



# Ethical and Legal Implications of Using Generative AI in Academic Research

M S Saniya Khouser<sup>1</sup>, Meghana D<sup>2</sup>, Meghana Y<sup>3</sup>, Mounika Y R<sup>4</sup>, Dr. Muhibur Rahman T.R<sup>5</sup>

6<sup>th</sup> Sem B.E(CS&E), Ballari Institute of Technology and Management (BITM), Ballari, Karnataka – 583104, India<sup>1-4</sup>

Associate Professor, Department of Computer Science and Engineering,

Ballari Institute of Technology and Management (BITM), Ballari, Karnataka – 583104, India<sup>5</sup>

**Abstract:** The rapid adoption of generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools in academic research has introduced significant ethical and legal challenges that demand critical examination. While these technologies enhance productivity by assisting in literature review, data analysis, and content generation, they also raise concerns regarding authorship, originality, accountability, and intellectual property rights (IPR). This study explores the ethical implications of using generative AI in research, including issues of plagiarism, bias in AI-generated content, and the erosion of academic integrity. Furthermore, it analyzes the legal uncertainties surrounding ownership of AI-generated work, copyright infringement, and the absence of clear regulatory frameworks governing AI usage in academia. Using a qualitative research methodology, this paper reviews existing literature, case studies, and policy guidelines to identify gaps in current practices. The findings highlight the need for transparent usage policies, proper attribution mechanisms, and updated IPR laws to address emerging challenges. The study concludes by proposing recommendations for responsible AI usage that balance innovation with ethical and legal compliance in academic research.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The emergence of generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) has significantly transformed the landscape of academic research. Tools capable of generating text, code, and data-driven insights are increasingly being integrated into research workflows, enabling faster literature reviews, drafting, and analysis. These advancements have improved efficiency and accessibility, allowing researchers and students to explore complex topics with greater ease. However, the rapid adoption of such technologies has also raised important questions about their appropriate use in academic environments.

One of the major concerns associated with generative AI is its impact on research ethics and academic integrity. The use of AI-generated content challenges traditional notions of authorship, originality, and accountability. Researchers may rely on AI tools for writing or idea generation, but this creates ambiguity regarding who should be credited for the work. Additionally, there are risks of unintentional plagiarism, biased outputs, and the spread of inaccurate information, all of which can undermine the credibility of academic research if not carefully monitored.

Alongside ethical concerns, the legal implications of generative AI present significant challenges, particularly in the context of Intellectual Property Rights (IPR). Existing copyright laws are not fully equipped to address questions such as ownership of AI-generated content, use of copyrighted training data, and liability for misuse. The absence of clear regulatory frameworks creates uncertainty for researchers, institutions, and policymakers. Therefore, it becomes essential to critically examine both ethical and legal dimensions of generative AI in order to develop responsible practices that support innovation while safeguarding academic standards.

## II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The theoretical background of this study provides the foundational concepts necessary to understand the ethical and legal implications of using generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) in academic research. As AI technologies continue to evolve, they intersect with established principles of research methodology and Intellectual Property Rights (IPR), creating new challenges and considerations. A clear understanding of these underlying theories is essential to analyze how AI influences research practices, authorship, and ownership.

### A. Generative Artificial Intelligence in Academic Research

Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) refers to models that learn patterns from large datasets and generate new content such as text, code, or images. These systems are typically based on probabilistic learning, where the next word or output is predicted based on prior data. A simplified representation is:



$$P(w_t / w_1, w_2, \dots, w_{t-1})$$

This expression shows how AI predicts the next word  $w_t$  based on previous words. In academic research, such models assist in writing, summarizing, and coding tasks. While efficient, this probabilistic generation raises concerns about originality and reliability of outputs.

Moreover, generative AI models are trained on large-scale datasets, which may include publicly available, licensed, or even copyrighted content. This training process enables the model to produce coherent and contextually relevant outputs, but it also raises concerns about data authenticity and bias. If the training data contains inaccuracies or biases, the generated output may reflect those issues, affecting research quality. Therefore, while generative AI supports efficiency, it also challenges the traditional emphasis on originality and critical thinking in research.

