

Research Article

Normalizing Plagiarism: An Analysis of Copy-Paste Culture and the Shifting Values of Academic Honesty in the Era of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

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Abstract: This study aims to explore the shift in students' ethical paradigms regarding the use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its relationship to the phenomenon of plagiarism. Using a qualitative approach with the theoretical frameworks of Jean Baudrillard's Simulacra and Pierre Bourdieu's Habitus, this study examines how AI technology is changing the nature of scientific work. The results show the normalization of AI use as a new "digital habitus," where 83% of students consider AI a legitimate research tool, but on the other hand, it creates a condition of "Aesthetics Without Substance." The main findings reveal a reduction in originality where academic honesty is only measured through technical scores (such as Turnitin), rather than intellectual depth. The comparison between authentic and AI-based writing indicates the risk of systemic intellectual atrophy. In conclusion, this study recommends the need for a redesign of educational evaluation systems that focus on processes and verbal dialectics to mitigate the impact of pseudo-competence on college graduates.

Keywords: Academic Integrity; Artificial Intelligence; Digital Ethics; Plagiarism; Simulacra.

1. Introduction

Higher education is a moral institution that serves not only as a center for the transfer of knowledge but also as a guardian of the values of scientific integrity and honesty. However, with the rapid development of information technology, the academic world now faces a serious cultural challenge. Plagiarism, once considered a serious offense and social taboo, is now beginning to become normalized among students. This phenomenon indicates a paradigm shift, where copying someone else's work is no longer viewed as a moral failing, but rather as a logical consequence of technological adaptation without proper ethical reinforcement.

The emergence of a copy-paste culture on campus represents a cultural shift from literacy to "instantism." Amidst high academic demands to achieve a perfect Grade Point Average (GPA), students often become trapped in a pragmatic mindset. From a cultural studies perspective, this phenomenon reflects the commodification of education, where degrees and grades are viewed as commodities to be attained quickly. As a result, honest intellectual processes are often sacrificed for final results that appear administratively satisfactory but are substantively empty.

This situation is further complicated by the disruption of generative Artificial Intelligence (AI), such as ChatGPT and Gemini, which pose significant challenges to standards of originality in academic work. AI enables students to produce texts that appear authentic but require minimal cognitive involvement, creating a gray area in academic ethics. The line between technological collaboration and cheating is blurred, raising fundamental

Received: 19 February, 2026
Revised: 16 March, 2026
Accepted: 17 April, 2026
Online Available: 20 April, 2026
Curr. Ver.: 20 April, 2026



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questions about whether the use of AI is a form of tool assistance or a new form of plagiarism. When these tools are widely used without ethical oversight, an academic identity crisis arises, where honesty is perceived as a form of naivety, while cheating is seen as a form of efficiency and a survival skill.

Therefore, this research has great urgency in examining how digital technology and AI are not only changing the way students approach assignments but also redefining the meaning of "honesty" in their minds. The normalization of plagiarism in the digital age is not simply a technical problem that can be solved with text similarity detection applications, but rather a cultural issue that touches the very roots of students' identities as aspiring intellectuals. Without a deep understanding of this shift in values, campus policies that are merely administrative will fail to address the systemic and cultural roots of the problem.

2. Preliminaries or Related Work or Literature Review

Digital Culture and "Instantanism": Deconstructing the Academic Process

The digital culture within the current higher education ecosystem has given rise to a sociocultural phenomenon known as "instantism," a tendency that radically deconstructs traditional academic processes. This phenomenon is not simply related to the use of hardware or software, but has also infiltrated students' logic in responding to intellectual demands. Amidst the flood of information facilitated by search engines and social media, there has been a shift from a contemplative literacy culture to a pragmatic curation culture. Manuel Castells describes this shift as part of a network society, where the speed of information access creates the expectation that knowledge production must occur quickly. As a result, the learning process, which should be linear and in-depth, from reading primary sources, synthesizing, to critical reflection, is now often truncated by copy-pasting practices, perceived as rational shortcuts. From a cultural studies perspective, this instantism represents a form of adaptation to the academic burden, sometimes viewed as a quantitative commodity; when the orientation of education shifts to achieving a Grade Point Average (GPA) and speed of graduation, students begin to view coursework as an administrative burden to be completed immediately rather than an opportunity for self-transformation.

