Beyond AI Use: Understanding University Students' Acceptance of AI-Assisted Academic Misuse

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Abstract: The rapid adoption of generative artificial intelligence (AI) in higher education has created new learning opportunities while raising concerns about academic integrity and students' acceptance of AI-assisted academic misuse. This study examined factors associated with such acceptance among 304 university students in Kuwait using a cross-sectional online survey and non-probability convenience and snowball sampling. The three focal constructs—general academic-integrity awareness, policy and AI-plagiarism awareness, and acceptance of AI-assisted academic misuse—were measured using 15 dichotomous Yes/No items coded 0 = No and 1 = Yes. Acceptance of AI-assisted academic misuse was operationalised as the mean of three misuse-acceptance items (Y12-Y14), producing a composite ranging from 0 to 1 that was analysed as a continuous outcome. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, principal-axis exploratory factor analysis with varimax rotation, KR-20 reliability analysis, correlations, and ordinary least squares regression with HC3 robust standard errors. The regression model was significant ($F = 2.579$, $p = .010$, $R^2 = .067$). Policy and AI-plagiarism awareness was positively associated with misuse acceptance ($B = .193$, $p = .013$), contrary to the hypothesised negative direction, and Kuwaiti nationality was also associated with higher acceptance ($B = .103$, $p = .039$). General academic-integrity awareness and prior AI use were not significant. Because the study is cross-sectional and the misuse-acceptance scale had modest reliability (KR-20 = .587), the findings are interpreted as associations rather than causal effects. The results support clearer, context-specific AI policies and guidance that distinguishes legitimate AI-supported learning from academically inappropriate use.

Keywords: generative Artificial Intelligence; Academic Integrity; AI-Assisted Academic Misuse; AI Policy Awareness; Responsible AI Use; Higher Education; Kuwait.

1. Introduction

The integration of AI chat assistants into higher education has transformed how students access information, engage with content, and complete academic tasks. These tools support legitimate activities including idea generation, concept explanation, revision, and personalised learning. However, their use has raised concerns about plagiarism, unauthorised content generation, assessment validity, dependence on AI-produced material, and reduced critical thinking. Universities must therefore balance educational benefits with academic standards (Cotton et al., 2024; Sallam et al., 2024).

AI-assisted academic misuse occurs when students use AI in ways that violate academic-integrity principles or institutional assessment rules. Examples include submitting AI-generated work as original, using AI without permission or acknowledgement, disguising plagiarism through AI-assisted paraphrasing, generating assignments, or using AI during prohibited assessments. Acceptability depends on purpose, context, disclosure, and institutional requirements. Students' acceptance matters because those who regard inappropriate use as permissible may be more willing to engage in it when rules are unclear or detection is difficult.

General academic-integrity awareness may guide students' judgements by reinforcing originality, acknowledgement, independent work, and compliance with assessment requirements. However, traditional integrity guidance may not resolve AI-specific practices such as automated text generation, extensive paraphrasing, editing, and undisclosed assistance. Awareness of institutional AI policies and AI-related plagiarism may therefore be especially important for distinguishing legitimate support from misconduct (Lund et al., 2025; Khairullah et al., 2025).

Prior AI use may also shape acceptance: familiarity can clarify appropriate boundaries, but repeated use may normalise dependence or blur distinctions between support and misconduct. Demographic characteristics may reflect differences in educational experience, policy exposure, and technology use, although existing findings are mixed (Al Omari et al., 2024; Deng et al., 2025; Syed et al., 2025).

Three gaps motivate this study. First, Kuwait and Gulf higher-education contexts remain underrepresented. Second, much prior research examines AI adoption, usefulness, or learning benefits rather than acceptance of misuse. Third, few studies consider general academic-integrity awareness, AI-specific policy/plagiarism

awareness, prior AI use, and demographic factors together. This study therefore examines how these factors are associated with university students' acceptance of AI-assisted academic misuse in Kuwait.

2. Literature Background

AI chat assistants such as ChatGPT, Gemini, Microsoft Copilot, Claude, and Perplexity AI use large language models and natural-language processing to generate conversational responses, summaries, explanations, and other content. In higher education, they can support concept explanation, idea generation, writing improvement, literature summarisation, feedback, and programming, potentially improving accessibility, productivity, and personalised learning (Alqahtani et al., 2023; Sajja et al., 2024; Khairullah et al., 2025).

