

Ethical Concerns in Generative AI Use in Higher Education: A Critical Narrative Review

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Abstract

Purpose: Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) is used in university assessment, writing, research, and library services. This review critically examines ethical concerns, stakeholder perspectives, institutional responses, and evidence needs through five guiding questions.

Methods: This critical narrative review interprets a selectively assembled literature collection identified through EBSCOhost, Research4Life, and Google Scholar. An AI-assisted grid organises 121 cited topic papers by research question. Original search records are incomplete; selected full-text checks support comparisons of findings, measures and responses.

Results: Integrity and authorship concerns centre on unclear boundaries for permitted assistance; reliability concerns centre on verification. Privacy, equity and agency depend on governance and support. Students, faculty and librarians describe different responsibilities. Workshop and classroom reports document particular activities and preliminary gains, including improved classification of ethical scenarios. Confidence, policy availability, and technical performance do not establish sustained responsible behaviour. Self-report, selective completion, short follow-up, repeated observations, and overlapping reviews limit interpretation.

Conclusion: Universities should specify permitted assistance and required human judgment for each task, support verification and assess the intended ethical outcome. Stronger evidence requires behavioural measures, suitable comparisons and follow-up across settings. The review offers contextual interpretation and proposals for evaluation; it does not estimate harm prevalence or comparative intervention effectiveness.

Keywords: *Generative artificial intelligence; Higher education; Academic integrity; Privacy; Equity; AI literacy*

INTRODUCTION

GenAI can support explanations, academic writing, coding, feedback, research discovery and the organisation of scholarly information. These capabilities may help learners participate, but they can also obscure the contribution being assessed. Ethical evaluation must therefore consider the activity's purpose, the responsibilities of those involved and the conditions under which generated content is accepted. A fluent answer, polished assignment or efficient workflow does not, by itself, establish accuracy, authentic learning or responsible research.

Existing reviews map major ethical concerns and offer guidance for higher education. Bittle and El-Gayar synthesise academic-integrity research; Jamil and colleagues examine ethical dilemmas and stakeholder perceptions; Jayasinghe and colleagues organise institutional support into six intervention areas; and Yarboi and colleagues connect ethical integration with global and African institutional contexts (Bittle and El-Gayar, 2025; Jamil *et al.*, 2026; Jayasinghe *et al.*, 2026; Yarboi *et al.*, 2026). These contributions provide the thematic and policy foundations for this review, which asks a further interpretive question: how closely does the evidence reported for a safeguard match its intended ethical outcome?

This review compares academic tasks, stakeholder responsibilities and measured outcomes across assessment, scholarly writing, research and academic-library work. It examines the judgments required in each setting and separates proposed safeguards from responses that have been implemented or evaluated. It also distinguishes attitudes,

confidence and technical accuracy from observed conduct. Greater confidence may not translate into better verification, published policies may not be followed, and short classroom activities offer limited evidence of sustained responsible behaviour. Table 1 illustrates these distinctions through selected empirical comparisons.

The review links each academic responsibility to a proposed response and an outcome through which that response could be evaluated. Table 1 compares selected response evidence, while Table 2 translates the synthesis into institutional actions and measurable outcomes, including source-checking performance, justified disclosure decisions and equitable participation. These recommendations require local evaluation. The review offers an interpretive framework for assessing evidence, rather than a new taxonomy of concerns or a validated intervention package. Its reference count does not indicate comprehensive coverage.

The literature extends beyond assignment misconduct to educators' responsibilities, postgraduate research, academic writing, disciplinary competencies and library research support. These settings involve different expectations of learning, authorship and professional judgment. Evidence on general AI, school education or clinical practice is used only where an identifiable discussion of GenAI in higher education is present (Chinoracky and Stalmasekova, 2025; Mabirizi *et al.*, 2025; Maphosa and Tlomatsana, 2026; Shabir, 2025; Yueh, 2026).

An ethical concern is defined here as an issue affecting academic responsibility, intellectual contribution, fair participation, information reliability or the protection of people and data. Reported benefits are relevant when they affect these responsibilities. The analysis distinguishes normative arguments about what should happen from empirical observations of participant reports, outputs and changes following an activity. When several reviews cite the same primary study, they draw on the same observations rather than independent evidence.

Research Aim

The aim is to critically interpret ethical concerns associated with GenAI use in higher education, examine their supporting evidence, and develop a contextual account of institutional responses and research priorities.

Research Objectives

- *RO1*: To organise ethical concerns and compare the empirical findings, secondary syntheses and conceptual arguments supporting them.
- *RO2*: To examine perspectives from students, educators, researchers and academic-library professionals across higher-education settings.
- *RO3*: To distinguish proposed safeguards, implemented practices and evaluated educational or institutional responses.
- *RO4*: To examine how study design, setting, measurement and methodological limitations affect the interpretation of ethical claims.
- *RO5*: To identify unresolved tensions and formulate priorities for research and institutional practice.

Guiding Questions

- *RQ1*: What ethical concerns are reported about generative AI use in higher education, and what evidence supports them?
- *RQ2*: How do students, educators, researchers, and academic-library professionals experience or interpret these concerns, and how do institutions respond?
- *RQ3*: Which institutional and educational responses are proposed, implemented, or evaluated, and what outcomes are reported for evaluated responses?
- *RQ4*: How do study design, setting, measurement and methodological limitations affect interpretation of the reported ethical concerns?
- *RQ5*: What unresolved tensions and evidence needs should guide future research and institutional practice?

METHODOLOGY

Review Approach

This article is a critical narrative review that compares ethical arguments with their supporting evidence and considers implications for higher-education practice. It uses thematic organisation and interpretive comparison of empirical studies, secondary reviews and conceptual accounts. It does not claim systematic retrieval, a PRISMA selection process or pooled effect estimates. The Scale for the Assessment of Narrative Review Articles (SANRA) guided attention to rationale, aims, source-selection transparency, referencing, and the alignment of evidence with outcomes. Developed for narrative reviews in medical publishing, SANRA serves here as editorial guidance, not as a validated appraisal score for education studies (Baethge *et al.*, 2019).

