



## **Academic Integrity in the AI Age: Exploring the Postgraduate Students' Awareness of Plagiarism in Second Language Writing**

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This study examines postgraduates' awareness of plagiarism in second-language writing to maintain academic integrity in the age of AI, and whether there are significant differences in plagiarism awareness among postgraduate students (PGS) based on gender and year of study. Awareness of plagiarism and the consequences of engaging in such practices is necessary to prevent plagiarism and promote academic integrity. There have thus been calls for researchers to investigate the intersection of AI, plagiarism, and L2 writing among PGS. This study employed a quantitative research design and involved 36 participants (PGS), consisting of 14 males and 22 females, in the Applied Linguistics program at a public university in Saudi Arabia's English Department. The study's findings indicate that postgraduates are generally aware of plagiarism, proper citation, academic integrity, AI tools, and institutional support, and AI's impact on academic integrity, strongly understand plagiarism detection systems, and are moderately aware of institutional support and training in academic integrity. Further, the findings demonstrate a statistically significant difference in plagiarism awareness, where females exhibit a higher awareness of academic integrity principles in second-language writing. Furthermore, the statistics indicate no significant difference in plagiarism awareness between first and second-year (PGS), suggesting that the year of study did not significantly influence plagiarism awareness.

**Keywords:** academic writing, academic integrity, AI tools, paraphrasing, plagiarism

### **INTRODUCTION**

The fast development of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools, including ChatGPT, Gemini, and Bard, has significantly altered academic environments, simultaneously introducing challenges to the preservation of academic integrity in higher education (Chan, 2023; Pudasaini et al., 2024; Wiredu et al., 2024). These tools provide advantages, including improved student engagement, collaboration, and accessibility; nonetheless, they also pose challenges related to academic integrity, plagiarism, and ethical writing practices (Cotton et al., 2023). Universities are currently addressing the implications of these tools, raising important questions regarding their effects on academic integrity (AbuSa'aleek, & Alharbi, 2025).

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Academic integrity is fundamental to educational and scientific pursuits, incorporating principles of honesty, justice, trust, respect, and responsibility (Vakulenko & Boyarchuk, 2022). Plagiarism constitutes a severe violation of academic integrity and continues to be a significant issue in higher education. Plagiarism is characterized by the unauthorized use of another's work without appropriate acknowledgment. It can take several forms, such as verbatim copying, insufficient paraphrasing, and acts of academic dishonesty (Ali et al., 2020; Darmansyah & Darman, 2022).

The necessity of teaching paraphrasing skills and conducting training that would enable students to avoid plagiarism and enhance their writing skills has also been stressed (Mariani et al., 2021; Pratama et al., 2022). Nevertheless, there is still limited research to be found that addresses the specific challenges created by AI-assisted writing tools from the perspective of PGS performing L2 writing. Integration of AI tools into academic writing requires further exploration of their implications for academic integrity. While previous research has considered traditional forms of plagiarism, the intersection of AI, plagiarism, and L2 writing remains little explored. Specifically, this study investigates how postgraduates understand plagiarism in second-language writing in the age of AI through the analysis of the level of awareness of plagiarism, knowledge of proper citation and attribution, institutional policy and training, perceived impact of AI on academic integrity and familiarity with AI tools and plagiarism detection, and whether there are significant differences in plagiarism awareness among (PGS) based on gender and year of study. The following are the guiding research questions.

RQ1. To what extent are PGS aware of plagiarism in second-language academic writing?

RQ2. Are there any significant differences between PGS's awareness of plagiarism in academic writing based on gender and year of study?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Theoretical Framework the Role of Academic Integrity in Fostering Ethical Academic Practices**

Academic integrity forms the cornerstone of ethical academic practice, based on values such as honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility (Bretag, 2020). Academic integrity ensures that academic work gains credibility, allowing it to operate fairly, transparently, and genuinely within scholarly activities. When it comes to writing, academic integrity involves identifying and giving proper credit to the ideas and contributions of others while adhering to guidelines in an ethical manner and remaining original (Adhiambo, 2019). Doing so allows academic communities to hold the ethical underpinnings necessary for meaningful intellectual advancement (Chan & Lee, 2023; Hosseini et al., 2023).

The promotion of academic integrity in education may be enabled through the establishment of a learning-oriented environment, better teaching, more institutional support for teaching and learning, and reduced institutional constraints (Gallant 2017). It also ranges from low-level, unplanned plagiarism and poor collaboration to high-

severe level plagiarism, collusion, examination cheating, ghostwriting, fabrication, and, recently, contract cheating (Bretag et al., 2019).