These benefits coexist with academic-integrity risks. Students may use AI to generate assessed work, paraphrase copied material, obtain unauthorised assistance, or submit AI-generated content as their own. Additional concerns include inaccurate information, fabricated references, bias, privacy risks, and overreliance that may weaken independent critical thinking and writing (AlBlooshi, 2026; Alotaibi, 2024; Cotton et al., 2024). AI-assisted academic misuse therefore refers to AI use that conflicts with academic-integrity standards, assessment requirements, or institutional rules.

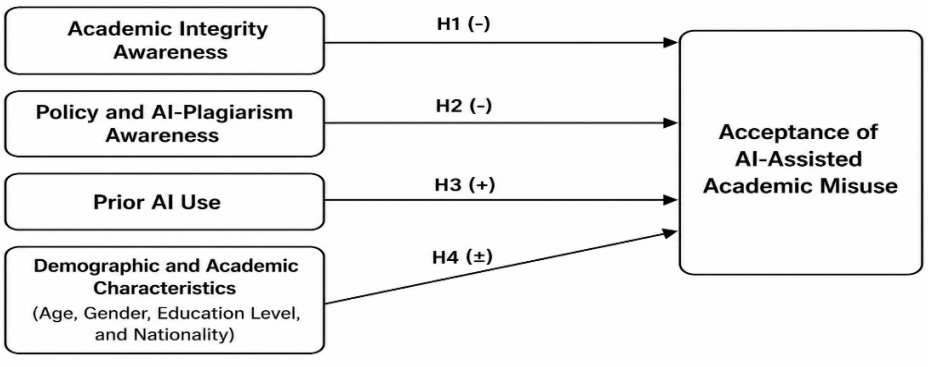
The boundary between legitimate support and misuse is often context dependent. AI may be permitted for explaining concepts, language support, or preliminary ideas but prohibited when it produces assessed work. Course requirements, assessment type, instructor instructions, disclosure expectations, and institutional policy can therefore shape judgements. In this study, acceptance of AI-assisted academic misuse refers to the extent to which students regard inappropriate AI-supported practices as acceptable or justifiable; acceptance is an attitude and does not demonstrate that misconduct occurred.

General academic-integrity awareness emphasises honesty, originality, acknowledgement, and responsibility, but conventional guidance may not fully address AI-generated writing, paraphrasing, editing, and idea generation. AI-specific policy and plagiarism awareness may be more proximal because clear rules can specify permitted, restricted, and prohibited uses, disclosure requirements, and the academic implications of unattributed AI-generated material (Chan, 2025; Khairullah et al., 2025; Alotaibi, 2024).

Prior AI use may either improve understanding of appropriate applications or normalise dependence on AI-generated content (Farhi et al., 2023; Li et al., 2025). Demographic characteristics may also capture differences in educational and institutional experience, although evidence is inconsistent (Koscielniak et al., 2026; Pawlak et al., 2025). Accordingly, the study tests whether general integrity awareness, policy and AI-plagiarism awareness, prior AI use, and demographic characteristics are associated with misuse acceptance in Kuwait.

3. Conceptual Model and Hypothesis Development

Figure 1 presents the conceptual model. Acceptance of AI-assisted academic misuse is the outcome, while general academic-integrity awareness, policy and AI-plagiarism awareness, prior AI use, and demographic/academic characteristics are the explanatory variables. The framework distinguishes broad ethical awareness from AI-specific policy knowledge and contextual characteristics. Because the study is cross-sectional, the hypothesised paths are interpreted as statistical associations rather than causal effects.



Note: (–) indicates a negative relationship; (+) indicates a positive relationship; (±) indicates that the relationship may be positive or negative depending on the group.

Figure 1: Proposed research model

3.1 Academic Integrity Awareness and Acceptance of AI-Assisted Academic Misuse

Students with stronger understanding of academic-integrity principles are generally expected to be less accepting of plagiarism, unauthorised AI-generated work, and related misconduct. Ethical awareness may strengthen judgements concerning originality, acknowledgement, fairness, and responsibility (Lund et al., 2025; Huang et al., 2025; Hanh & Duyen, 2025; Shishakly & Nachouki, 2026; Khairullah et al., 2025). Accordingly:

H1: Academic integrity awareness negatively predicts students' acceptance of AI-assisted academic misuse.

