The Student's Role in Navigating the Ethical Arena of AI Use for Academic Tasks

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Abstract: *The emergence of generative AI has brought significant changes to higher education, while also sparking intense debate. This technology is viewed as a catalyst for learning efficiency and innovation. However, it simultaneously presents a serious threat to academic integrity, challenging traditional conceptions of original work. Using a qualitative approach, this research focuses on students as the primary subjects. Through in-depth interviews, this study delves into how students subjectively experience and interpret the ethical dilemmas associated with using AI for academic tasks. The central argument is that the student's role has shifted: from being mere consumers of technology to individuals who must actively define personal moral boundaries between legitimate utilization and misuse. This shift in roles necessitates the mastery of critical AI literacy, extending beyond mere technical skills to include the capability to critically evaluate AI outputs and collaborate ethically with machines. By exploring student experiences, this research aims to map their adaptive strategies and build a deep understanding of how they envision their ideal roles in an academic future that is inextricably linked with AI.*

Keywords : *Artificial Intelligence (AI), Academic Integrity, Student Ethics, Student's Role, Digital Literacy.*

Abstrak: Kemunculan AI generatif membawa perubahan besar di dunia pendidikan tinggi, sekaligus memicu perdebatan yang tajam. Teknologi ini dipandang sebagai pendorong efisiensi belajar dan inovasi, namun di saat yang sama juga menghadirkan ancaman serius terhadap integritas akademik serta menantang gagasan tradisional mengenai karya orisinal. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif, penelitian ini berfokus pada mahasiswa sebagai subjek utama. Melalui metode wawancara mendalam, studi ini menggali bagaimana mahasiswa secara subjektif mengalami dan menginterpretasi dilema etis terkait penggunaan AI dalam pengerjaan tugas akademik. Argumen utamanya adalah bahwa peran mahasiswa telah bergeser; dari sekadar konsumen teknologi menjadi individu yang harus secara aktif menentukan batasan moral pribadi antara pemanfaatan yang wajar dan praktik penyalahgunaan. Pergeseran peran ini menuntut adanya penguasaan literasi AI yang bersifat kritis, yang tidak terbatas pada keterampilan teknis, tetapi juga mencakup kemampuan untuk menilai keluaran AI secara kritis dan bekerja sama dengannya secara etis. Dengan mengeksplorasi pengalaman mahasiswa, penelitian ini berupaya memetakan strategi adaptasi mereka serta membangun pemahaman mendalam mengenai bagaimana mereka membayangkan peran ideal mereka di masa depan akademik yang tidak terpisahkan dari AI.

Kata kunci: Kecerdasan Buatan (AI), Integritas Akademik, Etika Mahasiswa, Peran Mahasiswa, Literasi Digital

Introduction

The pedagogical landscape in global higher education is undergoing fundamental disruption due to the democratization of access to generative artificial intelligence (AI) technologies. Since their emergence, platforms like ChatGPT have rapidly integrated into students' academic workflows, offering a wide range of capabilities, from ideation and information synthesis to drafting (UNESCO, 2023). This phenomenon presents a central paradox: AI offers the potential for significant learning efficiency and acceleration (Baidoo-Anu & Ansah, 2023), but simultaneously threatens the fundamental pillars of education: integrity, originality, and the development of critical thinking (Eaton & Anselmo, 2022).

The most obvious threat is the potential erosion of academic integrity. The ease of generating coherent text in seconds has blurred the lines between authentic student work and machine output, opening the door to sophisticated new forms of plagiarism. Various studies in both international and Indonesian contexts confirm the high rate of AI adoption among students to complete assignments, often without a balanced, in-depth ethical understanding (Adha et al., 2023; Sobihah & Huda, 2023). Excessive reliance is also feared to degrade higher-level cognitive abilities, as challenging intellectual processes such as analysis and synthesis risk being replaced by simple commands to machines (Baskara, 2023).

This situation places students in a complex and stressful position. They are not merely passive participants, but active navigators, daily having to make ethical decisions in the "grey area" between use and misuse (Sullivan et al., 2023). Their decisions are influenced by various factors, ranging from deadline pressures and assignment burdens to perceptions of often immature institutional policies. Therefore, understanding how students negotiate these dilemmas, rationalize their actions, and interpret their roles is crucial.