### **The Notion of Awareness and Plagiarism in Academic Writing**

Chan (2023:4) introduced the concept of AI-giarism that combines 'AI' and 'plagiarism', "*AI-giarism refers to the unethical practice of using artificial intelligence technology, particularly generative language models, to generate content that is plagiarised either from original human-authored work or directly from AI-generated content, without appropriate acknowledgement of the sources or AI's contribution.*" to describe the intersection of AI-generated content and academic dishonesty.

Awareness of plagiarism requires an understanding of what it is, recognizing its unethical nature, and the consequences that would be involved if one engaged in such practices. Awareness is necessary to prevent plagiarism and uphold academic standards (Al-Hashmi et al., 2023; Rohmad & Wahyuni, 2019). Plagiarism is a serious problem in higher education, which the digital age has worsened since students can easily access information and reproduce it without proper citation (Ali et al., 2020; Sozon et al., 2024). Although students and academics understand the need for clear plagiarism policies, there needs to be more understanding of existing guidelines (Vanbaelen & Harrison, 2013). Plagiarism is a growing trend in higher education culture, affecting both education and research. Students increasingly seek easy ways out when writing research papers and theses (Jereb et al., 2018).

In addressing this issue, academia can employ several strategies, as suggested by previous research (Sozon et al., 2024). By integrating coursework on citing skills with library-led initiatives, students' awareness of plagiarism-related problems has been significantly improved (Ali et al., 2020). It was found that specific instructions on plagiarism and research approach significantly improve the students' skills in avoiding academic dishonesty. Plagiarism According to Carroll (2007) and Koul et al. (2009), plagiarism "involves the unacknowledged use of someone else's work or ideas and misrepresenting them as one's own". It is described as "a form of cheating or theft whereby an individual plagiarist appropriates the ideas or the actual words of another individual and passes it off as their original material" (Dang et al., 2005; Wong, 2011).

Previous research has mentioned the need to observe accepted norms regarding plagiarism (McCulloch & Indrarathne, 2023; Nauman, 2019). Generally, poor paraphrasing results in low-quality writing performance and unintentional plagiarism (Ramadhani, 2019). In contrast, the attitude of students and faculty regarding plagiarism and ways to reduce academic dishonesty have been presented in previously conducted research (Ali et al., 2020; Buraimo et al., 2019).

### **The Ethical Challenges of Generative AI in Academic Writing**

Generative AI has created new complexities in terms of academic integrity, given the shifting issues relating to academic ethics. Deliberate misuse of AI tools, such as reliance on AI-generated text that is not adequately cited or modified, could clearly nullify essential features of originality and fairness (Cotton et al., 2023). In addition, the lack of student awareness concerning the ethical use of AI and the absence of

comprehensive institutional policies further heighten the risks of academic dishonesty (Mariani et al., 2021; Pratama et al., 2022). In addition to questions of authorship, generative AI raises legal and ethical issues in academic publishing, reinforcing the need for transparent reporting and the development of AI-inclusive strategies to maintain academic integrity (Bozkurt, 2024).

The release of ChatGPT has particularly made the academic community worried about committing academic misconduct through activities such as contract cheating, among others (Lehane et al., 2024). Growing virtual academic resources, along with increased academic stress and a shift toward online academic environments, have further escalated the risks of issues to academic integrity (Sotiriadou et al., 2020). In mitigating risks from AI-assisted writing, most universities rely on plagiarism detection tools, such as Turnitin, which typically produce similarity reports by comparing the documents with big databases (Thohir et al., 2024).

### **Review of previous research on plagiarism awareness in second-language writing**

Plagiarism awareness in L2 writing also reported complex and multilevel problems influenced by linguistic, cultural, institutional, and technological factors within recent research by (Jereb, 2018; Babaii & Nejadghanbar, 2017; Shen & Hu, 2021; Tran et al., 2022). The general awareness and perception of plagiarism among students are crucial in addressing issues related to academic misconduct. For instance, Jereb (2018) found remarkable differences in gender students' perception of plagiarism, with female students judging plagiarism as more abominable than their male colleagues. Further, Babaii and Nejadghanbar (2017) investigated Iranian (PGS) students' knowledge of plagiarism. They found that some of the causes cited as promoting plagiarism included low academic writing skills, lenient teaching practices, time shortage, and lack of knowledge about plagiarism. Similarly, Shen and Hu (2021) investigated Chinese graduate students' perception of plagiarism and emphasized disciplinary differences in the understanding of subtle forms of plagiarism. However, in a study targeting (PGS) in New Zealand, Tran et al. (2022) revealed that domestic and international students display different perceptions of plagiarism. Such moderating factors include age, gender, academic discipline, and previous academic experience, which challenge the stereotype that international students are more engaged in academic misconduct compared to domestic students.