3.2 Policy and AI-Plagiarism Awareness and Acceptance of AI-Assisted Academic Misuse

Awareness of institutional AI policies and AI-related plagiarism should help students distinguish acceptable learning support from prohibited assistance. Clear rules can clarify disclosure, attribution, and assessment-specific boundaries and may therefore reduce tolerance of inappropriate AI use (Chan, 2025; Ali & Qureshi, 2025; Khairullah et al., 2025; AlBlooshi, 2026). Accordingly:

H2: Policy and AI-plagiarism awareness negatively predict students' acceptance of AI-assisted academic misuse.

3.3 AI Use and Acceptance of AI-Assisted Academic Misuse

Familiarity with AI chat assistants may shape students' acceptance of AI-assisted academic misuse. Repeated exposure could normalise AI use in academic tasks and increase tolerance of practices that conflict with integrity requirements; alternatively, experienced users may better understand appropriate boundaries. The expected direction in this study is positive, while recognising that AI use does not itself imply misconduct (Farhi et al., 2023; Li et al., 2025; Hanh & Duyen, 2025). Accordingly:

H3: Students' prior use of AI chat assistants positively predicts their acceptance of AI-assisted academic misuse.

3.4 Demographic Characteristics and Acceptance of AI-Assisted Academic Misuse

Age, gender, education level, and nationality may be associated with students' ethical perceptions through differences in educational experience, exposure to institutional policies, technology use, and assessment expectations. Existing evidence is mixed, so the hypothesis is non-directional across these groups (Al Omari et al., 2024; Koscielniak et al., 2026; Pawlak et al., 2025). Accordingly:

H4: Age, gender, education level, and nationality are significantly associated with students' acceptance of AI-assisted academic misuse.

4. Method

4.1 Research Design, Participants and Data Collection

This study used a quantitative cross-sectional online survey to examine associations with acceptance of AI-assisted academic misuse (Bryman, 2016; Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Participants were university students in Kuwait aged 18 years or older. Convenience and snowball sampling were used because the study sought access to students across institutions; consequently, the sample should not be treated as nationally representative. Data were collected anonymously through Google Forms from January to April 2026 via university mailing lists, student organisations, academic networks, communication channels, and social media. Of the eligible complete questionnaires, 304 were retained. Participation was voluntary, electronic informed consent was obtained, and no personally identifiable information was collected.

4.2 Measures and Scoring

The questionnaire comprised two sections. The first collected demographic and background information, including age, gender, employment status, education level, academic major, nationality, and prior experience with AI chat assistants; additional questions identified the AI tools used and the purposes for which students used them. The second section contained 15 dichotomously scored Yes/No items assessing three constructs.

General academic-integrity awareness comprised Y1, Y2, Y3, Y7, Y9, Y11, and Y15; policy and AI-plagiarism awareness comprised Y4, Y5, Y6, Y8, and Y10; and acceptance of AI-assisted academic misuse comprised Y12, Y13, and Y14. Responses were coded 1 for Yes and 0 for No. Composite scores were calculated as the mean of the constituent items and therefore ranged from 0 to 1, with higher scores indicating greater awareness or greater acceptance of AI-assisted academic misuse, depending on the construct. Prior AI use was also coded 0 = No and 1 = Yes. The questionnaire was reviewed by academics for content validity and pilot-tested for clarity, readability, relevance, structure, and preliminary reliability before administration. Minor wording revisions were made before final distribution. The Kuder-Richardson Formula 20 (KR-20) was used to assess internal consistency for the three multi-item constructs because all constituent items were dichotomously scored.

4.3 Data Analysis

Data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Before analysis, the dataset was screened for missing values, duplicate responses, outliers, data-entry errors, and violations of relevant statistical assumptions. Frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations summarised participants' demographic and academic characteristics and the principal study variables. The 15 dichotomous measurement items were examined using exploratory principal-axis factoring based on a Pearson/phi correlation matrix with varimax rotation. Sampling adequacy and factorability were evaluated using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett's test of sphericity. Factor retention and item assignment were guided by the empirical loading pattern, cross-loadings, conceptual relevance, and interpretability of the resulting factors. Because the items were binary and Pearson/phi correlations were used, the factor analysis was treated as exploratory and interpreted cautiously. Internal consistency of the three multi-item dichotomous constructs was assessed using KR-20. Acceptance of AI-assisted academic misuse was operationalised as the mean of Y12-Y14 and therefore formed a bounded continuous composite ranging from 0 to 1 rather than a single binary or ordinal outcome. Ordinary least squares (OLS) regression with HC3 heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors was used to estimate statistical associations with misuse acceptance. The model included general academic-integrity awareness, policy and AI-plagiarism awareness, prior AI use, and selected demographic characteristics. Categorical predictors were dummy coded before analysis: gender as female versus male, age as 18-30 versus over 30, nationality as non-Kuwaiti versus Kuwaiti, prior AI use as No versus Yes, and education as high school/Tawjeehi, two-year college degree, and bachelor's degree, with the two-year college degree as the reference category. Results were reported using unstandardised coefficients, HC3 robust standard errors, model statistics, and p-values. Statistical significance was set at $p < .05$, and coefficients were interpreted as statistical associations rather than causal effects.

