

Ethical Principles for Generative AI in Research Paper Writing for EFL Graduate Students in China

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Abstract

With DeepSeek and ChatGPT taking the lead in AI technology breakthroughs and applications, AI-assisted writing Apps have demonstrated marvelous efficiency and potential in academic writing for EFL graduate students, sparking concerns over academic misconduct, lack of originality, and privacy risks, and posing severe challenges to academic ethics in universities. Unfortunately, it still remains a universally unsettled debate regarding the accessibility, usability, and inclusivity of AI-assisted writing tools, leading to disparate positions of hesitation, rejection, and inclusion. This paper examines the pros and cons of AI-assisted academic writing and proposes three principles: originality, transparency, and accountability, to guide graduate schools in establishing guidelines for the use of AI in academic paper writing for EFL graduate students in China. It is recommended that the AI-assisted academic writing guidelines focus on AI assistance rather than overindulgence, AI use disclosure and disclaimer, and AI misuse prevention and punishment. The guidelines aim to proactively address the academic ethical challenges brought by AI technological innovation and fill the regulatory gap in AI-assisted academic paper writing for EFL graduate students in China. Our work represents an AI-assisted and CALL-motivated transition from our prior practices and its positive impacts on equity in language education, contributing to the promotion of institutional efforts in providing equitable AI access for EFL graduate students in a more inclusive language learning environment.

Keywords: AI policy, research paper writing, EFL graduate students

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AI innovation, such as DeepSeek and ChatGPT, is now transforming the landscape of language education globally, particularly in academic writing. In an experiment involving seven Harvard University general education course papers in the humanities and social sciences, Bodnick (2023) informed the course instructors and teaching assistants beforehand that the submitted course papers (1–9 pages) might be either written by the students themselves or automatically generated by ChatGPT-4, and the professors and TAs provided positive and objective feedback during the grading process on papers that were, in fact, entirely generated by ChatGPT-4. As revealed in Table 1, ChatGPT 4 performed well in the take-home writing assignments, achieving an average grade of A- at Harvard. It is noted that AI writing is challenging traditional university academic writing instruction and assessment, demonstrating potentials for widespread application, especially for EFL graduate students in China, where English is the *de facto* lingua franca of academic paper writing and publication, holding a privileged position in academic evaluation.

A relevant survey (Figure 1) conducted at Fudan University in China revealed that 97% of the 92 participating graduate students—enrolled in an English research paper writing course across humanities, social sciences, and STEM fields—used AI in their academic brainstorming, literature survey, language enhancement, data analysis, editing and reviewing. Their AI tools included DeepSeek, ChatGPT, Grammarly, DeepL, Kimi, Doubao, ERNIE Bot, AI Taiyan, ChemDraw, GitHub Copilot, Connected Papers, Research Rabbit, SemiKong, LaTeX, Writefull, Sider, Claude-Sonnet, etc., while disputes remain concerning the extent and regulations of AI assistance in their academic writing process. An exceptional minority of the participants in the survey (3%) did not use AI due to disciplinary restrictions (e.g., Chinese classics studies) and advisory prohibitions (e.g., modern Chinese history). A significant portion of the participants (35%) explicitly expressed serious concerns about

Table 1. Harvard university GhatGPT-4 course paper transcript (Brodnick, 2023)

No.	Course title	Grade
1	Microeconomics	A-
2	Macroeconomics	A
3	Latin American Politics	B-
4	American Presidency	A
5	Conflict Resolution	A
6	Intermediate Spanish	B
7	Proust Seminar	P

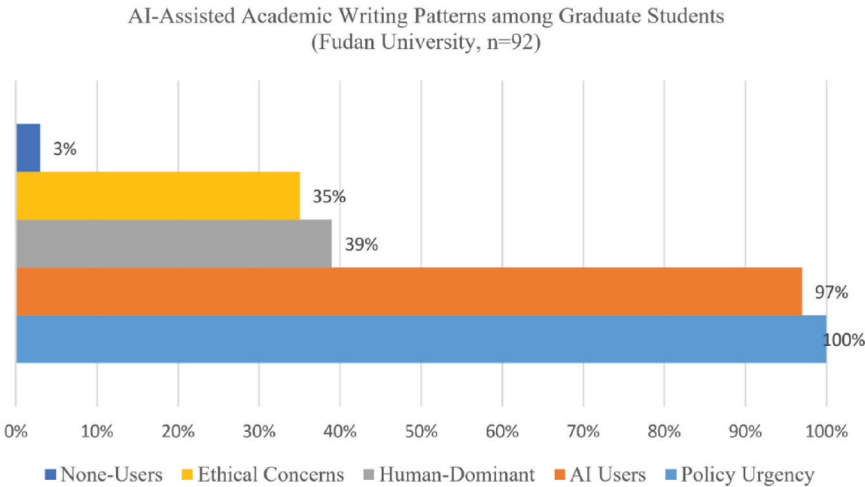


Figure 1. AI-Assisted academic writing patterns among graduate students (Fudan university, n = 92).