Further, Magida (2023) reported that while 83.1% of students claimed to understand what plagiarism means, 36.1% were unable to identify specific instances of plagiarism correctly. At the same time, Pecorari and Petrić (2014) underlined that plagiarism in L2 writing is often rooted in cultural conceptions of intellectual ownership and textual borrowing as a learning strategy. Fatemi and Saito (2020) noted that international students, even with high proficiency in English, tend to commit accidental plagiarism. Mostofa et al. (2021) established that various field researchers are mainly aware of anti-plagiarism tools like Turnitin in encouraging academic integrity. Nabee et al. (2020) identified two major predictors of plagiarism practice: the perception of plagiarism and familiarity with institutional policy. Buraimo et al. (2019) investigated what factors compel undergraduate students to commit plagiarism, identified poor academic

planning, fear of failure, and the urge to obtain good grades as the main drivers of such misconduct.

Cotton et al. (2023) also discussed the challenge of AI brought about by tools such as ChatGPT and suggested that strategies to be taken by any institution should include policies on ethical use, training, and enhanced detection methods since academic misconduct constantly evolves. Mulenga and Shilongo (2024) also discussed how plagiarism has far-reaching implications for students, educators, and institutions. Their findings underlined the main factors of plagiarism to be academic pressure, lack of time, and partial acquaintance with citation rules.

Several studies (Marar & Hamza, 2020; Parente & Roecklein-Canfield, 2020) strongly stress the importance of taking proactive steps toward enhancing academic integrity. Parente and Roecklein-Canfield (2020) discussed some classroom practices, including the use of real-life cases of misconduct and open discussions on academic honesty. Correspondingly, Marar and Hamza (2020) raise the point that self-plagiarism is one of the grey areas that need more awareness.

Concerning the level of Awareness of plagiarism, several studies (Al-Hashmi et al., 2023; Chan, 2023; Rohmad & Wahyuni, 2019) have highlighted that Awareness of plagiarism needs Understanding of what plagiarism is, Recognition of the unethical aspects, as well as the consequences that would be involved if one practices it, thus it impacts the fields of education as well as research (Jereb et al., 2018). These highlights are in line with the creation of the first construct scale.

Beyond general awareness, the second construct, Knowledge of Proper Citation and Attribution, draws upon previous studies by (Ali et al., 2020; Sozon et al., 2024) have highlighted the integration of AI tools that facilitate Plagiarism, since students can easily reproduce the content without proper citation. Furthermore, the third construct, institutional policy and training, draws from previous research (Cotton et al., 2023, Mulenga & Shilongo, 2024) which emphasized the challenge of integration of AI in academic writing and the strategies related to policies on ethical use, training, and detection methods that are taken by institutions and their implications on students and educators. Nabee et al. (2020) identified that the perception of plagiarism and familiarity with institutional policy are the major predictors of plagiarism practice.

Fourth, the construct of Perceived Impact of AI on Academic Integrity is grounded in recent research by Several studies (Marar & Hamza, 2020; Parente & Roecklein-Canfield, 2020) strongly stress the importance of taking proactive steps toward enhancing academic integrity. Parente and Roecklein-Canfield (2020) discussed some classroom practices, including the use of real-life cases of misconduct and open discussions on academic honesty. Correspondingly, Marar and Hamza (2020) raise the point that self-plagiarism is one of the grey areas that need more awareness. Lastly, the fifth construct, Familiarity with AI Tools and Plagiarism Detection, responds to the growing need for students to be familiar and engage with various digital writing tools as emphasized in previous studies (Chan, 2023; Pudasaini et al., 2024; Wiredu et al., 2024), where the fast expansion of these (AI) tools has notably altered academic environments, and ethical writing practices. Other studies (Mostofa et al., 2021; Thohir

et al., 2024) reported that most universities rely on plagiarism detection tools, such as Turnitin, and researchers are mainly aware of anti-plagiarism tools like Turnitin in encouraging academic integrity.

## METHOD

### Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative approach to collect data, aiming to enhance our understanding of postgraduates' awareness of plagiarism in second-language writing and the challenges they face in maintaining academic integrity in the age of AI. Quantitative approaches allow for precise measurement of variables, the use of statistical tools to assess relationships, and differences (Asher, 2024; Creswell et al., 2011; Lim, 2024). The questionnaire is an appropriate tool for descriptive studies, mainly when scrutinizing attitudes (Siedlecki, 2020).