5. Findings

The sample included 304 respondents; 68.1% were female, 69.4% were aged 18–30, and 61.8% were non-Kuwaiti. Prior AI use was widespread (92.4%). Among AI users, ChatGPT was the most frequently reported platform (94.7%), followed by Gemini (33.5%), DeepSeek (18.1%), and Copilot (15.3%). The main purposes were understanding difficult concepts (76.2%), summarising materials (44.1%), assignment support (41.6%), research assistance (37.0%), and writing improvement (35.2%). These patterns indicate that AI use in the sample was primarily academic-support oriented rather than evidence of misconduct.

Principal-axis factoring with varimax rotation was conducted on the 15 Yes/No measurement items. Sampling adequacy was satisfactory (KMO = .820), and Bartlett's test of sphericity was statistically significant, $\chi^2(105) = 1002.373$, $p < .001$. Although four initial eigenvalues exceeded 1, the fourth factor was weak and effectively single-item; a three-factor solution was therefore retained on the basis of statistical interpretability, conceptual coherence, and the intended construct structure. The first three initial eigenvalues accounted for 47.91% of the total variance, while the rotated principal-axis solution accounted for 36.11% based on rotated sums of squared loadings. The retained factors represented policy and AI-plagiarism awareness, general academic-integrity awareness, and acceptance of AI-assisted academic misuse. Table 1 reports all three loadings for every item to make cross-loadings transparent and to address the reviewer's request for fuller factor-analysis reporting.

Table 1: Rotated factor loadings for the 15 dichotomous Yes/No measurement items

Item	Statement	Policy / AI-Plagiarism Awareness	Academic Integrity Awareness	AI Misuse Acceptance
Y4	I know that I am not allowed to use AI Chat Assistants for graded assessments.	0.719		
Y5	I am fully aware of my university's policy regarding the usage of AI Chat Assistants.	0.468		
Y6	Using AI Chat Assistants to produce academic writing without proper attribution is considered plagiarism.	0.720		
Y8	Plagiarism from AI Chat Assistants can be detected by instructors using plagiarism detection software.	0.692		
Y10	For academic writing, it is better for students to use their own knowledge, skills, and research than relying on AI Assistants Tools	0.732		
Y1	Plagiarism is a form of academic dishonesty because it involves presenting someone else's work as one's own, without giving credit to the original author or source.		0.656	
Y2	Rewriting or paraphrasing material from any source without citing the original is plagiarism.		0.404	
Y3	Cutting and pasting material from various sources without referencing them is plagiarism.		0.697	
Y7	Relying on AI Chat Assistants discourages critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity.		0.517	
Y9	AI Chat Assistants can infringe copyright by generating text that may violate the rights of original authors.		0.626	
Y11	AI Assistants Tools should be used to complement my own research and writing and not to complete my assigned homework		0.555	
Y15	Academically weak students are more likely to plagiarise with ChatGPT		0.573	
Y12	Using AI Assistants Tools for plagiarism can be acceptable under certain circumstances (e.g., extreme financial pressures, or low learning value of the assignment)			0.548
Y13	In the absence of university rules, using AI Assistants Tools for plagiarism is acceptable			0.823
Y14	It is no big deal if I submit a homework using AI Assistants tools generated text and with no referencing			0.758

Note: All Y1-Y15 items were dichotomously scored (Yes = 1; No = 0). Extraction method: principal-axis factoring; rotation method: varimax. All factor loadings are shown to make cross-loadings visible. Items with primary loadings of approximately .40 or above were generally retained. Y2 and Y12 had weaker primary loadings but were retained because they represented core conceptual content of their intended constructs. Because binary items were analysed using Pearson/phi correlations, the factor solution is exploratory and should be interpreted cautiously.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics and reliability of study variables

