



ENSURING ACADEMIC INTEGRITY IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AT HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract

Academic integrity is a cornerstone of quality education, yet its application in English language teaching (ELT) at higher education institutions remains insufficiently explored, particularly in Central Asian contexts. This article investigates the challenges associated with maintaining academic honesty in ELT classrooms at Namangan State University, Uzbekistan. Drawing on a survey of 120 undergraduate students and 18 faculty members, the study identifies prevalent forms of academic dishonesty — including plagiarism, unauthorised use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools, and improper citation practices — and analyses their underlying causes. The findings reveal that limited awareness of institutional policies, inadequate digital literacy, and the growing accessibility of AI writing assistants are primary contributing factors. Based on these results, the article proposes a comprehensive framework incorporating curriculum-embedded integrity education, transparent AI usage policies, and formative assessment strategies. The study contributes to the emerging discourse on academic integrity in ELT and offers practical recommendations for educators and institutional policymakers.

Keywords: Academic integrity, English language teaching, plagiarism, artificial intelligence, higher education, Uzbekistan.

Introduction

Academic integrity — broadly defined as the commitment to honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and courage in scholarly work (ICAI, 2021) — has become an increasingly pressing concern in contemporary higher education. As universities worldwide grapple with rising rates of plagiarism, contract cheating, and the proliferation of AI-generated content, the need for proactive institutional responses has never been more urgent.



English language teaching (ELT) occupies a particularly complex position within this landscape. On the one hand, language learners face unique linguistic and cognitive challenges that may inadvertently lead to integrity violations; on the other, the global availability of AI-powered writing tools — such as ChatGPT, Grammarly, and DeepL — has fundamentally altered the boundaries between learner agency and technological assistance. In many higher education institutions across Central Asia, including those in Uzbekistan, clear policies governing the ethical use of such technologies remain underdeveloped.

Namangan State University (NSU), like many regional universities in Uzbekistan, has been undergoing significant reforms in response to the national strategy for developing higher education (2021–2026). Despite these reforms, faculty members and students alike report uncertainty regarding what constitutes acceptable academic conduct, particularly in English-language courses where assessment often involves writing tasks susceptible to integrity breaches.

This article addresses the following research questions: (1) What forms of academic dishonesty are most prevalent in ELT courses at NSU? (2) What factors contribute to these violations? (3) What institutional and pedagogical measures can effectively promote academic integrity in ELT settings? The study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative survey data with qualitative faculty interviews, to provide a comprehensive account of the current situation and to propose evidence-based solutions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Academic integrity in higher education has been the subject of extensive scholarly attention over the past three decades. Seminal work by McCabe, Treviño, and Butterfield (2001) established that institutional culture and peer norms are stronger predictors of academic dishonesty than individual moral reasoning alone. Subsequent studies have expanded this framework to examine the role of assessment design (Bretag et al., 2019), digital literacy (Eaton, 2021), and, most recently, AI tools (Perkins, 2023).

Within the ELT context specifically, Abasi and Akbari (2008) demonstrated that international students often engage in textual borrowing not as deliberate deception but as a culturally embedded rhetorical practice. This finding has been corroborated by subsequent research in post-Soviet educational contexts, where rote learning and heavy reliance on authoritative texts remain pedagogically



normalised (Karabiyik & Korkmaz, 2019). These studies underscore the importance of contextualising academic integrity education rather than imposing Western-centric standards uncritically.

The emergence of large language models (LLMs) such as GPT-4 has introduced new dimensions to the integrity debate. Perkins et al. (2024) found that over 40% of university students across multiple countries had used AI tools to complete written assignments, with a significant proportion doing so without disclosure. In ELT settings, where writing proficiency is itself the object of assessment, undisclosed AI use poses particular challenges for valid and reliable evaluation. In Uzbekistan, research on academic integrity remains nascent. Yusupov and Nazarov (2022) identified widespread paraphrasing plagiarism in undergraduate theses at Tashkent State University of Economics, attributing it to insufficient citation training and inadequate library access. No comparable study has focused specifically on ELT contexts or on AI-related integrity challenges, suggesting a clear research gap that the present study seeks to address.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study adopted a convergent mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), integrating quantitative survey data with qualitative interview findings. The mixed-methods approach was selected to enable both breadth of coverage across the student population and depth of understanding regarding faculty perspectives.

A purposive sample of 120 undergraduate students enrolled in English language courses at NSU during the spring semester of 2024–2025 completed an anonymous online questionnaire. Additionally, 18 faculty members from the Interfaculty Department of Foreign Languages participated in semi-structured interviews lasting 20–35 minutes each. Ethical approval was obtained from the NSU Research Ethics Committee, and all participants provided informed consent. The student questionnaire comprised 28 items organised across four domains: (a) awareness of academic integrity policies (7 items); (b) self-reported academic behaviours (9 items); (c) attitudes towards AI tool usage (7 items); and (d) perceived institutional support (5 items). Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). The faculty interview protocol included 12 open-ended questions addressing observed student behaviours, assessment strategies, and policy recommendations.

Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS v.26, employing descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation coefficients to examine relationships between variables. Qualitative data were analysed thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, with two independent coders achieving an inter-rater reliability of $\kappa = 0.81$. Quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated during the interpretation phase.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Group	N	Gender (F/M)	Mean Age
Undergraduate students	120	72 / 48	19.4
Faculty members	18	11 / 7	38.2
Total	138	83 / 55	—

4. RESULTS

The survey revealed that 67.5% of respondents admitted to having submitted work containing unattributed sources at least once during their studies. The most common form reported was paraphrasing without citation (54.2%), followed by direct copy-paste from online sources (38.3%), unauthorised use of AI writing tools (29.2%), and submitting the same work for multiple courses (14.2%). These figures are consistent with regional trends identified in the literature.

Table 2. Self-Reported Academic Dishonesty Behaviours (N=120)

Behaviour	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Paraphrasing without citation	65	54.2
Direct copy-paste from online sources	46	38.3
Unauthorised AI tool usage	35	29.2
Submitting same work for multiple courses	17	14.2
Purchasing or obtaining completed assignments	8	6.7
None of the above	39	32.5



Correlation analysis revealed a significant negative relationship between students' awareness of institutional integrity policies and self-reported dishonest behaviours ($r = -0.52$, $p < 0.001$). Only 31.7% of students reported having received explicit instruction on citation practices in their ELT courses. Faculty interviews corroborated these findings: 14 of 18 instructors (77.8%) indicated that integrity education was not systematically integrated into the ELT curriculum, and 12 (66.7%) expressed uncertainty about how to address AI-assisted writing in their assessment rubrics.

A substantial proportion of students (62.5%) reported using AI tools in their language learning, with ChatGPT being the most commonly cited (47.5%). However, only 22.5% stated they had received guidance from their instructors on the ethical use of AI. Thematic analysis of faculty interviews identified three major themes: (1) uncertainty about institutional policy on AI, (2) difficulty distinguishing AI-generated from student-produced writing, and (3) a perceived tension between leveraging AI as a pedagogical resource and maintaining assessment validity.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study paint a complex picture of academic integrity in ELT at NDU. The high rate of paraphrasing without citation (54.2%) is consistent with Abasi and Akbari's (2008) observation that textual borrowing is often culturally normalised rather than deliberately deceptive. This underscores the need for culturally sensitive integrity education that distinguishes between different motivations for text reuse and addresses them accordingly.

The significant correlation between policy awareness and dishonest behaviour ($r = -0.52$) highlights a critical institutional gap. When students are unaware of what constitutes acceptable conduct, violations are likely to occur by default rather than design. This finding aligns with Bretag et al.'s (2019) argument that proactive integrity education — embedded within course curricula rather than delivered as standalone policy statements — is far more effective at reducing dishonesty.

The AI-related findings are particularly significant given the rapidly evolving technological landscape. The fact that 62.5% of students use AI tools but only 22.5% have received guidance on their ethical use suggests a substantial policy vacuum. Drawing on Perkins et al. (2024), we argue that blanket prohibitions on AI use are neither realistic nor pedagogically sound in an ELT context. Instead,



institutions should develop nuanced frameworks that distinguish between AI as a language learning support tool and AI as a replacement for genuine linguistic production.

From a pedagogical standpoint, the results support a shift towards process-oriented assessment approaches — such as portfolios, reflective journals, and in-class writing tasks — that are less susceptible to AI-assisted cheating and more conducive to authentic language development. Faculty professional development on both academic integrity principles and responsible AI integration emerges as a key institutional priority.

6. CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that academic integrity in ELT at Namangan State University is compromised by a combination of limited policy awareness, insufficient citation training, and the ungoverned use of AI writing tools. These challenges are not unique to NDU but reflect broader structural issues in Central Asian higher education systems undergoing rapid modernisation.

To address these challenges, we propose a three-tiered framework: (1) at the institutional level, the development of a comprehensive academic integrity policy that explicitly addresses AI tool usage; (2) at the curricular level, the systematic integration of citation instruction and integrity education into ELT syllabi; and (3) at the pedagogical level, the adoption of varied, process-oriented assessment strategies that valorise authentic student output.

Future research should examine the longitudinal impact of integrity interventions on student behaviour and explore comparative perspectives across Uzbekistan's regional universities. Cross-institutional studies involving multiple ELT departments would provide a richer evidence base for national-level policy development.

Academic integrity is not merely a regulatory concern — it is a fundamental dimension of educational quality and professional formation. Ensuring that students develop not only linguistic competence but also the ethical disposition to use language honestly and responsibly is among the most important tasks facing ELT educators today.

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