrate AI-enhanced detection systems while also incorporating human oversight (e.g., oral assessments, in-class writing exercises) to ensure fair evaluation.
3. Academic institutions should revise academic integrity policies. The policies should explicitly address AI-generated content, defining acceptable vs. unacceptable use. Educators should communicate these policies clearly at the start of courses to set expectations.
4. Academic institutions should promote ethical AI literacy, instead of relying solely on detection, educators should teach students about responsible AI use, proper citation of AI-generated content, and the ethical implications of academic dishonesty.
5. Students should actively seek clarification on how plagiarism detection tools are used in their courses and voice concerns about fairness when necessary. Student representatives can collaborate with faculty to improve trust in assessment methods.
6. Student should develop authentic writing skills, rather than viewing detection tools as punitive, students should use them as learning aids to refine their academic writing, paraphrasing, and citation skills. Institutions can provide writing centers or AI-assisted drafting workshops to support this.
7. Student unions and academic bodies should work with faculty to ensure that AI detection policies are reasonable and that accused students have avenues for appeal if errors occur.
8. Developers should provide clearer explanations of how their tools distinguish between human and AI-generated text, reducing skepticism among students. Regular updates should be made to keep pace with evolving AI writing models.
9. Since student distrust stems partly from fear of wrongful accusations, detection tools should prioritize accuracy and allow educators to review flagged content contextually before making judgments.
10. Universities and developers should collaborate to test new detection technologies with real student submissions, gathering feedback to refine tools before full implementation.

11. Policymakers & Accreditation Bodies should establish Standardized AI Guidelines by developing frameworks for AI use in academia, helping institutions create consistent policies on detection, penalties, and student support.
12. Governments and educational agencies should sponsor studies to evaluate the long-term effectiveness of detection tools and explore alternative assessment models that reduce reliance on plagiarism checks.

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