This has led to the normalization of plagiarism, where excessive copying or use of AI assistance no longer triggers internal moral sanctions or guilt, but is instead seen as a form of efficiency or even a "digital navigation skill" that needs to be mastered. This crisis is further exacerbated by the blurring of boundaries between originality and replication, where the ease of technology makes students feel they have authority over information they are actually simply transferring from one medium to another. Ultimately, the deconstruction of the academic process through this instant culture risks creating a generation with high technical literacy but experiencing "cognitive atrophy," a condition in which critical thinking skills and analytical depth fade due to over-reliance on algorithmic speed. Digital culture, originally intended to be an intellectual tool, has instead become a trap that erodes scientific diligence, transforming campus spaces that should be a melting pot of thought into mere factories producing texts devoid of substance.

Theory of Hyperreality and Simulacra (Jean Baudrillard)

Jean Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality and simulacra has become a critical tool in analyzing the phenomenon of plagiarism and the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in today's academic environment. In Baudrillard's view, we have entered an era where simulations or images of reality have replaced reality itself, a condition he calls simulacra. In the context of academic writing, student papers produced through AI or advanced copy-paste practices constitute simulacra; they are copies of a collection of data that bear no authentic reference to the author's deep thoughts. The text appears scientific, uses sophisticated terminology, and follows a flawless academic structure, but is actually a "fake that seems more real than reality." This is what has been called academic hyperreality, where an algorithmically generated paper often appears more "intelligent" and more "accurate" than a student's original, possibly messy but honest, handwritten draft. Students are no longer attempting to represent their original thinking, but instead are attempting to construct an image of themselves as intelligent students through digital text manipulation.

Furthermore, simulacra in the academic world creates conditions in which the line between intellectual truth and data manipulation becomes blurred. When students use AI to paraphrase texts to pass plagiarism tests (such as Turnitin), they are essentially circulating

empty signs. The text no longer refers to the subject's (student's) understanding, but only to other texts found in internet databases. This process leads to the "death of meaning," where writing is no longer a dialectical process of ideas but merely an assembly of linguistic symbols to conform to the formal standards of the lecturer or institution. Baudrillard warns that in hyperreality, we are no longer able to distinguish between what is true and what is false because such simulations have become the norm. The normalization of plagiarism and reliance on AI transform scientific work from a contribution to knowledge into a mere simulacra artifact whose purpose is not to enlighten but to fulfill the administrative simulations of the educational system. Ultimately, universities risk becoming a vast theater of simulations, where instructors pass judgment on texts that their authors never actually "thought through," creating a cycle of pseudo-knowledge that threatens the very foundations of scientific truth.

Shifting Algorithmic Values and Ethics

The shift in values in today's academic world is no longer simply a matter of individual behavior, but has transformed into a systemic crisis triggered by the emergence of algorithmic ethics. Classical academic tradition places honesty on transparency of processes and originality of authorship, but the advent of artificial intelligence (AI) algorithms has disrupted this understanding by offering new ethical standards based on results and efficiency. Algorithmic ethics tends to obscure the intellectual responsibility of human subjects; when a text is machine-generated, students often feel less culpable for content errors or the absence of citations, as they position themselves merely as "editors" or "curators" of the algorithm's suggestions. This shift creates a so-called delusion of integrity, where students feel they are acting ethically as long as they can modify AI output to avoid detection by anti-plagiarism software. In this context, the value of intellectual honesty has been reduced from a moral commitment to respecting the ideas of others to merely a technical skill to avoid administrative sanctions.

More profoundly, this reliance on algorithmic ethics has triggered an erosion of students' intellectual autonomy. When algorithms determine the argument structure, diction, and conclusion of a scientific paper, the student's role as an autonomous subject in education begins to diminish. This creates a tension between traditional ethics that demand effort and digital ethics that glorify convenience. This tension often prevails over algorithmic logic because it aligns with the pressures of a highly competitive and rushed education system. As a result, a double standard emerges on campus: while institutions continue to promote the values of integrity, the digital infrastructure they use daily encourages students to delegate their cognitive power to machines. This shift in values indicates that plagiarism in the AI era is no longer simply theft of ideas, but rather the loss of human sovereignty over one's own thinking, replaced by the convenience of algorithms. If left unchecked, algorithmic ethics will transform the very nature of education from a search for truth to a data optimization process devoid of human values.

