IJLLT

AL-KINDI CENTER FOR RESEARCH
AND DEVELOPMENT

| **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

Written Assignments and the Ethical Considerations of Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education

Mohammed Siddique Kadwa
Researcher
Corresponding Author: Mohammed Siddique Kadwa, **E-mail**: dr.m.s.kadwa@gmail.com

---

| **ABSTRACT**

The rapid development of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools has created new opportunities and challenges in higher education. Written assignments, long regarded as central to intellectual development and assessment, are now being redefined by AI-assisted writing technologies. This article examines the epistemological, pedagogical, and ethical dimensions of AI in relation to written assignments, clarifying how AI reshapes academic discourse, assessment practices, and institutional approaches to integrity and fairness. The analysis draws on institutional guidelines, scholarly literature on assessment and second-language writing, theoretical debates on academic discourse, and policy frameworks in multilingual educational contexts. Findings indicate that AI can provide valuable linguistic and structural support in academic writing, particularly for second-language learners, but it also introduces risks related to academic integrity, transparency, bias, misinformation, equity, and linguistic justice. Assessment practices are especially vulnerable, necessitating innovative, process-oriented approaches such as workshops, oral defences, and reflective portfolios. In research contexts, concerns around reproducibility, data protection, and authorship are pressing. The article concludes that higher education institutions must balance innovation with ethical responsibility by embedding AI literacy, mandating disclosure, redesigning assessments to emphasize higher-order skills, and ensuring equitable access. Rather than prohibiting AI, universities should cultivate responsible digital citizenship to harness AI tools while upholding integrity, fairness, and inclusiveness.

| **KEYWORDS**

Written Assignments; Ethical Considerations; Artificial Intelligence; Higher Education

---

1. Introduction

Artificial intelligence has emerged as a defining feature of the twenty-first-century knowledge landscape. Since the release of publicly accessible large language models such as ChatGPT in 2022, universities have faced a paradigm shift in how students and researchers engage with written discourse. AI tools can generate coherent essays, refine arguments, and simulate disciplinary expertise, thus questioning the authenticity of traditional written assignments.

Written assignments have historically served as a cornerstone of higher education, functioning not merely as a mode of assessment but as a medium for cultivating intellectual independence, critical reasoning, and mastery of academic discourse (Hyland, 2009). In multilingual contexts, assignments also act as sites where language proficiency intersects with epistemic access (Kadwa & Alshenqeeti, 2020). The emergence of AI challenges these functions, raising pressing questions about authorship, ethics, and equity.

This article interrogates the implications of AI for written assignments. It draws on institutional guidelines (CILT, 2023; 2024), scholarly research on second-language writing assessment (Knoch & Taylor, 2020), innovative pedagogical models (Elbow, 2000; workshop methods), and sociolinguistic perspectives on language policy (Brenzinger, 2017). By integrating these perspectives, it

aims to offer a comprehensive framework for understanding how AI reshapes the pedagogical and ethical terrain of higher education.

2. Defining Artificial Intelligence and Academic Discourse

The concept of artificial intelligence resists a single definition. Philosophical and applied definitions range from AI as a computational simulation of human intelligence to more functional interpretations that view AI as systems capable of performing tasks requiring pattern recognition, prediction, or language generation (Brey, 2005). In the educational domain, generative AI, particularly large language models, functions as a discursive technology that produces text resembling human-authored academic discourse.

Academic discourse itself is not a neutral category but a socially regulated set of practices that define what counts as legitimate knowledge production (Hyland, 2009). It is typified by formal registers, epistemic hedging, and disciplinary conventions. Generative AI challenges these boundaries by producing outputs that mimic typical academic structures without the underlying epistemic labour. This raises ontological questions: if academic discourse is characterised by typicality, to what extent does AI-produced text conform to, or deviate from, these norms (Kuteeva, 2023)?

Thus, AI is not merely a technological tool but a discursive actor, reshaping what it means to write, learn, and assess within higher education.

3. Written Assignments and Their Pedagogical Role

Written assignments serve multiple pedagogical functions. They provide evidence of student learning, allow instructors to evaluate mastery of disciplinary content, and serve as formative spaces where students engage in argumentation, synthesis, and creativity (Lea & Street, 1998). For second-language learners, assignments also serve as linguistic training grounds, enabling students to navigate the complexities of academic English (Knoch & Taylor, 2020).