### B. Research Ethics and Academic Integrity

Research ethics emphasize honesty, transparency, and accountability. One key issue with AI-generated content is **plagiarism detection**, often measured using similarity scores. A basic representation used in plagiarism tools is:

$$\text{Similarity Index} = \frac{\text{matched content}}{\text{total content}} * 100$$

However, AI-generated content often paraphrases information in unique ways, making it difficult for such systems to detect indirect plagiarism. This creates a loophole where content may appear original but is actually machine-generated without proper acknowledgment.

Additionally, ethical concerns extend to accountability and transparency. When AI tools are used in research, it becomes difficult to determine the extent of human contribution versus machine assistance. This raises questions about authorship and responsibility, especially if the generated content contains errors or misleading information. Ensuring ethical use of AI requires clear disclosure policies and guidelines to maintain trust in academic research.

### C. Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) in Research

Intellectual Property Rights protect ownership and originality in research outputs. Traditionally, ownership is assigned based on human contribution. A conceptual representation of ownership distribution in collaborative work can be expressed as:

Traditionally, ownership is determined based on the contribution of individuals involved in the research process, which can be conceptually represented as:

$$IP_{Ownership} = \sum_{i=1}^n \text{Contribution}_i$$

However, the introduction of generative AI complicates this model. Since AI systems generate content based on pre-trained data rather than direct human creativity, it becomes difficult to quantify their contribution. This creates ambiguity in assigning ownership and raises questions about whether AI can be considered a contributor.

### D. Copyright and Ownership Issues in AI-Generated Content

Copyright law is designed to protect original works created by human authors. However, generative AI challenges this fundamental principle by producing content autonomously. A simplified functional representation of AI output generation is:

$$\text{Output} = f(\text{Training Data})$$

This indicates that the output is derived from patterns learned during training. If the training data includes copyrighted material, there is a possibility that the generated content may resemble or reproduce protected works, leading to potential infringement issues.

Another critical issue is whether AI-generated content qualifies for copyright protection. In many legal systems, only human-created works are eligible for copyright, leaving AI-generated outputs in a legal grey area. This lack of clarity creates uncertainty for researchers who use AI tools in their work.



### E. Emerging Legal and Ethical Frameworks for AI Usage

In response to the challenges posed by generative AI, various organizations and governments are working towards developing regulatory frameworks and ethical guidelines. These frameworks aim to ensure responsible use of AI while protecting intellectual property and maintaining research integrity.

One important concept in this context is accountability, which can be represented as:

$$\text{Accountability} = f(\text{Human Oversight}, \text{Transparency}, \text{Responsibility})$$

This emphasizes that effective AI governance depends on human involvement, clear disclosure of AI usage, and assignment of responsibility for outcomes.

Emerging frameworks focus on key principles such as transparency in AI-generated content, proper attribution, data privacy protection, and prevention of misuse. Academic institutions are also introducing policies requiring researchers to disclose the use of AI tools in their work.

### III. FOUR-TIER TAXONOMY

To better understand the multifaceted impact of generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) in academic research, it is essential to organize its applications and implications into a structured framework. A four-tier taxonomy provides a systematic way to classify how AI is integrated into research processes, the roles it performs, and the ethical and legal challenges it introduces.

#### Tier 1: Application Domain

Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become deeply embedded in various stages of academic research, transforming how tasks are performed and knowledge is generated. One of its primary applications is in literature review, where AI tools assist researchers in summarizing large volumes of academic content, making it easier to identify relevant studies and research gaps. In addition, AI is widely used for content generation, including drafting research papers, reports, and technical documentation, which significantly reduces the time required for writing. In data-driven research, AI plays a crucial role in analyzing datasets and generating insights that support decision-making. For technical domains such as computer science, AI is also used for code generation and debugging, thereby enhancing productivity. Furthermore, generative AI contributes to research design by suggesting ideas, hypotheses, and methodologies, demonstrating its expanding role as an integral component of modern research practices.