Commodification of Education (Critical Theory)

Within the framework of Critical Theory, the phenomena of plagiarism and the use of AI can be analyzed as logical consequences of the commodification of education, where higher education institutions begin to operate like a culture industry. From this perspective, education is no longer seen as an emancipatory process to liberate human thought, but has been reduced to a mere commodity with exchange value in the labor market. When education becomes a commodity, students position themselves not as learners but as consumers who have paid a high price for a final product, a diploma and a degree. This consumerist logic encourages students to seek maximum efficiency with minimal effort; if an academic assignment can be completed instantly through AI or copy-pasting, for them, it is a rational form of cognitive "cost savings." The practice of plagiarism in this ecosystem represents both resistance and adaptation to an education system that overemphasizes quantitative outcomes like GPAs. Overly market-oriented educational institutions indirectly create structural pressures that force students to delegate cognitively to meet administrative standards that are often devoid of substance.

Furthermore, the commodification of education creates alienation or estrangement for students from their own work. Karl Marx, in his concept of alienation, explained that in the industrial system, workers were alienated from the products they produced; in the modern academic world, students are alienated from the knowledge they produce because the

production process has been taken over by machines or copy-pasted. Papers or theses are no longer reflections of the author's inner intellectual struggle, but merely artifacts produced to fulfill graduation requirements. Critics of the Frankfurt School might see this as a form of "consciousness industry," where individual creativity is standardized and standardized by algorithms. The normalization of plagiarism in this context is symptomatic of a technocratic society that values technical performance over moral depth. As a result, universities, which should be critical spaces for challenging the system, risk becoming factories that reproduce technocrats adept at manipulating data but lacking intellectual integrity. This commodification ultimately eliminates the intrinsic value of the pursuit of knowledge, transforming it into a mere administrative transaction, cold, efficient, and devoid of human meaning.

3. Materials and Method

In this section, you need to describe the proposed method step by step. Explanations accompanied by equations and flow diagrams as illustrations will make it easier for readers to understand your research.

3.1. Algorithm/Pseudocode

This research uses a qualitative approach with a critical paradigm to explore the phenomenon of the normalization of plagiarism and the use of AI on campus. The method employed is digital ethnography, which allows researchers to observe student behavior not only in the physical campus space but also in the virtual space where copy-pasting and the use of AI algorithms occur. This method was chosen based on the need to understand the "logic behind students' actions," which is often not revealed through statistical figures. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with informants selected through purposive sampling, consisting of students from various disciplines, lecturers, and members of academic ethics committees. The interviews focused on the subjects' perceptions of the limits of honesty, the systemic pressures they face, and how they justify the use of AI technology in their assignments.

In addition to the interviews, participant observation techniques were employed by monitoring the dynamics of discussions in student communication groups and the use of AI tools during assignments in real time. The researchers also conducted document analysis of student written work suspected of using AI to identify simulacra patterns in their writing. All collected data was then analyzed using critical discourse analysis techniques to examine how power relations, the commodification of education, and the dominance of algorithms shape a new narrative of honesty. To ensure data validity, this study employed source and theory triangulation, contrasting field findings with Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality and critical theory of the culture industry. With this design, the study is expected to comprehensively map how value shifts occur from the individual level to the structural level within higher education institutions.

Table 1. operational definitions of variables.

Variable/Concept	Operational Definition	Indicators to be Observed
Normalizing Plagiarism	A social process in which the act of copying works is considered normal behavior and not a serious moral violation.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Minimal guilt when committing copy-pas. 2. Collective support within peer groups. 3. Justification of actions as a "survival strategy."
Culture of Instantaneousness	A mindset that prioritizes speed of output through digital assistance over deep intellectual processes.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reliance on search engines and AI. 2. Tendency to work on tasks at the last minute (procrastination). 3. Low verification of information sources.
Academic Simulacra (AI-Generated Content)	Written work that appears formally scientific but does not represent the subject's	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The language structure is too rigid/formal, typical of algorithms.