In response to these challenges, there is an urgent need for "AI Literacy" as a core competency for the 21st century. This literacy extends beyond technical skills to critical dimensions for evaluating the reliability and potential bias of AI-generated information (Ng et al., 2021; Lim et al., 2023). Consequently, the role of educators must shift from gatekeepers of knowledge to facilitators of critical dialogue and designers of authentic assessments (Rahimi & Askari, 2024). While much discussion focuses on policy and technological aspects, a significant empirical gap remains in understanding students' lived experiences. This qualitative study aims to fill this gap by giving voice to students' perspectives.

Therefore, the purpose of this research lies not only in the application of AI technology in academia, but also in how students actively construct their ethical positions amidst changing learning styles. In a context where the distinction between humans and machines is increasingly blurred, students are required to find a balance between innovation and moral principles. This awareness is central to education in this century, which focuses not only on mastering digital technology but also on developing moral and intellectual identity. Therefore, understanding the

reflective dynamics of students when interacting with AI is a crucial step in maintaining the true meaning of the educational process itself.

Conceptually, this research is expected to contribute to strengthening the understanding of digital ethics in higher education institutions and serve as a foundation for formulating responsive and humane academic policies. Through research findings based on students' experiences, it is hoped that new insights will emerge into how values such as honesty, responsibility, and intellectual independence can be maintained amidst the development of automation. Therefore, this research not only fills a gap in existing empirical studies but also opens up opportunities for reflection in the world of education to create new directions for the integration of technology and academic morality in the future.

Research methods

This research was designed using a qualitative approach with a descriptive approach. The qualitative approach was chosen because it is appropriate for understanding the phenomenon in depth from the perspective of students, particularly in the context of the ethical use of artificial intelligence (AI) in academia. This approach aligns with the views of Eaton & Anselmo (2022), who emphasize the importance of exploring values, integrity, and academic responsibility in the era of artificial intelligence, where a deep understanding of student perceptions is key to maintaining honesty and ethics in the learning process.

This research was conducted at Telkom University, Purwokerto Campus, with active students from various faculties as subjects. The selection of diverse subjects aimed to gain a broad perspective on the use of AI in academic activities and to understand the differences in students' experiences and perspectives on emerging ethical dilemmas.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, which were deemed most appropriate for eliciting information directly from the experiences and perspectives of the research subjects. The interviews were conducted semi-structured using open-ended questions to allow researchers to probe the context of the informants' responses. The entire interview process was recorded with the consent of the informants to ensure the authenticity and accuracy of the data. The collected data was analyzed through thematic analysis, starting with the transcription of interview results and drawing conclusions based on patterns emerging from student responses. This analysis was conducted to uncover deeper meanings related to students' attitudes, considerations, and strategies in addressing ethical dilemmas regarding the use of AI. Thus, this method allows researchers to present a systematic and reflective picture of the reality of AI use in academic contexts, in accordance with the principles of academic integrity.

Results and Discussion

Generative AI (GenAI) is an artificial intelligence (AI) technology that automatically generates content in response to commands written in natural-language conversational interfaces (UNESCO, 2023). This content is generated by statistically analyzing the distribution of words, pixels, or other elements in stored data, identifying and repeating common patterns (e.g., words that typically follow other words). Some examples of Gen AI include ChatGPT, DALL•E 2, and Pictory. This type of AI has penetrated the world of education, leading to changes in student behavior.

This study aims to understand the perceptions, habits, and impacts of students' use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in completing academic assignments. Based on interviews with several students at Telkom University Purwokerto Campus, it was found that students have diverse views on AI, including its benefits, dependency, and ethical implications. These findings reinforce the research of Adha, Supriyono, & Pratama (2023), which showed that most students view AI, particularly ChatGPT (GenAI), as an effective tool for completing assignments due to its efficiency, ease of access, and ability to provide quick and relevant answers. Students also expressed similar sentiments, believing AI could improve time efficiency and simplify the process of conducting research and academic assignments.