### Participants

This study involved 36 participants (PGS), consisting of 14 males and 22 females. The study participants were EFL postgraduates in the Applied Linguistics program at a public university in Saudi Arabia's English Department. All participants were Saudi nationals between the ages of 25 and 32 years, native Arabic speakers. The sample was categorized into two groups according to gender to correspond with the study's emphasis. The participants exhibited a high level of English proficiency. They utilized AI-assisted writing tools in their academic writing practices. A purposive sampling method was used to select the study sample, as the study specifically targeted EFL postgraduate males and females. This selection is justified by the participants' active involvement in the academic writing process, which aligned with the study's objectives. The primary objective of purposive sampling is to concentrate on relevant population characteristics (Rai & Thapa, 2015), thus facilitating the successful conclusion of your research questions and enhancing the depth of understanding (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Table 1  
Demographic information of the participants

Variables		N	%
Gender	Male	14	39%
	Female	22	61%
Year of Study	First Year	15	41%
	Second Year	21	59%
Language Proficiency	Advanced	27	75%
	Intermediate	9	25%
Familiarity with AI Tools	Frequent Use	19	53%
	Occasional Use	17	47%
Prior Training in Academic Integrity	Yes	4	11%
	No	32	89%

Table 1 presents the distribution of the participants based on their gender. As presented above, the males (PGS) who participated in this questionnaire were 39%, whereas the females (PGS) were 61%. Further, it presents the participants' year of study, language proficiency, familiarity with AI tools, and prior training in academic integrity.

### **Instrument, Data Collection, and Analysis**

This study focuses on determining to what extent (PGS) are aware of plagiarism in second-language academic writing and whether there are any significant differences between (PGS)' awareness of plagiarism in academic writing based on gender. The researcher created and developed the Awareness of Academic Integrity and Plagiarism (AAIP) scale with reference to previous studies and literature (Chan, 2023; Cotton et al., 2023; Fatemi & Saito, 2020; Jereb et al., 2018; Mulenga & Shilongo, 2024; Mostofa et al., 2021; Oyewole et al., 2018; Nabee et al., 2020; Shen & Hu, 2021). The AAIP scale consisted of two distinct sections: The first section gathered demographic data of the respondents, comprising 5 items: gender, year of study, language proficiency level, familiarity with AI writing tools, prior training in academic integrity, and plagiarism prevention. The second section of the AAIP scale comprised 25 items to explore students' awareness of academic integrity and plagiarism in second-language academic writing. This section contains 5 constructs: (1) The Level of Awareness of Plagiarism. (2) Knowledge of Proper Citation and Attribution. (3) Institutional Policy and Training. (4) Perceived Impact of AI on Academic Integrity. (5) Familiarity with AI Tools and Plagiarism Detection, each of these constructs comprising five items. The AAIP scale employed a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 5 (Strongly Agree) to 1 (Strongly Disagree). Five experts in the field assessed the content validity of the AAIP scale. Their comments and recommendations were taken into consideration. Cronbach's alpha was computed for the AAIP scale and the total scale. These estimates indicate that AAIP is a valid and reliable measure. The AAIP scale showed good internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha = .81). The data were acquired via electronically administered surveys distributed to (N=36) (PGS) in the Applied Linguistics program. The electronic survey was distributed through Department WhatsApp groups, and students were told of the study's goal, emphasizing that their responses would only be utilized for research purposes. Participation was voluntary, and they were assured it would not affect their academic grades.

Descriptive statistics, such as means and standard deviations, were utilized to evaluate students' understanding of academic integrity and plagiarism in second-language academic writing. Their perspectives were assessed using five AAIP subscales. The analysis employed SPSS software to guarantee precise and accurate statistical reports. An independent samples t-test was conducted to examine potential differences in attitudes by gender. The mean scores were classified into three levels for clarity in interpretation: High: 3.67 to 5, Moderate: 2.34 to 3.66, Low: 1 to 2.33. The researchers used these cut-off scores for the scale to determine and differentiate each AAIP scale item's status. These means were divided into three cut-off scores used in previous studies (AbuSa'aleek & Yaghi, 2024; Alghamdi & AbuSa'aleek, 2025; Budin, 2014).

### **FINDINGS**

This section presents findings about the overall postgraduates' awareness of plagiarism in second-language writing in the age of AI, through the analysis of questionnaire's 5 constructs: the level of awareness of plagiarism, knowledge of proper citation and attribution, institutional policy and training, perceived impact of AI on academic

integrity and familiarity with AI tools and plagiarism detection, and whether there are significant differences in plagiarism awareness among (PGS) based on gender and year of study.

Table 2  
Descriptive statistics of questionnaire constructs.