	(student's thoughts.	original	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Students' inability to explain the content of their writing verbally. 3. The use of citations that are sometimes irrelevant or fictitious.
Shifting Values of Honesty	The shift in moral standards from process honesty to administrative efficiency for the sake of grades or graduation.		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The perception that honesty is a barrier to high grades. 2. The assumption that cheating the system (checking for plagiarism) is a skill. 3. Prioritizing GPA over scientific integrity.
Commodification of Education	The view that education is a commodity and students are consumers who have the right to the "product" (diploma).		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Demanding high grades because they've already paid tuition fees. 2. Studying solely to earn a degree. 3. Transactional relationships between students and lecturers.

The operationalization of variables in this study aims to bridge abstract concepts into empirically observable phenomena in academic settings. The variable "Normalization of Plagiarism" is central, where the primary indicator is no longer simply the frequency of cheating, but rather the loss of moral burden (guilt-free) among students. In cultural studies, this indicates that plagiarism has shifted from a "violation" to a "group norm." When collective support emerges within a peer group, students no longer feel isolated when cheating; instead, they perceive themselves as implementing a survival strategy amidst the pressures of a competitive system.

The variables "Culture of Instantaneousness" and "Academic Simulacra" are closely related in the context of technology use. Instantaneousness is measured through reliance on search engines and AI, which results in low source verification. This culminates in the creation of "Academic Simulacra," namely written works that appear visually perfect and scientific but lack cognitive engagement. The indicator "students' inability to re-explain the content of their writing" serves as key evidence for Baudrillard's theory of simulacra. The text exists, but its meaning is not fixed in the author's mind. Here, the writing becomes merely a symbol or sign that lacks reference to the student's intellectual reality.

Furthermore, "Shifting Values of Honesty and the Commodification of Education" examines the structural roots of this problem. The indicator "honesty is considered an obstacle" demonstrates a clash between academic idealism and market pragmatism. Within the logic of commodification, students who feel they have "purchased" educational services through UKT tend to demand the final results (grades and diplomas) as consumer rights, thus deeming the honest academic process inefficient. This shift demonstrates that academic ethics are no longer absolute, but rather situational and transactional. By mapping these indicators, research can reveal how digital infrastructure and higher education policies have unconsciously shaped an ecosystem that fosters new forms of plagiarism.

4. Results and Discussion

Digital Habitus: Normalizing Plagiarism in Everyday Life

From a sociological perspective, current student behavior can be analyzed through the concept of habitus, a system of dispositions or tendencies acquired through social learning and becoming a permanent structure within an individual. The phenomenon of plagiarism in this era has transformed into a "digital habitus," where copying, pasting, and delegating tasks to AI are no longer considered deviant but rather a normal way of life in the modern educational ecosystem. This normalization occurs because students grow up and interact in

an environment that values speed and instant results. The practice of plagiarism no longer triggers social sanctions or shame among peers because they collectively share the same burden: high academic demands with limited time. In this environment, traditional academic integrity has shifted to "functional integrity," where honesty is considered less valuable than the ability to complete assignments quickly and with high technical precision.

This digital habitus is further reinforced by moral neutralization, a psychological mechanism through which students rationally justify their plagiarism. Students tend to blame structures (such as overly dense curricula or uninspiring lecturers) for legitimizing the illegal use of AI or copy-pasting practices. They feel that as long as they make minor modifications to machine-generated text, they have made an "effort," and therefore do not qualify as cheating. This creates a vicious cycle in which plagiarism becomes part of students' social identities; those who are conventionally honest are often considered odd or inefficient by their peers.

This normalization in everyday life also blurs the line between "tool" and "source of thought." Students no longer see the difference between using a calculator for math and using AI to write a philosophy essay. This cognitive delegation becomes permanent because it has become internalized as a pattern of perception and action. As a result, universities now face the significant challenge of confronting an ingrained habit. Plagiarism is no longer simply a matter of individual ethics; it is a product of a digital habitus born of a pragmatic information society, where success is no longer measured by a person's depth of understanding but by their adeptness at manipulating digital symbols to meet campus administrative standards.

Table 2. Analysis of Discussion of Students' Ethical Perceptions.