Scope and Source Selection

The review focuses on English-language scholarly literature addressing GenAI or large language models in higher education from 2022 onward. Settings include teaching, assessment, academic writing, research, and academic-library services. Studies with mixed educational or professional populations are considered only where a higher-education contribution can be identified. Institutional affiliation alone does not establish an educational study setting.

Sources were selected for their relevance to the guiding questions and the interpretability of their evidence. Empirical studies contribute observations or reported experiences, secondary reviews provide synthesis and context, and conceptual papers articulate ethical responsibilities. General AI material without a discernible GenAI connection, unrelated school or clinical evidence, duplicate copies and unresolved publication identities were set aside. Selection was based on relevance for narrative interpretation; it was not a systematic eligibility assessment of all available literature.

Literature Provenance

Initial searches were conducted through EBSCOhost, Research4Life and Google Scholar on 1–3 September 2026. EBSCOhost and Research4Life are access platforms. The specific databases, original queries, search fields, limits, and retrieval totals were not retained, so the searches cannot be

reconstructed. A Boolean strategy developed subsequently has not been run and is not presented as the original search.

The collection was reviewed during manuscript preparation in October 2026 and includes later-dated publications. The September interval therefore does not identify the retrieval date of every cited item, and the dates and routes of later additions are undocumented. The collection supports critical interpretation, rather than estimates of coverage, prevalence or geographic distribution. Selective inclusion and incomplete retrieval records may favour accessible publications and familiar perspectives.

Source Interpretation

An AI-assisted research grid links the manuscript's 121 topic papers to RQ1–RQ5 and records evidence type, paper-specific notes, candidate passages, source locations and verification status. Papers may contribute to several questions, but those contributions are not counted as independent studies. The grid distinguishes the narrative corpus from the wider screening register. Candidate passages guided source checking because automatically located text may describe background literature rather than a paper's own findings. Selected papers' methods, results, discussion, and limitations were checked for the close comparisons reported below. Extraction and human verification have not been completed for all 121 papers.

Each close comparison examines the task, participants, setting, design, measurement, response status, and source location. RQ1 addresses reported ethical issues; RQ2, stakeholder experiences and interpretations; RQ3, response stages and outcomes; RQ4, the inferences supported by study design; and RQ5, outstanding evidence needs. Paper authors' recommendations and stated gaps are distinguished from the reviewer's interpretation. Table 1 presents selected examples. The RQ grid is a working source register, not a validated dataset for frequency analysis.

Critical Synthesis

The comparison asks whether each measure addresses the ethical claim, whether observations are independent, and which participants contribute to the analysis. It also considers how far findings may apply to other tasks or settings. Confidence, intentions, source accuracy, and conduct are interpreted separately. Where full-text results qualify an abstract or earlier grid note, the manuscript follows the relevant methods and results while retaining uncertainty. No completed assessment using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT), Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) tools or another risk-of-bias instrument is reported. No aggregate quality score or certainty grade is assigned.

Thematic organisation reflects recurring ethical concerns and their relationship to academic practice. These interpretive groupings do not constitute frequency analysis or demonstrate thematic saturation. Quantitative findings are compared according to their constructs and design; heterogeneous attitudes, learning outcomes, output quality, and policy descriptions are not pooled. Because secondary reviews may share primary studies, recurrence across reviews is not treated as independent corroboration.

The conceptual framework connects academic context; evidence type, and documented response (Fig. 1). It asks whether a safeguard addresses the outcome relevant to the task. Disclosure concerns transparency, output checking concerns reliability, and assessment redesign concerns evidence of learning. Each requires an appropriate measure; a report of tool adoption alone reveals little about these outcomes.

Table 1: Selected responses and the outcomes supporting their interpretation.

Report and context	Document response	Outcome reported	Interpretive limit
Alduais *et al.* (2025) 15 faculty and 15 graduate students	ETHICAL checklist applied in two pilot workshops	Risk classification 32% pre to 78% post; protocol refined	Preliminary scenario evaluation; real research conduct and durable effects unresolved
Archambault *et al.* (2025) Undergraduate workshop	Technical explanation, reflection and prompt practice	Confidence increased; correct output-generation answers 33% to 44%	36 pre and 34 post responses to knowledge item; short-term and exploratory tools
Goldberg *et al.* (2026) Faculty micro-credential	Ethics module, action plan and syllabus statement	Perception and reported use improved; ethical concern did not change significantly	145 posttest completers of 374 starters; 135 paired responses; no demonstrated conduct outcome
Reinke *et al.* (2025) Physiology tutorial	Critique of a generated answer and discussion of acceptable use	236 attendees, 492 posts; 0 confirmed inappropriate-GenAI assignments in 2023 and 3 in 2024	Different cohorts and conditions; no causal test of prevention
Sun and Deng (2025) Business-course activity	Guided prompting and reflection	70 survey responses on prompts and perceived output	Convenience sample and self-reports; ethical efficacy not assessed
Sharma (2026) Text-mining module	Copilot use with validation and data-handling guidance	Teaching implementation and reported perceptions	Ethics-specific effects and later behaviour not established
Viswanathan *et al.* (2026) SQL tutor	Tutoring with cautions and database output checks	Perceived usefulness and test-score comparison	Historical cohorts, uncontrolled comparison; transfer to responsible use untested

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Academic Integrity and Assessment

Academic integrity concerns include the authenticity of submitted work, boundaries of acceptable assistance, and whether assessment still demonstrates learning. Reviews and a conceptual framework discuss these concerns alongside prevention strategies, integrity ecosystems and assessment changes. Recurrence indicates the topic's prominence but does not independently establish prevalence or intervention efficacy (Adelakun *et al.*, 2026; Balalle and Pannilage, 2025; Estrella-Bote *et al.*, 2026; Maleki, 2026; Mbotho and Mabina, 2025; Ncube *et al.*, 2026; Ofusori and Hendradi, 2025; Sharma and Panja, 2025).