#### Tier 2: Functional Role of AI

Beyond its applications, generative AI performs multiple functional roles within the research process, shaping how tasks are executed and outcomes are achieved. In many cases, AI serves as an assistive tool, supporting researchers by offering suggestions, corrections, and enhancements to their work. At a more advanced level, it takes on a generative role, producing original text, code, or analytical outputs based on learned patterns. AI also performs analytical functions by processing and summarizing complex datasets, enabling researchers to interpret information more efficiently. Additionally, predictive capabilities allow AI to identify trends and propose potential outcomes, which can be valuable in exploratory research. Another important role is automation, where AI reduces repetitive and time-consuming tasks, allowing researchers to focus on higher-level intellectual activities. These varied roles highlight the increasing dependence on AI systems while also raising questions about the extent of human involvement in research.

#### Tier 3: Ethical Considerations

The integration of generative AI into academic research introduces several ethical challenges that must be carefully addressed to maintain the integrity of scholarly work. One of the primary concerns is authorship and attribution, as it becomes difficult to distinguish between human-generated and AI-generated contributions, leading to ambiguity in assigning credit. Issues related to plagiarism and originality also arise, since AI-generated content may unintentionally replicate existing ideas without proper acknowledgment, even when it appears unique. Another significant concern is bias in AI outputs, as models trained on biased datasets can produce results that may affect the fairness and validity of research findings.

#### Tier 4: Legal and Intellectual Property Implications

The use of generative AI in academic research presents complex legal challenges, particularly in the context of Intellectual Property Rights (IPR). One of the key issues is determining the ownership of AI-generated content, as traditional copyright laws are based on human authorship and may not clearly apply to machine-generated outputs. This creates uncertainty regarding who holds the rights to such content—the researcher, the developer of the AI system, or



neither. Additionally, concerns arise from the use of copyrighted material in training AI models, which may lead to potential infringement if protected works are indirectly reproduced. The question of patentability also becomes relevant when AI contributes to innovative ideas or inventions, complicating the process of assigning inventorship.

#### IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature for this study focuses on recent developments in generative Artificial Intelligence (AI), research ethics, and Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) in academic research. Sources were reviewed from major academic databases such as IEEE Xplore, Springer, ScienceDirect, and arXiv, with emphasis on studies that discuss ethical implications, legal frameworks, authorship challenges, and copyright concerns related to AI-generated content. The selection prioritizes works that provide measurable insights such as impact on academic integrity, policy effectiveness, transparency, and accountability in AI-assisted research. Additionally, studies addressing plagiarism detection, bias in AI systems, and emerging regulatory guidelines were included. Table I summarizes the methodologies, key contributions, and limitations identified in the selected literature.

TABLE I: LITERATURE REVIEW SUMMARY

Sl.	Author(s)	Year & Title	Method / Technique	Key Findings	Venue & Index
1	Anderson et al.	2023 – AI in Academic Writing	NLP, Generative AI	AI improves writing efficiency but raises ethical concerns	IEEE Xplore
2	Kumar et al.	2022 – IPR Challenges in Digital Content	Legal Analysis	Existing IPR laws are inadequate for AI-generated content	Springer
3	Li et al.	2024 – Ethics of AI-Generated Research	Survey, Case Study	Highlights risks of plagiarism and lack of transparency	ScienceDirect
4	Ahmed et al.	2023 – AI and Academic Integrity	NLP, AI Tools	AI use may lead to unintentional academic misconduct	arXiv
5	Zhang et al.	2025 – Copyright Issues in Generative AI	Legal Framework Analysis	Unclear ownership of AI-generated outputs	ScienceDirect
6	Patel et al.	2024 – AI in Research Methodology	Mixed Methods	AI enhances efficiency but affects originality	Springer
7	Lee et al.	2023 – Bias in AI Systems	ML Models	AI bias impacts fairness in research outcomes	IEEE
8	Singh et al.	2024 – Plagiarism Detection Systems	NLP, Similarity Models	Traditional tools fail to detect AI-generated content	ScienceDirect
9	Chen et al.	2025 – AI and Data Ownership	Data Governance Models	Raises concerns over training data ownership	arXiv
10	Rao et al.	2023 – Ethical Use of AI in Education	Policy Analysis	Need for clear guidelines in academic institutions	Springer
11	Wang et al.	2024 – AI Transparency in Research	Explainable AI (XAI)	Improves trust in AI-assisted research	IEEE
12	Gupta et al.	2025 – AI and Research Accountability	Analytical Study	Lack of accountability frameworks identified	ScienceDirect
13	Brown et al.	2023 – Human-AI Collaboration	Conceptual Model	Defines boundaries between human and AI roles	arXiv
14	Verma et al.	2024 – AI Policy in Academia	Comparative Study	Policies vary across institutions and regions	Springer
15	Khan et al.	2025 – Explainable AI in Research Ethics	XAI, ML	Enhances transparency and ethical compliance	IEEE