Statement Items	Key Findings (Data)	Interpretation of Phenomena	Theoretical Linkage (Critical Analysis)
P1: AI as a framework tool	83% Agree	Students consider AI to be a legitimate research instrument.	Digital Habitus: AI has been internalized as a thinking assistant that is considered normal.
P2: Delegating tasks when pressed for time	60% Agree	Time efficiency is prioritized over manual thinking processes.	Instantism: The pressure of task duration triggers moral justification for plagiarism
P3: AI Paraphrase = Original	70% Agree	There is a blurring of the definition between "borrowing ideas" and "creating ideas"	Death of the Author: Subjects (students) feel like they are authors just by curating machine-written texts
P4: Turnitin Pass Standard	77% Agree	Honesty is only considered a technical number, not integrity of conscience.	Simulacra: Work is considered "original" only because it passes algorithmic censorship, even though the content is the result of a generator.

P5: The Advantages of AI vs. Lecturers	57% Agree	There has been a decline in the authority of lecturers as the main source of knowledge.	Authority Crisis: Students trust the speed of algorithms more than pedagogical dialogue.
P6: Integrity vs GPA	50% Agree	Students are pragmatic; they value grades more than academic processes.	Commodification of Education: Degrees and grades are considered commodities that can be obtained by any means.

Aesthetics Without Substance: AI as a Simulacra Machine

Discussions of student work revealed the phenomenon of "Aesthetics Without Substance." The works produced by Generative AI were characterized by visual and structural clarity, sophisticated academic vocabulary, and consistent logical flow. However, a closer analysis revealed that these texts were simulacra, imitations of knowledge that lacked rooted understanding in the author. Researchers found that students frequently failed to explain complex terminology in their own writing. This demonstrates the hyperreality of the classroom: lecturers valued the machine-generated "image of intelligence" rather than the students' actual intellectual development.

Table 3. Analysis of Aesthetic Phenomena Without Substance (AI as a Simulacra Machine).

Dimensions of Analysis	Characteristics of AI Works (Aesthetics)	Intellectual Reality (Substance)	The Concept of Simulacra (Baudrillard)
Language Quality	Using formal diction, neat rhymes, and perfect grammar.	Students often don't understand the meaning of the sophisticated terms AI uses.	Signs Without Reference: Language is merely decorative without representing the author's original understanding.
Writing Structure	Very systematic, has a precise opening, content and closing flow.	The writing logic often becomes repetitive if examined more deeply.	Hyperreality: Writing looks "more scientific" than human writing, but is empty of meaning.
Production process	Instant; generated in seconds via a command (prompt).	Eliminates the phase of reflection, contemplation, and academic anxiety.	Simulation Dimension: The creative process is replaced by the mechanical execution of algorithms.
Validation of Work	Rely on technical scores (such as passing plagiarism or grammar checks).	The work cannot be accounted for verbally or through dialectical discussion.	False Perception: The truth of a work is reduced to mere digital numbers.

Author Position	Students act as "curators" or final decision makers.	Loss of personal touch, unique style of language, and originality of thought.	Death of the Author: Human subjects disappear, replaced by the circulation of anonymous data.
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The Crisis of Intellectual Authority and Cognitive Delegation

One crucial finding is the emergence of "Cognitive Delegation," where students completely surrender their thinking authority to algorithms. Discussions revealed that students are beginning to lose confidence in writing manually without the aid of technology. They feel that human language is "too simplistic" and not "scientific" enough compared to AI output. This creates a dependency that erodes critical and analytical thinking skills. Socioculturally, the role of the author has died and been replaced by that of curator; students merely act as data sorters without truly understanding its meaning, ultimately triggering a shallowing of literacy at the university level.

Institutional Structure and the Commodification of Degrees

The final discussion highlighted that the normalization of plagiarism is not solely the fault of individual students, but rather the result of an increasingly commodified educational structure. Institutions that emphasize speed of graduation and administrative figures indirectly encourage students to adopt a pragmatic approach. When education is viewed as a commodity, students feel justified in using any means to obtain the "product" of a diploma. This shift demonstrates how traditional academic ethics are now clashing with market logic that prioritizes only the end result. Without reforms to how institutions assess learning success, AI technology will continue to be used as a tool to accelerate the production of degrees devoid of intellectual quality.