Kumar and colleagues survey 304 students about assignment use, digital literacy, ethical awareness, and faculty guidance. These constructs address students' understanding and use of assistance; perceived academic performance differs from independently tested learning (Kumar *et al.*, 2026). Goyal and colleagues analyse responses from 413 Indian business students with prior ChatGPT use. In a hypothetical assignment scenario, neutralisation techniques are associated with misuse intentions, while formal-sanction severity and moral beliefs show negative associations in the reported structural model. The outcome is intention, not documented misconduct, and the cross-sectional design cannot establish whether deterrence policy changes behaviour (Goyal *et al.*, 2026). Huang and colleagues likewise examine integrity-related intentions (Huang *et al.*, 2025).

López-López and colleagues' survey of 357 students at a Colombian public university illustrates uncertainty: 52.1% rejected the statement that AI use in academic tasks is fraud, 37.8% were undecided, and 10.1% agreed. Because the item does not specify the extent of AI contribution, task or disclosure, rejection of this blanket label does not imply acceptance of every use. Perceived learning support and creativity loss were associated with different judgments (López-López *et al.*, 2026). Zhang and colleagues add evidence on rationality and moral disengagement (Zhang *et al.*, 2025). Taken together, these findings suggest that students may value a tool while remaining uncertain about the legitimacy of its use. Institutions should clarify expected contributions for each task rather than treat all use as a single behavioural category.

Detector-based responses raise a responsibility to interpret automated classifications fairly. Ibrahim's review of second-language (L2) writing examines limitations of AI-content detection, and Salamah discusses detection and prevention in higher education. These accounts locate a tension between identifying prohibited assistance and avoiding unsupported accusations. A detector output should open a contextual investigation; it is not conclusive evidence of a violation (Ibrahim, 2026; Salamah, 2026).

Gheisari and colleagues and Olohunfunmi and Khairuddin review integrity risks and propose safeguards (Gheisari *et al.*, 2026; Olohunfunmi and Khairuddin, 2024). Peterson proposes academic-integrity reporting to clarify responsibility without demonstrating reduced misconduct (Peterson, 2025). Sadudeen and colleagues discuss further risks and opportunities (Sadudeen *et al.*, 2025). Institutions considering these proposals need to examine how they are implemented, what consequences follow, and whether they treat students fairly.

Authorship and Disclosure in Academic Writing

GenAI-assisted writing raises questions about the contribution attributable to the writer, the disclosure of assistance, and whether a task still develops academic literacy. Reviews of undergraduate perceptions, university academic work, and writing tools discuss benefits alongside

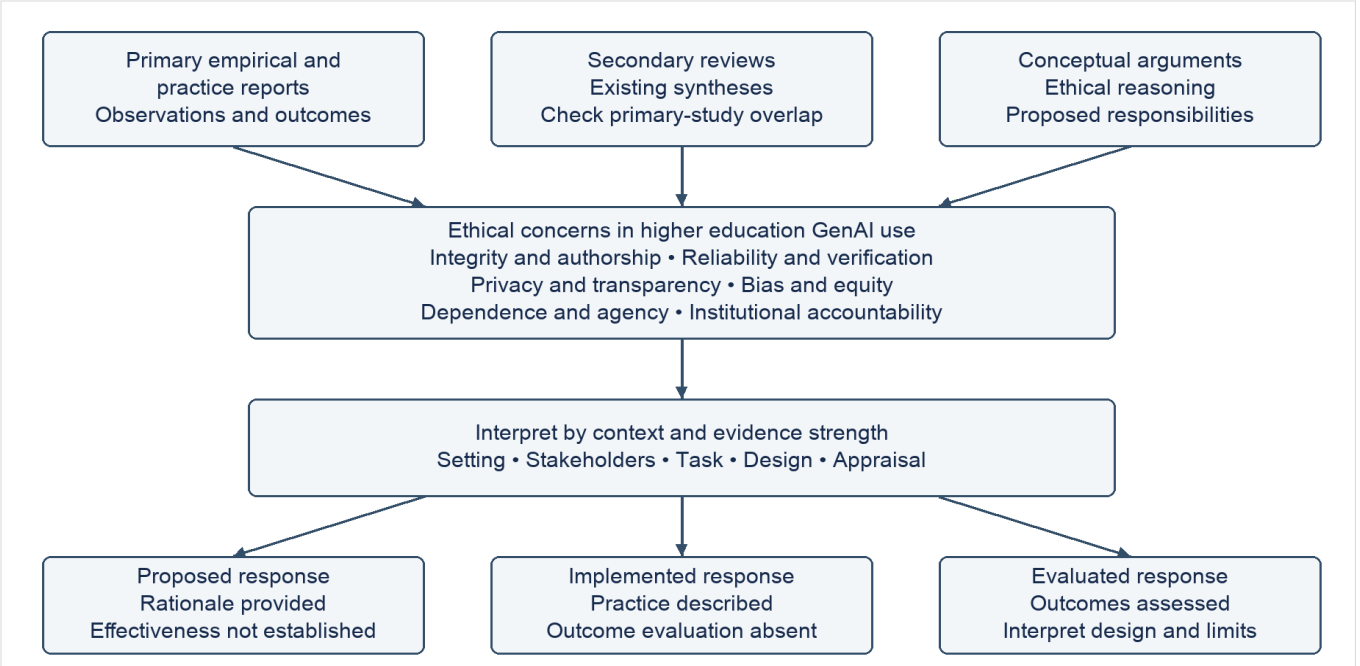


Fig. 1: Conceptual framework for critical interpretation.

concerns about integrity, critical thinking, and dependence. They also point to the need to distinguish editing, idea generation, substantive drafting, and substitution for the learner's own reasoning (Shabir, 2025; Liu *et al.*, 2025; Manyahi and Mang'ehe, 2025; Balraj, 2025; Qureshi, 2026; Roe *et al.*, 2023; Sodangi and Isma'il, 2025).