AI over-dependence, accessibility disparities and related ethical risks, whereas a larger group (39%) proactively favored a human-dominant approach, critically reviewing their AI-generated content to uphold academic integrity. Unanimously, all participants (100%) emphasized the urgent need for clear AI guidelines in English research paper writing, which are unfortunately lacking in the graduate schools in higher education institutions(HEIs) in China, who are struggling to keep up to date with the rapid pace of AI innovation. (Zeng et al. 2025).

Notably in both Harvard and Fudan cases (Table 1 & Figure 1), AI demonstrates remarkable efficiency in information retrieval, text generation, editing/translation, and data processing. However, AI dependency has sparked concerns over academic misconduct, lack of originality, and privacy risks, compromising scholarly rigor and ethical standards. As best captured in recent peer-reviewed literature (Moorhouse et al. 2025, Rong et al. 2025, Zou et al. 2025), AI has profoundly reshaped the landscape of writing, presenting both opportunities and challenges for L2/EFL writers, especially at advanced academic levels. To make matters worse, it remains a universally unsettled debate regarding the accessibility, usability, and inclusivity of AI as a collaborative or cheating tool, leading to controversial stances of cautious observation, outright ban, and regulated application among graduate students, professors, and educational administrators in graduate schools. Overall, HEIs remain reactive rather than proactive in AI ethical guidance and academic policy development.

To address the controversy over the disruptive impact of AI technologies on academic integrity, when policy development has been outpaced by technological innovation, this study proposes three principles: originality, transparency, and accountability, to facilitate HEIs in establishing AI-assisted writing guidelines. First, originality prioritizes the individual initiative, independent discretion and human authorship of all academic work in topic selection, study design, data analysis, drafting and revision, etc., with AI serving merely as an auxiliary instrument, marking distinct boundaries between AI assistance and replacement. Second, transparency requires the explicit and full disclosure of AI contributions (Appendices 1 & 2, Zeng et al. 2025), specifying the AI tools used, purpose, scope and time of AI assistance, with a highlighted statement acknowledging the author's full responsibility for content accuracy and validity. Third, accountability is ensured by updating AI ethical guidance and academic policy, discipline-specific practices and training programs, including workshops on ethical AI use and detection techniques, writing tutorials, and faculty/peer evaluation requirements, grading penalties for undisclosed AI use, and disciplinary punishments for repeated violations, etc.

Consequently, this study aims to proactively address the disruptive ethical challenges brought by AI innovation and fill the regulatory gap in AI-assisted academic writing for EFL graduate students in China. It is hence urged that AI guidelines and policies will be immediately developed in HEIs, graduate schools, discipline-specific schools, departments and courses, focusing on AI assistance rather than overindulgence, AI use disclosure and disclaimer, and AI misuse prevention and punishment. In other words, HEIs are expected to supervise and regularize AI-assisted writing practices while preserving academic integrity and empowering original research. Graduate schools are recommended to update AI-assisted writing protocols, providing AI disclosure templates and detection resources, and utilizing global networks for AI policy evaluation and improvement. School and department efforts are further encouraged to customize and optimize the AI policies and practices in discipline-specific research programmes. Course-specific requirements are also recommended in AI-assisted writing regulations, mandatory peer-review, writing tutorial and oral defense processes, transparent AI usage statements and originality checks, etc. These ethical principles, guidelines and practices for generative AI in academic writing will empower EFL graduate students in China, as well as students in Harvard and other HEIs to use AI ethically, transforming technological disruption into an opportunity for academic advancement.

In summary, we present an AI/CALL-driven framework for equitable AI integration in academic writing, addressing institutional gaps in ethical principles and academic policy to accommodate AI-assisted English

research paper writing for linguistically underprivileged EFL learners. The ethical guidelines and institutional efforts recommended are expected to accommodate diverse linguistic backgrounds, language proficiency, learning styles, and accessibility needs, empowering all learners equitably by fostering a more inclusive academic ecosystem globally. We also recognize that selection bias, representativeness, or response framing within the Fudan survey remain limitations, and future efforts, such as reporting key demographic distributions within the survey sample, refining sampling frame and method, and sharing data and materials to address these issues, would enhance the transparency and value of the study.

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Appendices

1. No AI tool was used in the writing of this term paper.
2. The author thanks DeepSeek-V3 (2025) for providing language improvement during the final editing phase. The final version of this manuscript represents my own academic insights and research efforts, with the AI's contribution limited to language enhancement.