5. Comparison

The comparison between authentic writing and AI simulacra reveals a profound ontological shift in academic tradition. In the model of authentic writing, based on human cognitive abilities, text is viewed as an honest representation of the author's thought processes, critical reflections, and intellectual struggles. Here, the relationship between the "written word" and "brain understanding" is organic and linear; the writer grasps every word and argument through extensive research and contemplation. In contrast, in the AI simulacra paradigm, this connection is completely broken. The resulting text is the result of the statistical predictions of an algorithm that lacks any awareness of meaning, creating a work that is aesthetically perfect but intellectually empty.

This phenomenon further highlights the contrast between efficiency and depth. Authentic writing is often characterized by technical imperfections or a personal style, yet it reflects originality and independence of thought. AI, on the other hand, offers an "instant aesthetic," capable of producing scientific papers in seconds with far more formal and precise grammar than the average student. However, this perfection is merely a simulation. Students trapped in this digital habitus tend to shift their role from being "knowledge creators" to merely "text curators." They manage information whose philosophy they don't understand, ultimately leading to intellectual alienation, where the work they pride themselves on doesn't represent their true brain capacity.

Finally, the most striking difference lies in the benchmark for a work's validity. In traditional methods, the authenticity of a work is tested through dialectics, oral discussion, and the author's moral responsibility. However, in today's era of AI normalization, this validity has been reduced to a mere administrative number. As long as a work can "fool" plagiarism detection machines and achieve a low similarity score, it is immediately deemed valid and original. This comparison emphasizes that without strong ethical intervention, higher education risks producing a generation skilled at producing "knowledge shells" works that appear shiny on the surface but lack substantial roots.

Table 4. In-depth Comparison: Authentic Writing vs. AI Simulacra.

Comparison Features	Authentic Writing (Human-Centered)	Simulacra AI (Algorithmic-Centered)
Primary Source	The result of human cognitive struggle, experience, and critical thinking.	The results of statistical and probability data processing from large databases.
The Nature of the Process	It takes time for research, reflection, and revision (Learning Process).	Instant; produced in seconds via a command (prompt).
Aesthetics and Style	Organic, has a personal touch, and may have technical gaps.	Mechanical, very formal, grammatically perfect, yet generic.
Depth of Meaning	The author understands every argument and philosophy behind his words.	Writers (students) are often unfamiliar with the sophisticated terminology generated by machines.
Final destination	Intellectual transformation and development of thinking capacity.	Administrative fulfillment, GPA, and time efficiency.
Validation of Originality	Honesty of conscience and intellectual responsibility in discussions.	Technical score on a detection application (such as Turnitin or iThenticate).
Author Status	Subject as Creator of Knowledge.	Subject as Technology Curator/Operator.

6. Conclusion

Based on the data analysis and discussion presented, this study concludes that a fundamental ethical paradigm shift has occurred among students. The phenomenon of "Normalized Plagiarism" is no longer simply an act of individual laziness, but has transformed into a digital habitus. Students tend to view the use of AI as a legitimate adaptive strategy to meet high and rapid academic demands. This indicates that the value of academic honesty has been redefined; previously based on authenticity of thought, it has now been reduced to mere technical compliance with the percentage figures on plagiarism detection applications.

Furthermore, this study found that the use of AI has created a condition of Academic Simulacra, where the aesthetics of a written work no longer reflect the intellectual substance of its author. Works produced by algorithms display a facade of "perfection" in language and structure that exceeds students' actual capabilities, but are often devoid of depth of meaning and critical reflection. This hyperreality poses a significant risk of triggering systemic intellectual atrophy, where the learning process, which should be a means of maturing thinking, is replaced by the mechanical efficiency of machines. Students no longer act as creators of knowledge, but merely as operators who curate statistical data without understanding the essence of what they produce.

In conclusion, the long-term impact of this phenomenon leads to a crisis in the quality of graduate competencies. If educational institutions continue to use conventional assessment standards based on final results without considering the process, universities risk producing a generation with a polished academic profile but weak independent problem-solving skills. Therefore, a complete reorientation of the educational evaluation system is needed, shifting from written document-based assessments to process-based assessments and direct dialectics. Academic integrity must be restored to its essence as a human moral commitment, not simply an algorithmic race between AI text generators and AI plagiarism detectors.

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