Baldrich and colleagues examine university reading and writing, while Kornieva and colleagues consider controlled assistance in literature-review writing (Baldrich *et al.*, 2025; Kornieva *et al.*, 2026). Sanz-Tejeda and colleagues synthesise reading and writing evidence, and Stroud and colleagues map undergraduate humanities research (Sanz-Tejeda *et al.*, 2026; Stroud *et al.*, 2026). These sources emphasise source selection, argument development, and critical revision of generated material. A polished final text may reveal little about the learning and intellectual work behind it.

Atta and colleagues survey 86 students and six faculty members across five Pakistani universities. Students report academic benefits alongside copy-pasting and reduced independent thinking. Although the abstract refers to objective indicators, the limitations section states that critical thinking was measured through self-assessed scales and behavioural indicators rather than standardised experimental testing. The reported association therefore does not establish that ChatGPT caused cognitive decline (Atta *et al.*, 2026). Yoon and Kawshalya examine multilingual mediation, dependence and risk (Yoon and Kawshalya, 2026). Language assistance may support participation, whereas replacing required reasoning changes the contribution assessed. Distinguishing these uses requires a task-specific account of learning and authorship.

Intellectual Property and Source Provenance

The literature addresses responsibility for material supplied in prompts and generated text of uncertain provenance. Alduais and colleagues' ETHICAL protocol treats intellectual property as a research responsibility; educator-focused work and reviews connect ownership, attribution and licensing to academic practice. These accounts primarily describe risks and duties rather than the frequency of copyright infringement in universities (Chinoracky and Stalmasekova, 2025; Olohunfunmi and Khairuddin, 2024; Sanz-Tejeda *et al.*, 2026; Alduais *et al.*, 2025).

Disclosing AI assistance and obtaining permission to reuse material are distinct responsibilities. Disclosure can clarify the writing process, but does not resolve the provenance of input material or permission to use it. Reviews of postgraduate research and institutional policy place these issues within academic responsibility. The present review discusses copyright and licensing as ethical concerns raised in the literature, without making jurisdiction-specific legal determinations (Mabirizi *et al.*, 2025; Rana, 2025).

Possible safeguards include retaining source records, checking generated quotations and citations, documenting human contributions, and clarifying permitted uses of research or teaching material. Faculty accounts and educational reviews support clearer institutional guidance. Such proposals specify intended responsibilities; their practical value depends on whether users understand and apply them in particular academic activities (Springmier, 2025; Wei and Perkins, 2026).

Information Reliability and Human Verification

Cleverley examines an AI-assisted information journey and the support needed to evaluate it (Cleverley, 2024). Zavalina's graduate metadata activity offers a specific reliability example: fourteen students submitted assignments, thirteen submissions supplied tool-use data, and twelve supplied tabulated error data. Generated records contained accuracy and completeness problems, and novice evaluators missed further errors (Zavalina, 2026). The findings support teaching and assessing verification skills, since a human check can miss errors that the checker does not recognise. The assignment does not establish a general effect on ethical conduct.

Lopatovska and colleagues use drawings and focus-group explanations to examine nine information-science graduate students' mental models. Their qualitative account identifies incomplete understanding among experienced users without estimating its prevalence (Lopatovska *et al.*, 2026). Wang and colleagues examine trust in unidentified GenAI and librarian feedback among 146 university students recruited in China. Across five tasks per participant, the report finds no significant difference in trust between providers (Wang *et al.*, 2026). This result concerns perceived trustworthiness, not independently assessed correctness or demonstrated equivalence. The task ratings are repeated observations, not additional independent participants.

Academic-library implementations contribute operational evidence. The Unicamp study evaluates Gemini-assisted indexing with human validation; the Polish Primo Research Assistant case examines implementation in academic libraries; and Michalak describes human oversight of college-library FAQ work. Classification metrics, implementation experience, and service redesign address different outcomes and cannot be combined into a single measure of responsible use (Foz *et al.*, 2026; Kotuła and Gmiterek, 2026; Michalak and Ellixson, 2026).

Privacy and Institutional Accountability

Privacy concerns apply to student work, research materials, prompts, service interactions and institutional data. Broader reviews place them alongside transparency, bias and integrity, while studies of university educators and institutional policy identify responsibilities at organisational and professional levels. Idris and Nasir review the risks of GenAI integration, and Sikandar and colleagues address student and faculty perspectives that include dependence and privacy. These sources describe privacy risks and responsibilities, but do not provide a common estimate of how often privacy harm occurs. An identified risk therefore needs to be distinguished from a documented data incident (Chinoracky and Stalmasekova, 2025; Rana, 2025; Alfiras *et al.*, 2026; Chaurura and Chuma, 2026; Ebikabowei, 2026; Idris and Nasir, 2026; Mukherjee and Kumar, 2026; Sikandar *et al.*, 2026).

The ETHICAL protocol connects tool choice, output inspection, citation, and acknowledgment in academic research (Alduais *et al.*, 2025). Cummins and colleagues discuss authenticity, agency and equity in online graduate education, while Nikolopoulou distinguishes higher-education student support from school settings (Cummins *et al.*, 2026; Nikolopoulou, 2026). These accounts outline responsibilities that need to be considered alongside any evaluations reported elsewhere. A framework alone is insufficient evidence of effectiveness, but it also does not imply that no testing has occurred.

Rana's analysis of purposively selected institutional and publishing policies identifies expectations for acknowledgment and responsibility (Rana, 2025). Mukherjee and Kumar audit publicly accessible research-ethics material from 100 Indian universities ranked in the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF), using a broader framework of 60 themes. Their GenAI finding concerns limited publicly documented guidance, rather than the absence of internal policies or observed compliance (Mukherjee and Kumar, 2026). Plata and colleagues connect enforcement, education, and encouragement in research and policy (Plata *et al.*, 2023). Document audits reveal institutional expectations, but cannot establish whether students understand rules or staff apply them consistently.