However, reliance on written assignments has also been critiqued. Assessments may disproportionately disadvantage multilingual students whose linguistic proficiency affects their ability to demonstrate content mastery (Kadwa & Sheik, 2021). In Saudi Arabian universities, for example, students entering foundation year programs often struggle with English-medium instruction, with direct consequences for their performance in science courses (Kadwa & Alshenqeeti, 2020). Similar inequities exist in South African universities, where English and Afrikaans historically dominated as languages of instruction despite the recognition of 11 official languages in the 1996 Constitution (Brenzinger, 2017).

These structural inequities illustrate that written assignments are not neutral but are embedded within broader socio-linguistic and institutional frameworks. AI's arrival complicates these dynamics further, offering linguistic scaffolding for some students while simultaneously raising concerns about authenticity and fairness.

4. AI as Pedagogical Support in Written Assignments

AI tools offer potential benefits in supporting student writing. They can generate outlines, summarise readings, provide feedback on grammar, and simulate peer review. For second-language learners, AI can reduce cognitive load by assisting with linguistic expression, allowing greater focus on conceptual content (CILT, Teaching and Learning with AI Tools, 2023).

Pedagogical frameworks have emerged to support productive AI use. The CREATE framework—Clarity, Relevance, Examples, Avoiding ambiguity, Tinkering, and Evaluation—emphasises effective prompt design to elicit meaningful outputs (CILT, Developing Effective Prompts, 2023). Workshop-based methods, which foreground collaborative drafting and peer feedback, can be integrated with AI to create hybrid learning spaces that combine human interaction with technological support (Elbow, 2000; Innovative Assessment Report, 2022).

Yet these opportunities must be weighed against risks. Without careful scaffolding, students may outsource intellectual labour to AI, undermining the formative value of writing assignments. Educators thus face the challenge of integrating AI in ways that support rather than supplant learning.

5. Ethical Considerations in AI-Supported Writing

The ethical implications of AI in assignments are multifaceted, encompassing issues of academic integrity, transparency, bias, reliability, privacy, and equity. A primary concern is whether AI-generated text constitutes plagiarism, since although outputs are algorithmically generated rather than copied, submitting such work as one's own undermines the principles of academic honesty (CILT, Assessment and Academic Integrity, 2023). To safeguard against this, ethical practice requires transparency, with some institutions mandating disclosure of when and how AI tools are used, much like citing digital sources. Equally significant are

questions of bias and fairness, as AI systems reproduce patterns from training data that may perpetuate stereotypes and marginalise diverse voices, particularly affecting multilingual students whose unique expressions risk being homogenised (CILT, Student Guide, 2024). Reliability poses another challenge, as hallucinated or fabricated outputs can mislead students who rely on them uncritically, thereby compromising scholarly validity. Privacy concerns also arise when drafts or sensitive research data are uploaded to platforms that store information on external servers (CILT, Teaching and Learning with AI Tools, 2023). Moreover, equity is at stake, since subscription-based services privilege students with financial means, exacerbating existing digital divides in global higher education (CILT, Researcher Guide, 2024). Together, these ethical dimensions highlight the urgent need for institutional policies that balance innovation with fairness, transparency, and accountability.

6. Assessment Practices and AI Disruption

The arrival of AI compels a rethinking of assessment design. Traditional essay-based assignments, reliant on recall and synthesis, are highly susceptible to AI assistance. Scholars in second-language writing research have long argued for diversification in assessment practices, noting that written texts alone cannot capture the full range of student abilities (Knoch & Taylor, 2020).

Innovative assessment models, such as the workshop method, shift emphasis from the final product to the process of writing. These models foreground peer collaboration, iterative drafting, and reflection, which are less easily outsourced to AI (Elbow, 2000). Similarly, oral defences, multimodal projects, and reflective portfolios can capture learning processes in ways that resist automation.

In multilingual contexts, such diversification also addresses inequities. For example, South Africa's language policy, while recognising 11 official languages, has struggled to translate this recognition into meaningful educational practice (Brenzinger, 2017). By reimagining assessments as inclusive, interactive, and contextually relevant, institutions can mitigate both linguistic barriers and AI-related integrity risks.

7. Research Ethics and AI

Beyond pedagogy, AI raises profound questions for research integrity. Scholars increasingly use AI for literature reviews, coding, and drafting. While these applications enhance efficiency, they undermine principles of transparency and reproducibility if undisclosed. Because AI outputs are non-replicable—identical prompts yield divergent results—they challenge core scientific norms of verification (CILT, Researcher Guide, 2024).

Research ethics frameworks now call for explicit disclosure of AI use in theses, publications, and funding applications. Sensitive data must not be uploaded to external platforms without safeguards. Moreover, debates over authorship arise: should AI be considered a co-author, a tool, or a resource? Most scholarly consensus rejects authorship for AI, emphasising that human accountability remains central to research integrity.