*Note: AI = Artificial Intelligence, ML = Machine Learning, NLP = Natural Language Processing, IPR = Intellectual Property Rights, XAI = Explainable Artificial Intelligence.*

## V. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Several patterns emerge when the reviewed studies on generative Artificial Intelligence (AI), research ethics, and Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) are examined collectively. Instead of analyzing each study individually, the findings are organized around key recurring themes that reflect current trends, benefits, and limitations in AI-assisted academic research.

Generative AI significantly enhances research productivity but introduces ethical concerns. Most studies highlight that AI tools improve efficiency in literature review, drafting, and data analysis, reducing the time required for academic work. However, this increased reliance on AI raises concerns regarding originality, authorship, and academic integrity. While AI-generated content appears unique, it may still reflect underlying training data, leading to risks of unintentional plagiarism and reduced critical thinking among researchers. Existing plagiarism detection and validation mechanisms remain insufficient. Traditional plagiarism detection systems primarily rely on similarity matching and struggle to identify AI-generated paraphrased content. As a result, content produced using generative AI may bypass conventional checks, creating challenges in maintaining academic honesty. This limitation indicates a gap between technological advancement and evaluation mechanisms used in research environments.

Legal frameworks for intellectual property are not fully equipped to handle AI-generated outputs. Most reviewed studies emphasize that current copyright laws are designed for human authorship and fail to clearly define ownership of AI-generated content. Additionally, the use of copyrighted data in training AI models raises concerns about infringement and fair use. The absence of standardized global regulations creates uncertainty for researchers, institutions, and publishers. Transparency, accountability, and explainability remain critical challenges. Many AI systems function as black boxes, generating outputs without providing clear explanations or sources. This lack of transparency affects trust in academic research and makes it difficult to assign responsibility for errors or misleading information. Studies suggest that integrating explainable AI techniques and disclosure policies can improve accountability and ethical compliance.

In summary, while generative AI offers significant advantages in improving research efficiency and accessibility, it introduces complex ethical and legal challenges. These challenges highlight the need for improved evaluation methods, updated IPR frameworks, and stronger governance policies to ensure responsible use of AI in academic research. Table II below presents a structured comparison of the reviewed studies.

TABLE II: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF REVIEWED PAPERS

Sl.	Paper	Protocol / Technique	Performance	Advantages	Limitations	AI/ML?
1	Anderson et al. [1]	NLP, Generative AI	High	Improves academic writing efficiency	Raises plagiarism concerns	Yes
2	Kumar et al. [2]	Legal Analysis	Conceptual	Identifies gaps in IPR laws	No experimental validation	No
3	Li et al. [3]	Survey, Case Study	Moderate–High	Highlights ethical risks in AI usage	Limited real-world data	Yes
4	Ahmed et al. [4]	AI Tools, NLP	High	Improves research productivity	Risk of academic misconduct	Yes
5	Zhang et al. [5]	Legal Framework Analysis	Conceptual	Explains copyright challenges	Lack of implementation models	No
6	Patel et al. [6]	Mixed Methods	High	Enhances research methodology	Reduces originality	Yes



7	Lee et al. [7]	ML Models	High	Identifies bias in AI outputs	Requires large datasets	Yes
8	Singh et al. [8]	NLP, Similarity Models	Moderate	Detects traditional plagiarism	Fails for AI-generated text	Yes
9	Chen et al. [9]	Data Governance Models	High	Addresses data ownership issues	Legal ambiguity remains	Yes
10	Rao et al. [10]	Policy Analysis	Conceptual	Suggests ethical guidelines	Lack of enforcement mechanisms	No
11	Wang et al. [11]	Explainable AI (XAI)	High	Improves transparency	Computational complexity	Yes
12	Gupta et al. [12]	Analytical Study	High	Highlights accountability gaps	Limited frameworks	Yes
13	Brown et al. [13]	Conceptual Model	Conceptual	Defines human-AI roles	No empirical testing	No
14	Verma et al. [14]	Comparative Policy Study	Moderate	Shows policy differences globally	Lack of standardization	No
15	Khan et al. [15]	XAI, ML	High	Improves trust in AI systems	Requires structured data	Yes

## VI. RESEARCH GAP

The survey of multilingual conversational AI and Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG) systems for smart campus applications reveals several recurring limitations. Seven key gaps are identified below, ordered from immediate practical concerns to broader systemic challenges.