Equity and Contextual Inclusion

Equity concerns include access to tools and support, language, disciplinary representation, institutional resources, and the consequences of unreliable outputs. Reviews focused on Africa and the Global South connect ethical literacy and governance with local conditions; psychological and equity-focused syntheses raise questions about participation and learner experience. These sources justify asking whose needs and settings are represented, while avoiding the assumption that location alone creates a particular disadvantage (Yarboi *et al.*, 2026; Adelakun *et al.*, 2026; Ni and Li, 2026; Shabut *et al.*, 2026; Van Wyk, 2024).

Coman and colleagues frame integration as responsible, equitable, and human-centred; Mariyono and Hidayatullah examine generative chatbots' ethical challenges in global higher education. Reviews of academic capabilities and integration discuss opportunities and risks, while broader application papers consider institutional choices. These accounts identify ways in which adoption could exclude or support learners. Whether inclusive-adoption recommendations reduce access inequalities remains an empirical question (Coman *et al.*, 2026; George, 2023; Mariyono and Alif Hidayatullah, 2025; Chinonso *et al.*, 2023; Panda and Kaur, 2024; Qian and Bowman, 2026; Sahu and Sahu, 2024; Suprobo *et al.*, 2025; You, 2024).

Equitable governance also affects responses to suspected misuse. Rules need to specify the difference between permitted assistance and prohibited substitution, while recognising differences in access to tools and guidance. No universal threshold for acceptable assistance emerges from the sources considered. A policy can instead make the task, required human contribution and conditions of permitted use explicit, providing a basis for examining whether its application is fair.

AI Literacy and Learner Agency

AI literacy encompasses understanding tools, evaluating outputs, and making responsible decisions. Reviews examine competence frameworks, measurement instruments, continuing education, and accounting or business education. These frameworks extend literacy beyond tool familiarity, but do not alone provide validated measures of ethical competence. Mixed-setting reviews require interpretation limited to identifiable higher-education GenAI content (Yueh, 2026; De Martino *et al.*, 2026; Deroncele-Acosta *et al.*, 2025; Küçük *et al.*, 2025; Mahadewi *et al.*, 2025; Mamentu *et al.*, 2026; Memarian and Doleck, 2026; Reis and Schütz, 2026; van der Linde *et al.*, 2025).

Archambault and colleagues evaluate an undergraduate workshop through pre- and post-surveys, knowledge questions, and practical activities. Agreement with understanding how ChatGPT works increased from 38% of 37 pre-survey respondents to 85% of 34 post-survey respondents. Correct answers to the output-generation question increased from 33% of 36 to 44% of 34 respondents, although a substantial group retained a misconception. Different response totals and an exploratory prompt rubric limit conclusions about individual learning. Confidence and demonstrated understanding must therefore be distinguished when evaluating literacy instruction (Archambault *et al.*, 2025). Goldberg and colleagues' faculty micro-credential included an ethics module, action plans, and syllabus statements. Of 374 starters, 145 completed the posttest and 135 supplied paired responses. Perceptions and reported use improved, but ethical concern, trust in accuracy, and the stated need for verification did not change significantly. These findings concern selected perceptions among completers, not demonstrated improvements in ethical behaviour (Goldberg *et al.*, 2026). Wakeman and colleagues' survey of 130 students adds evidence on perceived literacy and reported use (Wakeman *et al.*, 2026).

Khoso and colleagues review AI literacy, collaboration and dependence among university students, and Muhammad and Hasan examine ethical integration and fair assessment in English as a foreign language (EFL) learning (Khoso *et al.*, 2026; Muhammad and Hasan, 2026). Reinke and colleagues' physiology tutorial engaged 236 students across two cohorts, collecting 492 Padlet posts. Students critiqued a ChatGPT-generated answer and discussed use in learning and assessment. The report also documents zero confirmed inappropriate-GenAI assignments in 2023 and three in 2024. Differences in cohorts, exposure and institutional conditions prevent attributing the misconduct figures to the activity. The example underscores the need to examine behaviour alongside students' expressed concerns and classroom discussion (Reinke *et al.*, 2025). Sun and Deng's exploratory activity with seventy business students examines prompts and reported experiences; convenience recruitment and self-reported learning limit claims about educational or ethical effectiveness (Sun and Deng, 2025).

Information-systems teaching offers further examples of connecting practical use with responsibility. Chan and colleagues teach hands-on GenAI development, Jiang and Nakatani examine course implementations, Sharma introduces Copilot-assisted text mining in Excel, and Viswanathan and colleagues develop an LLM-based tutor. These activities address errors, data handling or dependence, but their designs and outcomes differ. Including ethical content in a course does not establish its effect (Chan *et al.*, 2026; Jiang and Nakatani, 2025; Sharma, 2026; Viswanathan *et al.*, 2026).

Lan and colleagues map literacy interventions for undergraduate writing, Mirzaei and Khayer examine feedback personalisation, Ramirez reflects on teaching and assessment, and Weng and colleagues map assessment and learning outcomes (Lan *et al.*, 2026; Mirzaei and Khayer, 2025; Ramirez, 2026; Weng *et al.*, 2024). Wei and Perkins extend the analysis to group processes, and Springmier adds faculty and student perspectives (Springmier, 2025; Wei and Perkins, 2026). These sources suggest that agency includes decisions and contributions made throughout an activity. Group work creates an additional attribution problem: assessing a group's finished output may not reveal what each member understood or contributed.

Academic Research and Professional Education

Buragohain and colleagues survey 176 doctoral researchers at Tezpur University about adoption, perceived benefits and challenges, including privacy, bias and integrity (Buragohain *et al.*, 2026). Gustavsen and colleagues examine qualitative coding with GenAI, while Khan considers research-writing perceptions in India and the United Arab Emirates (Gustavsen *et al.*, 2025; Khan, 2025). Task-level coding analysis and surveys of perceived usefulness answer different questions and cannot yield a common estimate of improved research quality. Researchers retain responsibility for interpretive decisions and sources.