Variable	Items	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max	KR-20
Acceptance of AI-assisted academic misuse	Y12-Y14	304	.538	.361	.000	1.000	.587
General academic-integrity awareness	Y1-Y3, Y7, Y9, Y11, Y15	304	.763	.263	.000	1.000	.735
Policy and AI-plagiarism awareness	Y4-Y6, Y8, Y10	304	.764	.302	.000	1.000	.757
Prior AI chat assistant use	Single binary item	304	.924	.265	.000	1.000	-

Note: The three multi-item constructs are means of dichotomous items coded 0 = No and 1 = Yes; therefore, their composite scores range from 0 to 1. KR-20 is reported for general academic-integrity awareness, policy and AI-plagiarism awareness, and acceptance of AI-assisted academic misuse. Prior AI use is a single binary item and no internal-consistency coefficient is applicable. The misuse-acceptance reliability was modest (KR-20 = .587), which limits measurement precision and requires cautious interpretation.

At the bivariate level, misuse acceptance was positively correlated with general academic-integrity awareness ($r = .161$, $p < .01$) and policy and AI-plagiarism awareness ($r = .188$, $p < .01$), while its correlation with prior AI use was small and non-significant ($r = .082$). These correlations describe association only and do not establish direction or causation.

Table 3: Model summary for OLS regression of acceptance of AI-assisted academic misuse

Statistic	Value
N	304
R^2	.067
Adjusted R^2	.042
F	2.579
p	.010

Note: OLS regression with HC3 robust standard errors; N = 304. The dependent variable is the continuous 0–1 misuse-acceptance composite. Prior AI use tests H3.

Table 4: OLS regression of acceptance of AI-assisted academic misuse

Predictor	B (HC3 robust SE)	β	p
General academic-integrity awareness	.088 (.090)	.064	.327
Policy and AI-plagiarism awareness	.193 (.078)*	.162	.013
Prior AI chat assistant use	.098 (.087)	.072	.262
Gender: male	-.051 (.044)	-.066	.247
Age: over 30	-.051 (.055)	-.065	.358
Education: bachelor's degree	-.041 (.052)	-.054	.432
Education: high school/Tawjeehi	-.011 (.054)	-.015	.832
Nationality: Kuwaiti	.103 (.050)*	.139	.039

*Note: Reference categories are female, age 18–30, college degree (2 years), non-Kuwaiti, and no prior AI use. * p < .05. ** p < .01. *** p < .001.*

Table 5: Multicollinearity diagnostics for the OLS model

Predictor	VIF
General academic-integrity awareness	1.42
Policy and AI-plagiarism awareness	1.40
Prior AI chat assistant use	1.04
Gender: male	1.03
Age: over 30	1.44

Predictor	VIF
Education: bachelor's degree	1.41
Education: high school/Tawjeehi	1.42
Nationality: Kuwaiti	1.46

Note: All VIF values were below 1.50, indicating no material multicollinearity concern among the predictors.

The OLS model was statistically significant, F = 2.579, p = .010, and explained 6.7% of the variance in misuse acceptance (adjusted R^2 = .042). Policy and AI-plagiarism awareness showed a statistically significant positive association (B = .193, p = .013), which was opposite to the negative direction proposed in H2. Kuwaiti nationality was also positively associated with misuse acceptance (B = .103, p = .039). General academic-integrity awareness, prior AI use, gender, age, and education level were not statistically significant. The small explained variance and cross-sectional design require restrained interpretation.

Table 6: Summary of hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	Evidence	Decision
H1	General integrity awareness: B = .088, p = .327	Not supported
H2	Policy/AI-plagiarism awareness: B = .193, p = .013; observed direction positive, hypothesised direction negative	Statistically significant; directional H2 not supported
H3	Prior AI use: B = .098, p = .262	Not supported
H4	Male p = .247; age >30 p = .358; bachelor's p = .432; high school/Tawjeehi p = .832; Kuwaiti: B = .103, p = .039	Partially supported (nationality only)

Note: H2 was statistically significant but not supported in its hypothesised negative direction. "Association" is used throughout to avoid causal interpretation of cross-sectional estimates.

Overall, misuse acceptance was associated most clearly with policy and AI-plagiarism awareness and nationality in the multivariable model. The positive policy-awareness coefficient should not be interpreted as evidence that awareness causes tolerance of misuse; reverse direction, unmeasured contextual factors, or greater exposure to ambiguous AI-use situations remain possible explanations.