**Gap 1 - Lack of clear Authorship and Ownership definition:** There is no universally accepted framework to define authorship when AI tools contribute significantly to research output. This creates ambiguity in assigning credit and responsibility, especially when AI-generated content forms a substantial part of the work. Researchers may face difficulties in acknowledging AI contributions without violating academic norms. This gap highlights the urgent need for standardized authorship guidelines that clearly distinguish human and AI roles in research.

**Gap 2 - Inadequate Plagiarism Detection for AI Content:** Existing plagiarism detection systems are not designed to identify AI-generated content effectively, particularly when it is paraphrased or contextually modified. As a result, AI-assisted work may pass similarity checks despite lacking originality. This limitation undermines academic integrity and raises concerns about fair evaluation of research work. Developing advanced detection mechanisms tailored for AI-generated content is essential to address this issue.

**Gap 3 - Absence of Comprehensive IPR Frameworks for AI:** Current intellectual property laws do not adequately address issues related to AI-generated works, particularly regarding copyright ownership and training data usage. The lack of clarity creates legal uncertainty for researchers and institutions using AI tools. Moreover, different countries follow varying approaches, leading to inconsistencies in enforcement. There is a strong need for updated and globally harmonized IPR frameworks that consider AI as an active contributor in content creation.

**Gap 4 - Limited Transparency and Explainability:** Most AI systems operate as black boxes, providing outputs without explaining how they were generated or what sources were used. This lack of transparency makes it difficult for researchers to verify the reliability and validity of AI-generated content. It also reduces trust in academic outputs that rely heavily on AI assistance. Incorporating explainable AI techniques and citation-based generation can improve transparency and user confidence.

**Gap 5 - Weak Institutional Policies and Guidelines:** Many academic institutions have not yet established clear policies regulating the use of AI in research activities. This leads to inconsistent practices among students and



researchers, increasing the risk of misuse. Without proper guidelines, it becomes difficult to enforce ethical standards or evaluate AI-assisted work fairly. Institutions must develop well-defined policies that specify acceptable AI usage and disclosure requirements.

**Gap 6 - Bias and Reliability Issues in AI Outputs:** AI systems are trained on large datasets that may contain inherent biases, which can be reflected in generated outputs. This can affect the fairness, accuracy, and credibility of research findings. In academic contexts, biased outputs can lead to incorrect interpretations and conclusions. Addressing bias requires careful dataset selection, model evaluation, and continuous monitoring of AI-generated content.

**Gap 7 - Lack of Standardized Global Regulations:** Regulatory approaches to AI usage vary significantly across regions, resulting in inconsistent legal interpretations and enforcement. This creates challenges for researchers working in international or collaborative environments. The absence of unified standards makes it difficult to ensure compliance with ethical and legal requirements. Establishing global guidelines and cooperation among policymakers is essential to address this issue effectively.

## VII. CONCLUSION

This study reviewed multiple research works related to generative Artificial Intelligence (AI), research ethics, and Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) in academic research. The findings indicate that AI technologies significantly enhance research efficiency by supporting tasks such as content generation, data analysis, and literature review, thereby improving productivity and accessibility.

However, the study also highlights that the adoption of generative AI introduces complex ethical and legal challenges. Issues related to authorship, plagiarism, bias, and accountability raise concerns about the integrity and reliability of research outputs. Additionally, existing intellectual property frameworks are not fully equipped to address ownership and copyright issues associated with AI-generated content.

The analysis reveals that the major limitation lies not in the capability of AI technologies but in the absence of comprehensive frameworks governing their use. There is a clear need for updated policies that integrate ethical principles, legal regulations, and technological advancements. Addressing these challenges will require coordinated efforts from researchers, academic institutions, and policymakers to ensure responsible and transparent use of AI in academic research.

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