Reviews of postgraduate and educational research address integrity, ghostwriting and critical reflection, while reviews in biomedical writing and professional education consider reliability and responsibility. Mortlock and Lucas, for example, review GenAI in pharmacy education and its implications for academic integrity, and Çaloğlu and colleagues evaluate AI-assisted medical education, including its ethical aspects. The higher-education component has to be separated from clinical practice and general scholarly publishing, because medical literature is not automatically educational evidence (Mabirizi *et al.*, 2025; Abujaber *et al.*, 2023; Cheng and Zhu, 2025; Çaloğlu *et al.*, 2026; Lin *et al.*, 2026; Mortlock and Lucas, 2024; Rahmawati *et al.*, 2026; Sallam, 2023; Sriram *et al.*, 2026; Ugwu, 2026; Jeyaraman *et al.*, 2023).

Kang and colleagues interview faculty, postgraduate and clinical nurses, and only the separable academic subset is relevant here. Tahir and colleagues model relationships among GenAI use, engagement, self-regulation and integrity concerns in a cross-sectional survey of 380 students. The latter study illustrates that perceived educational benefit and ethical concern can coexist, although the model describes associations, not causal effects (Kang *et al.*, 2025; Tahir *et al.*, 2026).

Broader higher-education reviews provide context on adoption, affordances and risk, but require appraisal and checks for overlapping evidence. A review's title does not determine whether it is systematic, narrative or scoping. Reviews by Crompton and Burke, Dempere and colleagues, Dos, and Mahmoodi and colleagues differ in their periods and selection procedures, limiting direct comparison (Crompton and Burke, 2024; Dempere *et al.*, 2023; Dos, 2025; Mahmoodi *et al.*, 2026).

Academic-Library Roles and Institutional Support

Adewojo and Tella interview and observe twenty librarians in three universities within Kwara State, Nigeria. Their themes include professional anxiety, critical mediation, verification routines, and institutional support gaps. These experiences show how librarians interpret and check outputs, drawing on local knowledge as part of that responsibility. The authors caution that the findings are specific to the sampled institutions and recommend participatory policy development and critical-literacy training; the recommendations were not evaluated as interventions (Adewojo and Tella, 2026). Havelka and McGuinness examine library-and-information-studies students at University College Dublin (UCD), Margam and colleagues study students in Delhi, and Yasmin and Khan consider research-library perceptions (Havelka and McGuinness, 2026; Margam *et al.*, 2025; Yasmin and Khan, 2026). These accounts broaden the ethical discussion from student use to the expertise and support needed within libraries.

Maphosa and Tlomatsana discuss library research support, while implementation and graduate-training reports describe operational opportunities and limits. Library support may include source checking, critical understanding of tools, and guidance on data and research responsibilities. Their relevance to responsible practice still needs to be distinguished from evidence that a library intervention changes academic behaviour or prevents harm (Maphosa and Tlomatsana, 2026; Zavalina, 2026; Michalak and Ellixson, 2026).

Institutional and Educational Responses

Responses are assessed according to what has been proposed, implemented, or evaluated, and which outcomes have been measured. A proposal sets out responsibilities, an implementation report describes their practical application, and an evaluation examines selected outcomes. A report may include all three without establishing sustained ethical improvement. Alduais and colleagues' ETHICAL protocol includes two pilot workshops, each with fifteen participants: one for faculty and one for engineering graduate students. In the reported pre/post evaluation, correct risk classification increased from 32% to 78%. The authors describe the pilots as preliminary and informal, calling for larger, cross-disciplinary validation. These immediate scenario outcomes provide limited empirical support, while real research behaviour and longer-term effects remain unresolved. The

protocol therefore warrants classification as preliminarily evaluated, rather than solely proposed (Alduais *et al.*, 2025).

Documented Geographical Contexts

The close comparisons cover librarian experience in Kwara State, Nigeria (Adewojo and Tella, 2026), undergraduate literacy instruction at Loyola Marymount University in California (Archambault *et al.*, 2025), UCD library education in Ireland (Havelka and McGuinness, 2026), university students in Colombia (López-López *et al.*, 2026), reference-service trust among university students recruited in China (Wang *et al.*, 2026), a United States business-course activity (Sun and Deng, 2025), and graduate metadata training at the University of North Texas (Zavalina, 2026). These settings clarify an observation's relevance and limits; they do not establish geographic distributions or regional effect estimates. Study location is identified from methods, not author affiliation.

Conceptual Safeguards and Their Evidential Limits

Andersen and Fajkovic propose "explain, declare, document" safeguards in university-library instruction, connecting disclosure with reflection on AI use. Their account draws on professional experience and informal feedback rather than measured intervention effects. Bobula's review proposes assessment and policy changes without an effectiveness estimate. Zeshan and Hu illustrate provenance checking, bias review, and authorship disclosure in graduate architectural design through a conceptual scenario and call for empirical validation. These reports support proposed responses rather than evaluated interventions (Andersen and Fajkovic, 2026; Bobula, 2024; Zeshan and Hu, 2026).

Answers to the Guiding Questions

RQ1: The concerns examined involve intellectual contribution and integrity, reliable information, privacy, fair participation and the preservation of judgment. Evidence is strongest for describing a particular reported experience or task output. Broader privacy and equity arguments identify responsibilities and possible mechanisms, with fewer directly measured harm outcomes in the examples examined (Goyal *et al.*, 2026; López-López *et al.*, 2026; Zavalina, 2026; Alfiras *et al.*, 2026; Mukherjee and Kumar, 2026; Adewojo and Tella, 2026).

RQ2: Students can perceive academic value while remaining uncertain about legitimacy, faculty can report greater engagement while retaining ethical caution, and librarians can carry the work of verification and contextual explanation. The Colombian survey, faculty micro-credential and Nigerian library account demonstrate these different perspectives. Each describes one group in one setting, so none should be read as representing its stakeholder population (López-López *et al.*, 2026; Goldberg *et al.*, 2026; Adewojo and Tella, 2026).