Construct	Mean	SD
The Level of Awareness of Plagiarism	4.37	0.60
Knowledge of Proper Citation and Attribution	3.64	0.84
Institutional Policy and Training	3.63	0.77
Perceived Impact of AI on Academic Integrity	4.44	0.62
Familiarity with AI Tools and Plagiarism Detection	4.39	0.71
Overall	4.09	0.71

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for the overall constructs, illustrating postgraduates' awareness in five critical areas concerning awareness of plagiarism, proper citation, academic integrity, AI tools, and institutional support. The overall mean score (Mean = 4.09, SD = 0.71) reflects a strong awareness, accompanied by significant variations among different constructs. The Perceived Impact of AI on Academic Integrity achieved a high score (Mean = 4.44, SD = 0.62), indicating favorable views regarding the potential of AI tools to improve academic writing when utilized ethically. The Familiarity with AI Tools and Plagiarism Detection received a high score (Mean = 4.39, SD = 0.71), suggesting that postgraduates possess a strong understanding of AI writing tools and plagiarism detection systems. Meanwhile, the Level of Awareness of Plagiarism attained a high score (Mean = 4.37, SD = 0.60), indicating that postgraduates possessed a robust understanding of plagiarism and the necessity for proper attribution. Finally, the Knowledge of Proper Citation and Attribution construct scored at the higher end of the moderate range (Mean = 3.64, SD = 0.84), indicating variability in participants' citation knowledge, whereas the Institutional Policy and Training construct (Mean = 3.63, SD = 0.77), reflecting a moderate awareness regarding the sufficiency of institutional support and training in academic integrity. The findings demonstrate that postgraduates comprehensively understand plagiarism and are well-acquainted with AI tools.

Table 3  
Descriptive Statistics of the Level of Awareness of Plagiarism

Statement	M	SD
1. I am aware of the definition of plagiarism and the various forms it might take.	3.61	1.06
2. I understand that presenting another individual's work as one's own without appropriate citation is plagiarism.	4.56	0.50
3. I understand that utilizing an author's precise language without quotation marks and proper citation constitutes plagiarism.	4.69	0.46
4. I understand that utilizing another author's concepts without acknowledging the source is plagiarism.	4.53	0.50
5. Plagiarism reduces the credibility and value of academic work.	4.47	0.50
Overall	4.37	0.60

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics for the level of awareness of the plagiarism subscale, reflecting postgraduates' comprehension and awareness of plagiarism and its different forms. The subscale attained a high positive score (Mean = 4.37, SD = 0.60). The mean scores for the postgraduates' answers to the five items varied from (3.61 to 4.69). The results indicate that postgraduates exhibited the highest level of agreement regarding the comprehension of direct language misuse and the necessity for proper citation (Mean = 4.69, SD = 0.46). Items concerning the presentation of others' work and ideas without proper acknowledgment received high scores (Mean = 4.56 and 4.53, respectively), indicating a significant recognition of the ethical significance of attribution. Postgraduates concurred that plagiarism diminishes the credibility of academic work (Mean = 4.47, SD = 0.50). The item assessing general awareness of the definition and various forms of plagiarism yielded a lower score (Mean = 3.61, SD = 1.06), suggesting variability in postgraduates' familiarity with the broader concept of plagiarism. The results indicate that postgraduates typically have a solid grasp of plagiarism; however, further assistance may be necessary to understand its various forms and consequences thoroughly.

Table 4  
Descriptive Statistics of Knowledge of Proper Citation and Attribution

Statement	Mean	SD
1. I am aware that all sources of information must be credited, whether quoted directly or paraphrased.	4.56	0.50
2. I know in-text citations and the regulations about reference lists in academic writing.	3.44	1.28
3. I can differentiate between common knowledge and information that requires citation.	2.97	1.14
4. I am confident in effectively utilizing an approved citation style, such as APA or MLA, in my academic writing.	3.11	0.97
5. I understand the consequences of failing to attribute sources of information in my academic work correctly.	4.11	0.31
Overall	3.64	0.84

Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics for the knowledge of proper citation subscale, reflecting postgraduates' awareness and understanding of citation practices and their capacity to attribute sources accurately. The subscale attained a moderate score (Mean = 3.64, SD = 0.84), reflecting variability in postgraduates' knowledge and confidence in this domain. The mean scores for postgraduates' responses to the five items varied from (2.97 to 4.56). The item evaluating awareness of the necessity to credit all sources of information, whether quoted directly or paraphrased, received the highest score (Mean = 4.56, SD = 0.50), indicating a strong consensus on this essential principle of academic integrity. Furthermore, the awareness of the repercussions associated with improper source attribution was notably high (Mean = 4.11, SD = 0.31), reflecting an acknowledgment of the significance of accurate citation. Lower scores were noted for items concerning the differentiation between common knowledge and information necessitating citation (Mean = 2.97, SD = 1.14), confidence in utilizing citation style, (Mean = 3.11, SD = 0.97) and familiarity with in-text citations and reference list regulations (Mean = 3.44, SD = 1.28), indicating a potential need for additional

guidance for postgraduates. Finally, the results demonstrate that postgraduates grasp the fundamental principles of proper citation. However, they have significant deficiencies in their practical application and confidence regarding specific citation practices, underscoring the necessity for focused training and support in this domain.