However, differences emerged in students' levels of dependence on AI. It is important to emphasize the importance of maintaining individual independence of thought to prevent intellectual decline. Dependence on AI can arise due to the convenience it offers in completing academic assignments. These findings indicate two polarities in student behavior: one that is reflective and strives to maintain independence of thought, and another that tends to utilize AI for efficiency. This aligns with the views of Sullivan, Kelly, & McLaughlan (2023), who highlighted the challenges of academic integrity in the AI era, where easy access to information can erode the authenticity of students' thought processes if not balanced with a critical and ethical attitude.

In terms of its impact on mindsets and habits, it was found that AI has the potential to make students less thoughtful, as they become accustomed to obtaining answers instantly. Excessive use of AI can reduce the ability to think independently. This finding aligns with research by Baidoo-Anu & Ansah (2023) and Eaton & Anselmo (2022), which emphasizes the need for ethical awareness and self-reflection in utilizing AI technology to avoid creating intellectual dependency. Conversely, students' adaptive, selective and critical use of AI indicates a form of good AI literacy, as conceptualized by Ng et al. (2021), who argue that AI literacy is not only about the ability to use technology but also includes an awareness of its limits and impact on human thought processes.

Regarding student self-control strategies regarding AI, a possible approach is to position AI as a secondary tool. Students can strive to first understand and complete tasks independently before seeking AI assistance. This approach

demonstrates the development of metacognitive abilities (understanding, monitoring, and controlling one's own thought processes), enabling students to assess when technological assistance is needed and when to think independently. This approach also aligns with the ethical principles for the use of AI recommended by UNESCO (2023), namely its wise and responsible use, while maintaining human centrality in decision-making.

Regarding the influence of AI on learning motivation and critical thinking skills, AI has a positive impact, primarily because it can facilitate understanding of material and accelerate the learning process. AI is considered to help increase learning motivation due to the ease of obtaining clear explanations, and AI actually encourages more critical thinking through the process of verifying answers. These results are consistent with the findings of Baskara (2023) and Rahimi & Askari (2024), which show that the reflective use of AI can strengthen independent learning and expand students' critical thinking skills.

The future outlook on AI also suggests a balance between perceived threats and opportunities. AI can act as a threat because it has the potential to replace humans in the workplace, while AI can also be an opportunity to motivate learning and a threat if it creates dependency. This view reflects the ambiguity also found by Lim et al. (2023) in their study on the future of education in the AI era, where generative AI can AI can be either "reform or destruction" depending on the policies and how it is used in education. Thus, these findings indicate that students at Telkom University Purwokerto Campus have developed a critical awareness of AI's dual role as both an assistive tool and a potential ethical challenge in the future.

Overall, the results of this study indicate that students view AI as an adaptive and efficient learning tool, but remain aware of the risks of dependency and a decline in critical thinking. Therefore, the use of AI in academic contexts requires ethical, reflective, and responsible literacy, as recommended by UNESCO (2023) and Eaton & Anselmo (2022). With the right approach, AI can be a partner in developing students' intellectual potential without sacrificing the values of honesty and academic integrity.

Enriching the nation's life is one of the state's goals, as stated in the fourth paragraph of the Preamble to the 1945 Constitution. This goal ensures that all Indonesian citizens receive a quality education, so that they develop strong intelligence and noble character. This responsibility is not solely the responsibility of the government, but also of all Indonesian citizens. It can be achieved through education that focuses on intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and social intelligence. This goal embodies the principles of Pancasila, ensuring social welfare in society.

Civics education can be a means of fostering an intelligent, participatory, and responsible society (Nurchotimah, 2021). Students, who will become members of society in the future, must be equipped with civic skills to prepare them for decision-making and provide solutions to societal problems. The presence of AI in education is feared to pose a threat to independent critical thinking, weakening

students' decision-making abilities. Therefore, civics education can equip students with civic skills to minimize the negative impacts of AI.

Conclusion

Students believe that artificial intelligence (AI) is an effective tool to assist the academic process, speed up research, and help them understand material more deeply. However, despite its ease of use, students are aware of the risks of dependency, loss of critical thinking skills, and compromised academic integrity if AI is used unfettered without ethical considerations. With this awareness, they continue to strive to think independently and use AI as a learning companion rather than a substitute for intellectual processes. Therefore, critical, reflective, and ethical skills regarding artificial intelligence are essential skills that students must learn so they can act as ethical navigators who balance technological advancements with their intellectual responsibilities and academic values.

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