RQ3: Responses range from conceptual safeguards and policy wording to implemented activities and preliminary evaluations. The protocol pilot tests scenario classification; the undergraduate workshop compares confidence and knowledge; and metadata teaching examines output errors and checking. Each evaluation supports conclusions about its measured outcome; the results cannot be combined into a common estimate of ethical effectiveness (Alduais *et al.*, 2025; Zavalina, 2026; Archambault *et al.*, 2025).

RQ4: Interpretation depends on the construct measured, sample and completion, analytic unit, comparison and timing. Misuse intention differs from misconduct, a trust rating differs from accuracy, and a completer survey differs from a result for all who started. Cross-sectional associations and uncontrolled changes leave open whether an institutional response caused any ethical improvement (Goyal *et al.*, 2026; Wang *et al.*, 2026; Archambault *et al.*, 2025; Goldberg *et al.*, 2026).

RQ5: Author-stated needs include better assessment tools, larger validation studies, behavioural observation and longitudinal or multisite comparisons. The reviewer extends these to testing the link between a safeguard and its intended ethical outcome, including transfer to later tasks and distribution across differently supported groups. These priorities reflect the papers examined and the reviewer's interpretation; they do not imply that such studies are absent from the wider field (Alduais *et al.*, 2025; Zavalina, 2026; Archambault *et al.*, 2025; Goldberg *et al.*, 2026; Adewojo and Tella, 2026).

Connecting Concerns to Evidence

Across the five questions, a central argument emerges: institutions must define the academic responsibility at stake before selecting or evaluating a safeguard. Output verification addresses accuracy, contribution statements address transparency, and demonstrations of reasoning address learning and authorship. These measures may complement one another, but success on one does not establish success on the others. Fig. 1 brings these relationships together in an interpretive framework whose causal pathways have not been tested.

RQ4 requires scrutiny within a paper as well as across designs. Atta and colleagues' limitations qualify the abstract's description of objective cognitive indicators (Atta *et al.*, 2026). Goyal and colleagues' abstract characterises certainty of shame as negatively related to misuse intention, while the reported structural-model table gives a positive coefficient. This discrepancy limits any recommendation based on that specific construct; the neutralisation associations remain distinct from an estimate of observed misconduct (Goyal *et al.*, 2026). In the trust experiment, five ratings from each of 146 students generate task-level observations; more ratings do not mean more independent participants (Wang *et al.*, 2026). These examples justify reading methods and detailed results before adopting an abstract's policy interpretation.

Recurring concerns across secondary reviews provide context, but overlapping primary studies can create apparent corroboration (Bittle and El-Gayar, 2025; Jamil *et al.*, 2026; Jayasinghe *et al.*, 2026; Yarboi *et al.*, 2026). This narrative comparison neither de-duplicates every primary report within those reviews nor estimates a common effect. Convergence is interpreted as agreement about concerns, with empirical

strength judged from the original observations examined. Qualitative experiences, classroom evaluations and policy arguments therefore contribute distinct forms of evidence rather than a common quality score.

Tensions Between Access, Contribution and Control

One tension concerns access and intellectual contribution. Language or explanatory assistance may enable participation, while replacement of reasoning may undermine assessment. Institutions should specify what students must demonstrate independently and how permitted assistance affects that demonstration. This interpretation connects literacy and authorship accounts; it is not a measured estimate of language assistance effects (Baldrich *et al.*, 2025; Kornieva *et al.*, 2026; Sanz-Tejeda *et al.*, 2026; Stroud *et al.*, 2026; Yoon and Kawshalya, 2026; De Martino *et al.*, 2026).

The second tension is between control and fair treatment. Monitoring or automated detection may be intended to protect integrity, but its ethical justification depends on how the resulting evidence is interpreted. Clear task expectations, documented process evidence and an opportunity to explain academic decisions can help clarify responsibility. The sources considered support scrutiny of the inference from a flagged output to an accusation; they do not establish the accuracy or fairness of individual institutional detection processes (Chinoracky and Stalmasekova, 2025; López-López *et al.*, 2026; Ibrahim, 2026; Salamah, 2026).

A further tension concerns standardisation and contextual responsibility. Common disclosure policies may promote consistency, yet acceptable use differs between introductory skill development, library metadata checking and research-data analysis. Policy descriptions establish institutional prescriptions, rather than users' understanding or the adequacy of rules for specific risks. Consistency should therefore be examined through the clarity of purposes and responsibilities, as well as policy wording (Alduais *et al.*, 2025; Rana, 2025; Zavalina, 2026; Mukherjee and Kumar, 2026; Plata *et al.*, 2023).

Implications for Educational and Institutional Practice

Institutional practice should begin with the academic purpose and the contribution students or researchers must demonstrate. Course statements can specify permitted assistance, required disclosure, and evidence of independent reasoning for each task. Research guidance can clarify permissible inputs, output checks, and responsibility. These proposals follow from the review and the responsibilities described in research protocols, educator accounts and policy analyses; they have not been shown effective across institutions (Chinoracky and Stalmasekova, 2025; Alduais *et al.*, 2025; Rana, 2025; Mukherjee and Kumar, 2026; Plata *et al.*, 2023).

Teaching and library support should make verification observable. Students can check generated references against the original publication, identify unsupported statements and justify revisions to an output. The metadata and workshop examples show why confidence or the mere presence of a check is an incomplete outcome (Zavalina, 2026; Archambault *et al.*, 2025). Educators should also evaluate the reasoning students retain when assistance is permitted. A process record, explanation, or task-appropriate demonstration can make that contribution assessable; its accessibility and workload implications need examination before routine adoption.