Table 5  
Descriptive Statistics of Institutional Policy and Training

Statement	Mean	SD
1. My university maintains clear policies regarding preventing plagiarism in academic writing.	4.00	0.67
2. My college offers sufficient training sessions or workshops on academic integrity and plagiarism prevention.	3.11	1.15
3. I am appropriately instructed to utilize the plagiarism detection technologies endorsed by my university.	4.00	0.82
4. My teachers provide sufficient feedback to enhance my citation and referencing skills.	4.11	0.31
5. I feel my university guides the ethical utilization of AI-assisted writing tools.	2.94	0.91
Overall	3.63	0.77

Table 5 presents the descriptive statistics for the institutional policy and training subscale, reflecting postgraduates' perceptions regarding their institution's initiatives to promote academic integrity and offer support via training and policies. The subscale obtained a moderate score (Mean = 3.63, SD = 0.77), reflecting variability in the perceived adequacy of institutional support. The mean scores for the postgraduates' responses varied from (2.94 to 4.11). The highest score was recorded for the statement regarding the adequacy of feedback from teachers to improve citation and referencing skills (Mean = 4.11, SD = 0.31), indicating that postgraduates typically perceive support from their instructors in enhancing their academic writing. Similarly, well-defined institutional policies regarding plagiarism prevention and guidance on the use of approved plagiarism detection technologies garnered notably high ratings (Mean = 4.00 for both items). Furthermore, training sessions or workshops on academic integrity and plagiarism prevention received a moderate rating (Mean = 3.11, SD = 1.15), indicating variability in their availability or perceived effectiveness. In contrast, the lowest score was noted for guidance on the ethical use of AI-assisted writing tools (Mean = 2.94, SD = 0.91), suggesting that postgraduates perceive a lack of adequate direction from their institution in this developing field. The findings suggest that postgraduates recognize the existence of clear institutional policies and teacher support, but there is still a necessity for enhanced structured training and guidance.

Table 6  
Descriptive Statistics of Perceived Impact of AI on Academic Integrity

Statement	Mean	SD
1. Access to AI tools facilitates the act of plagiarism.	4.19	0.97
2. AI tools utilized in academic writing have created confusion among students regarding the distinction between ethical writing and plagiarism.	4.47	0.50
3. AI-based tools enhance writing skills but may also raise the tendency for unethical writing practices.	4.44	0.50
4. I believe that AI tools can be utilized in a manner that avoids plagiarism.	4.69	0.46
5. Institutions require more explicit guidelines regarding using AI-assisted writing tools to ensure compliance with academic integrity policies.	4.42	0.68
Overall	4.44	0.62

Table 6 presents descriptive statistics for the perceived impact of AI on the academic integrity subscale, reflecting postgraduates' views on the potential influence of AI tools on ethical writing practices. The subscale recorded a high positive score (Mean = 4.44, SD = 0.62), suggesting that postgraduates acknowledge the advantages and difficulties linked to using AI tools in academic writing. The mean scores for the postgraduates' responses ranged from (4.19 to 4.69). The highest score indicated a belief in the potential of AI tools to be employed in a manner that avoids plagiarism (Mean = 4.69, SD = 0.46), reflecting a positive outlook among postgraduates concerning the ethical use of AI-assisted writing tools when applied responsibly. Postgraduates strongly agreed that more explicit institutional guidelines are necessary to ensure compliance with academic integrity policies (Mean = 4.42, SD = 0.68), emphasizing the demand for clearer policies and regulations. Postgraduates recognized the dual nature of AI tools, noting that they improve writing skills while also heightening the risk of unethical writing practices (Mean = 4.44, SD = 0.50). The assertion that AI tools generate confusion among students about ethical and unethical writing also received a high score (Mean = 4.47, SD = 0.50), highlighting concerns regarding the ambiguity in the appropriate use of these tools. While the statement regarding AI tools facilitating plagiarism received the lowest score (Mean = 4.19, SD = 0.97), it remains notably high, indicating mixed perceptions about the relationship between access to AI tools and unethical practices. The findings indicate that postgraduates recognize the complexities related to AI-assisted writing and highlight the necessity of clear institutional guidelines to promote the ethical use of these technologies.