8. Towards Ethical and Resilient Assessment Practices

The convergence of AI, multilingualism, and academic integrity demands new pedagogical responses that move beyond traditional forms of assessment. This involves redesigning assignments to prioritise higher-order skills such as critical analysis, originality, and reflection—dimensions of learning that are far less susceptible to AI substitution. Embedding AI literacy within curricula is equally crucial, ensuring that students are not passive consumers of algorithmic outputs but active, critical evaluators of their reliability, limitations, and biases. Transparency also plays a central role, with institutions requiring students and researchers to disclose the use of AI tools, including the nature of prompts and the extent of assistance received, thereby reinforcing accountability and academic honesty.

Complementing these measures is the need for diversification of assessment practices through oral defences, collaborative workshops, and multimodal projects that highlight process as much as final product. At the same time, equity considerations must be addressed by providing institutional access to AI resources and mitigating financial barriers that could deepen existing digital divides. Finally, upholding linguistic justice remains a priority, as pedagogy should embrace local languages and resist the homogenising tendencies of AI-generated discourse. Collectively, these strategies represent a shift from policing or prohibiting AI to fostering responsible digital citizenship and preparing students to navigate ethically within an AI-mediated academic environment.

9. Conclusion

Generative AI is transforming the foundations of written assignments and, more broadly, the academic landscape of higher education. It provides unprecedented opportunities for enhancing linguistic expression, efficiency, and creativity, particularly for

multilingual learners, but it also challenges fundamental values of academic integrity, equity, and epistemic responsibility. This duality demands a pedagogical reorientation: written assignments must not be abandoned but reimagined to foreground critical reasoning, originality, and reflective engagement that cannot be easily replicated by machines. Universities must embrace AI literacy as an essential graduate attribute, ensuring that students and researchers learn not only how to use AI responsibly but also how to interrogate its limitations, biases, and ethical risks. Moving forward, the task is not to regulate AI out of education but to embed it in ways that strengthen scholarly practices, uphold linguistic and cultural diversity, and cultivate resilient, ethically minded graduates. In this way, higher education can safeguard its role as a site of knowledge creation and critical inquiry while equipping learners to thrive in an AI-mediated world.

References

[1] Brey, P. (2005). Artificial intelligence and its applications. AI & Society, 19(1), 1–6. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00146-004-0270-6

[2] Brenzinger, M. (2017). Eleven official languages and more: Legislation and language policies in South Africa. Revista de Llengua i Dret, 67, 38–54. https://doi.org/10.2436/rld.i67.2017.2936

[3] CILT. (2023). Staff guide: Developing effective prompts for generative AI tools. Centre for Innovation in Learning and Teaching, University of Cape Town.

[4] CILT. (2023). Staff guide: Teaching and learning with AI tools. Centre for Innovation in Learning and Teaching, University of Cape Town.

[5] CILT. (2023). Staff guide: Assessment and academic integrity in the age of AI. Centre for Innovation in Learning and Teaching, University of Cape Town.

[6] CILT. (2024). Student guide: Using ChatGPT and other AI tools in education. Centre for Innovation in Learning and Teaching, University of Cape Town.

[7] CILT. (2024). Researcher guide: Ethical use of generative AI for research purposes. Centre for Innovation in Learning and Teaching, University of Cape Town.

[8] Elbow, P. (2000). Everyone can write: Essays toward a hopeful theory of writing and teaching writing. Oxford University Press.

[9] Hyland, K. (2009). Academic discourse: English in a global context. Continuum.

[10] Kadwa, M. S., & Alshenqeeti, H. (2020). The impact of students' proficiency in English on science courses in a foundation year program. International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation, 3(11), 55–67. https://doi.org/10.32996/ijllt.2020.3.11.6

[11] Kadwa, M. S., & Sheik, A. (2021). A critical review of the Oxford Q-Skills Placement Test at a Saudi Arabian university. International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation, 4(1), 198–209. https://doi.org/10.32996/ijllt.2021.4.1.21

[12] Knoch, U., & Taylor, L. (2020). The role of assessment in second language writing research and pedagogy. Language Teaching, 53(3), 285–296. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444819000329

[13] Kuteeva, M. (2023). The typicality of academic discourse. Journal of Applied Linguistics, 44(2), 215–232. https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amac042

[14] Lea, M. R., & Street, B. V. (1998). Student writing in higher education: An academic literacies approach. Studies in Higher Education, 23(2), 157–172. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079812331380364

[15] Morton, J., & O'Brien, D. (2022). *Innovative assessment: The workshop method*. University of Cape Town: Centre for Innovation in Learning and Teaching.