Implementation requires coordination among course leaders, research governance, faculty development and academic libraries. Staff need consistent guidance on permitted use, sensitive material, and escalation. Students need access to the guidance and resources required for assessment, including alternatives when tool access is unequal. Table 2 translates these implications into outcomes for institutional evaluation. Before use, these measures need local adaptation and

Table 2: Proposed safeguards and outcomes for institutional evaluation.

Concern	Proposed institutional action	Outcome to examine	Evidence informing the proposal
Integrity and contribution	Specify permitted assistance and assess the reasoning retained	Consistency of task judgments; contribution explanations; documented breaches	Scenario intentions and ambiguous judgments (Goyal *et al.*, 2026; López-López *et al.*, 2026); tutorial experience (Reinke *et al.*, 2025)
Reliable information	Teach source verification with a discipline-specific rubric	Correct identification and correction of fabricated or inaccurate material	Metadata errors and missed checks (Zavalina, 2026); workshop knowledge gap (Archambault *et al.*, 2025)
Privacy and accountability	Clarify permitted input material, responsibility and escalation	Decisions in sensitive-data scenarios; observed handling and incident response	Research protocol (Alduais *et al.*, 2025); institutional policy material (Rana, 2025; Mukherjee and Kumar, 2026)
Literacy and agency	Combine technical instruction with critique and independent explanation	Performance on new tasks and retained reasoning at follow-up	Workshop (Archambault *et al.*, 2025), faculty development (Goldberg *et al.*, 2026) and guided activities (Reinke *et al.*, 2025; Sun and Deng, 2025)
Equitable participation	Provide accessible guidance and task-appropriate alternatives	Access to support, participation barriers and differences in outcomes	Equity-focused literature (Ni and Li, 2026; Van Wyk, 2024); institutional support gaps (Adewojo and Tella, 2026)
Policy implementation	Involve course staff, students and librarians in guidance and review	Agreement about rules; handling of cases; resource and workload effects	Policy analyses (Rana, 2025; Mukherjee and Kumar, 2026; Plata *et al.*, 2023) and librarian experience (Adewojo and Tella, 2026)

validation. They have not been validated as indicators of a single ethical-competence construct or evaluated together as an intervention package.

Research Gaps

RQ5 distinguishes author-stated gaps from reviewer-derived priorities. Archambault and colleagues call for improved assessment tools and studies across educational settings; Alduais and colleagues call for larger formal protocol validation; and Goldberg and colleagues propose direct observation, analysis of teaching artefacts, and post-completion follow-up (Alduais *et al.*, 2025; Archambault *et al.*, 2025; Goldberg *et al.*, 2026). Zavalina describes ongoing work using an initial small dataset, while Adewojo and Tella recommend longitudinal and comparative research on library roles and critical-literacy education (Zavalina, 2026; Adewojo and Tella, 2026). These are priorities identified in particular papers, not a comprehensive account of gaps across the corpus.

The first priority proposed here is to examine how ethical reasoning relates to behaviour. Integrity studies could distinguish a student's judgment about an AI-assisted scenario from documented practice under clearly stated task rules. Literacy evaluations could assess reference verification and error recognition alongside confidence, using comparison groups where feasible and follow-up during later coursework. Policy research could examine how the same guidance is interpreted by students, educators, and librarians, and whether actual handling of cases matches that guidance. Privacy and equity evaluations require explicit definitions of the affected data, group, process, and harm; a risk statement alone is insufficient.

A second priority is to test transfer and distribution of outcomes. Multisite studies could compare a common core activity across disciplines while documenting language, access, prior knowledge, and institutional support. They should report the model and version, task conditions, participant and analytic denominators, noncompletion and follow-up timing. Task ratings, student posts and assignments should be distinguished from independent participants. Reviews could map overlap of primary studies and keep GenAI-specific higher-education evidence separate from school, clinical and general-AI evidence. These proposals arise from the methodological limitations identified here; the selective English-language corpus cannot show that no relevant work exists elsewhere.

Limitations

This critical narrative review is selective and interpretive. Original search strings, specific databases within EBSCOhost and Research4Life, retrieval totals, and the provenance of later additions are unavailable. The collection cannot establish comprehensive coverage, concern, prevalence, geographic distribution, or comparative effectiveness. The 121 topic papers constitute the cited corpus, not a systematic sample or 121 independent empirical studies. The RQ grid contains AI-assisted candidate passages; complete human verification of every extraction and cited interpretation remains outstanding. Selected full-text checks support specific comparisons but do not remove selection or interpretation bias. No independent duplicate review or completed formal risk-of-bias appraisal was conducted.

English-language selection and reliance on an available collection may underrepresent regional scholarship, unpublished experience, and unsuccessful interventions. Secondary reviews may share primary studies, and conceptual papers contribute arguments rather than observations. Self-report, selective participation, small or uncontrolled evaluations, and short follow-up limit the examples examined. Unmeasured privacy incidents, unequal treatment, or effective safeguards cannot be assumed absent. Findings apply to the tools and conditions studied; the proposed framework and measures require further examination as these change.

CONCLUSION

Ethical GenAI use in higher education requires an assessable account of human contribution, information reliability, and institutional responsibility. Across the five guiding questions, the cited evidence identifies uncertainty about acceptable assistance, limits in verification and literacy, and the importance of contextual support. Preliminary evaluations document changes in particular knowledge, perceptions, or activities, but do not establish sustained ethical conduct. Universities can strengthen practice by clarifying task expectations, teaching and assessing verification, supporting equitable participation and examining policy implementation. Further research should connect safeguards with observed behaviour, learning and consequences over time, using designs suited to the claim.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

During the preparation of this manuscript, the author used Google Gemini 1.5 Flash to assist in synthesising key conceptual arguments and refining the structural flow and clarity of the discussion section. The author also used OpenAI Codex to assist with language editing, transitions, clarity, and consistency across the manuscript. Following the use of these tools, the author thoroughly reviewed, edited, and verified the AI-generated and AI-assisted content and assumes full responsibility for the accuracy and integrity of the final manuscript.

Life Science Reporting

Not applicable.

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