Table 7  
Descriptive Statistics of Familiarity with AI Tools and Plagiarism Detection

Statement	M	SD
1. I know the famous AI-assisted writing tools and their functionalities: ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude Consensus, SciSpace, Quillbot, and Grammarly.	4.42	0.49
2. I have utilized AI writing tools to generate ideas or enhance my academic writing.	4.08	0.86
3. I understand the capability of plagiarism detection tools such as Turnitin software to identify similarities in submitted texts.	4.47	0.50
4. I recognize that AI-generated content constitutes and may be flagged as plagiarism unless adequately cited, quoted, or modified.	4.56	0.50
5. Plagiarism detection tools assist in preventing unethical practices associated with the use of AI writing tools.	4.44	0.50
Overall	4.39	0.57

Table 7 presents the descriptive statistics for the familiarity with AI tools and plagiarism detection subscale, reflecting postgraduates' knowledge of AI-assisted writing tools and their comprehension of plagiarism detection systems. The subscale attained a high positive score (Mean = 4.39, SD = 0.57), suggesting that postgraduates possess a strong understanding of AI tools and plagiarism detection functionalities. Further, the statement concerning the recognition that AI-generated content may be flagged as plagiarism unless appropriately cited, quoted, or modified received the highest score (Mean = 4.56, SD = 0.50), indicating a strong awareness of the ethical implications associated with AI-generated content. Postgraduates exhibited a strong understanding of plagiarism detection tools, exemplified by Turnitin (Mean = 4.47, SD = 0.50), and recognized the role of these tools in mitigating unethical practices (Mean = 4.44, SD = 0.50). Postgraduates demonstrated significant familiarity with popular AI writing tools and their functionalities (Mean = 4.42, SD = 0.49), reflecting a comprehensive awareness of tools such as ChatGPT, Quillbot, and Grammarly, whereas for the utilization of AI writing tools to generate ideas or improve academic writing (Mean = 4.08, SD = 0.86), indicating that although postgraduates recognize these tools, their practical usage may be infrequent. Finally, the findings indicate that postgraduates demonstrate a strong awareness and comprehension of AI-assisted writing tools and plagiarism detection systems. However, variability exists in their active utilization of these tools for academic purposes.

To address the second research question, a comprehensive analysis of an independent samples t-test and descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) was conducted to find out whether there are any significant differences between PGS's awareness of plagiarism in academic writing based on gender and year of study. The results of the independent t-tests are presented in Table 8 and highlight the key differences in plagiarism awareness based on gender and year of study.

Table 8  
Independent T-Test of Postgraduates' Gender and Year of Study

Comparison	F (Levene's Test)	p-value (Levene's Test)	t-statistic	df	p-value (two-sided)
Gender	0.439	0.511	-2.64	34	0.013
Year of Study	1.543	0.214	-1.154	34	0.256

The t-test results in Table 8 demonstrate a statistically significant difference in plagiarism awareness between male and female (PGS) in academic writing. The p-value for the gender comparison is 0.013, which is below the significance level of 0.05. The findings indicate that gender significantly influenced plagiarism awareness. Furthermore, the t-test results in Table 8 indicate no significant difference in plagiarism awareness between first-year and second-year (PGS). The p-value for the comparison of years of study is 0.256, exceeding the level of 0.05, suggesting that year of study did not significantly influence plagiarism awareness.

Table 9  
Descriptive Statistics for Gender and Year of Study

Category	Group	M	SD
Gender	Male	21.93	1.77
	Female	23.36	1.62
Year of Study	First Year	22	1.88
	Second Year	22.6	1.72

Descriptive statistics in Table 9 indicate that females ( $M = 23.36$ ,  $SD = 1.62$ ) exhibited higher plagiarism awareness scores than males ( $M = 21.93$ ,  $SD = 1.77$ ). The findings indicate that females (PGS) exhibit a higher awareness of academic integrity principles in second-language writing. Furthermore, the descriptive statistics Table 9 indicate that first-year students ( $M = 22.00$ ,  $SD = 1.88$ ) and second-year students ( $M = 22.60$ ,  $SD = 1.72$ ) exhibit comparable levels of awareness, thereby reinforcing that the differences in mean scores are very slight.

## DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

This study explored the extent to which (PGS) are aware of plagiarism in second-language academic writing and whether there are any significant differences between the (PGS)' awareness of plagiarism in academic writing based on gender and year of study.

The study indicates that postgraduates are generally aware of plagiarism, proper citation, academic integrity, AI tools, and institutional support. Furthermore, postgraduates are highly aware of plagiarism and AI's impact on academic integrity and strongly understand plagiarism detection systems. However, they are moderately aware of institutional support and training in academic integrity, and the knowledge of proper citation and attribution indicates variability in participants' citation knowledge.

Considering the findings of the second question, the results demonstrate a statistically significant difference in plagiarism awareness between males and females (PGS) in academic writing. Females exhibit a higher awareness of academic integrity principles

in second-language writing. Furthermore, the statistics indicate no significant difference in plagiarism awareness between first and second-year (PGS), suggesting that the year of study did not significantly influence plagiarism awareness.