6. Discussion

This study examined factors associated with university students' acceptance of AI-assisted academic misuse in Kuwait. AI use was widespread and was concentrated on academic-support activities, particularly concept explanation, summarisation, assignment support, research, and writing. This reinforces the need to distinguish ordinary AI use from academically inappropriate use rather than treating AI users as a uniform integrity-risk group (Cotton et al., 2024; Farhi et al., 2023).

Participants reported relatively high general academic-integrity awareness and policy/AI-plagiarism awareness, yet misuse acceptance was moderate. The pattern indicates that knowledge of integrity principles does not necessarily resolve context-specific questions about AI authorship, disclosure, paraphrasing, and permitted assistance (Lund et al., 2025; Khairullah et al., 2025).

General academic-integrity awareness was not significantly associated with misuse acceptance in the multivariable model (H1 not supported). Students may understand traditional plagiarism while remaining uncertain about AI-generated writing, editing, brainstorming, and language support. Universities should therefore supplement general integrity education with AI-specific examples addressing authorship, attribution, disclosure, and assessment expectations (Huang et al., 2025; Hanh & Duyen, 2025).

Policy and AI-plagiarism awareness was significantly but positively associated with misuse acceptance. Because H2 specified a negative relationship, the directional hypothesis was not supported even though the coefficient was statistically significant. The unexpected positive direction may indicate that students who are more familiar with AI rules also encounter more nuanced or ambiguous use cases; however, the cross-sectional data cannot

determine why this pattern occurred (Lund et al., 2025). Prior AI use was not significant (H3 not supported), suggesting that experience with AI alone does not differentiate students' acceptance of misuse.

Among the demographic variables, only nationality was statistically significant, so H4 received partial support. Kuwaiti respondents reported higher misuse-acceptance scores than non-Kuwaiti respondents after adjustment for the other predictors. This result should not be interpreted as an inherent cultural or national difference. Nationality may proxy differences in educational background, institutional exposure, programme composition, assessment expectations, or other unmeasured contextual factors; replication across institutions and countries is required (Al Omari et al., 2024; Deng et al., 2025; Syed et al., 2025).

Several limitations qualify the findings. The cross-sectional design cannot establish temporal or causal relationships; self-report may be affected by social-desirability bias; convenience and snowball sampling restrict generalisability; and the misuse-acceptance scale showed modest internal consistency (KR-20 = .587), increasing measurement error. The OLS model also explained only a small proportion of variance. Future research should use larger multi-institutional and longitudinal samples, refine the misuse-acceptance measure, and examine additional constructs such as AI literacy, self-efficacy, trust, and institutional support (Bewersdorff et al., 2025).

7. Conclusion Limitations and Implications

This study provides evidence from Kuwait on factors statistically associated with students' acceptance of AI-assisted academic misuse. Policy and AI-plagiarism awareness and nationality were significant in the multivariable model, whereas general academic-integrity awareness and prior AI use were not. Importantly, the policy-awareness association was positive rather than the hypothesised negative direction, so it should be treated as an unexpected association requiring further investigation rather than as support for H2.

The conclusions are bounded by the cross-sectional design, self-reported data, non-probability sampling, modest reliability of the misuse-acceptance scale, and low explained variance. These limitations prevent causal claims and restrict generalisation beyond comparable university settings in Kuwait. The nationality association likewise requires replication before substantive cultural interpretations are made.

The findings nevertheless have practical implications. General plagiarism knowledge alone may be insufficient for emerging practices such as AI-assisted writing, summarising, paraphrasing, and idea generation. Academic-integrity frameworks should clearly distinguish legitimate AI-supported learning from academically inappropriate use and specify purpose, extent, disclosure, attribution, and assessment-specific boundaries (Lund et al., 2025; Khairullah et al., 2025).

Universities should therefore provide clear and consistently applied AI-use policies, practical examples of permitted and prohibited practices, disclosure requirements, and targeted AI-literacy education. Such guidance can support responsible AI-assisted learning while protecting originality, fairness, and assessment validity (Cotton et al., 2024; Sallam et al., 2024).

Ethics Declaration

The study received ethical approval from the Arab Open University–Kuwait Institutional Review Board and complied with all relevant ethical guidelines.

AI Declaration

Generative AI was used for language editing and improving clarity. All suggestions were reviewed and verified by the authors, who take full responsibility for the final manuscript.

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