These findings aligned with previous studies (Jereb, 2018; Babaii & Nejadghanbar, 2017; Shen & Hu, 2021; Tran et al., 2022), which emphasized that the awareness of plagiarism among PGSs in L2 writing is affected by various aspects, including linguistic, language proficiency, and academic levels, cultural, institutional, and technological factors.

In addition, other studies (Babaii & Nejadghanbar, 2017; Fatemi & Saito, 2020; Shen & Hu, 2021) have identified reasons leading to the rise of plagiarism, including low academic writing skills, lack of familiarity with academic writing conventions, lenient teaching practices, time shortage, and lack of knowledge about plagiarism which often hinders L2 students' understanding of plagiarism.

Fatemi and Saito (2020) and Tran et al. (2022) noted that international students tend to commit accidental plagiarism due to unfamiliarity with Western conventions of academic integrity, unsatisfactory support programs, and high proficiency in English. At the same time, Buraimo et al. (2019) reported that undergraduate students commit plagiarism due to poor academic planning, fear of failure, and the urge to obtain good grades, which are the main drivers of such misconduct. Mulenga and Shilongo (2024) emphasized that academic pressure, lack of time, and partial acquaintance with citation rules are the main factors of plagiarism. In another study, Chan (2023) highlighted that students criticized direct uses of AI in content creation but exhibited mixed views on more subtle applications, such as paraphrasing and idea generation.

Additionally, other previous studies contradict the findings of this study (Magida, 2023; Pecorari & Petrić, 2014) in terms of awareness of plagiarism among students in L2 academic writing. These studies highlighted that some students could not identify specific instances of plagiarism correctly, and many of the students believed that self-plagiarism should not be punished. At the same time, Pecorari and Petrić (2014) indicate that plagiarism in L2 writing is rooted in cultural conceptions of intellectual ownership and textual borrowing as a learning strategy.

Several studies (Marar & Hamza, 2020; Parente & Roeklein-Canfield, 2020) strongly stress the importance of proactive steps toward enhancing academic integrity. Furthermore, another previous study supported the findings of this study (Cotton et al. 2023; Nabee et al. 2020) recommended constant training and clear communication of plagiarism policies as a way of reducing academic misconduct, while Cotton et al. (2023) suggested that all institutions should include policies on ethical use, training, and enhanced detection methods since academic misconduct constantly evolves. These studies focused on the role of academic institutions in taking proactive steps toward enhancing academic integrity.

The findings of this study are confirmed by Jereb (2018), who noted remarkable differences in gender students' perception of plagiarism, with female students judging plagiarism as more abominable than their male colleagues. This contradicts what

Buraimo et al. (2019) reported, that while gender is not of significant importance in plagiarism perception, a student's academic discipline significantly impacts shaping his/her attitudes.

The actionable findings of the study highlight the need for the pedagogical implications of (PGS)'s awareness of plagiarism in academic writing. Higher education institutions ought to incorporate instruction on plagiarism within L2 writing courses by elucidating the various forms of plagiarism. Instructors can enhance L2 students' comprehension of and adherence to academic integrity standards; furthermore, instructors and supervisors must remain informed about emerging plagiarism tendencies and the instruments students may utilize. Continuous training in academic integrity in classrooms enhances educators' ability to address plagiarism more efficiently. Moreover, allowing (PGS) access to plagiarism detection tools such as Turnitin allows students to validate their work before submission. This activity promotes self-correction and enhances students' understanding of proper citation and paraphrasing.

To conclude, the present study revealed that (PGS) are largely aware of plagiarism, proper citation, academic integrity, AI tools, and institutional support, and AI's impact on academic integrity. Further, they are strongly aware of plagiarism detection software and are moderately aware of institutional support and training in academic integrity. Moreover, the findings indicated a statistically significant difference in plagiarism awareness, where females have shown higher awareness than males regarding academic integrity principles in second-language writing. Furthermore, the statistics indicate no significant difference in plagiarism awareness between first and second year (PGS), suggesting that the year of study did not significantly impact plagiarism awareness.

In contributing to previous research on (PGS) awareness of plagiarism in academic writing, there are several limitations that future research should tackle. First, this study is limited to a small sample size of PGS consisting of 14 males and 22 females. The study participants were EFL postgraduates in the Applied Linguistics program at a public university in Saudi Arabia's English Department. Accordingly, to strengthen the generalizability of the findings, further studies should include more samples of both PGS and undergraduate students. Second, this study was limited to the Applied Linguistics program. Therefore, it is recommended that further research be conducted across various departments and disciplines. Such efforts will contribute to the comprehensive understanding of students' awareness of plagiarism in academic writing. The third noteworthy limitation is that a quantitative approach was employed in this study. Thus, further research should include a qualitative approach or mixed methods to better understand the students' awareness of plagiarism in academic writing, especially in the AI age.

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