

# ACADEMIC INTEGRITY IN THE AGE OF GENERATIVE AI: A SURVEY-BASED STUDY OF TRANSLATION AND INTERPRETING STUDENTS' ETHICAL PERCEPTIONS

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**Abstract:** *This study investigates third-year undergraduates' perceptions of the use of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) tools in the context of diploma paper writing. Drawing on survey data collected from 64 students from the Department of Translation, Interpretation and Applied Linguistics at Moldova State University in March 2026, the study examines patterns of AI use, perceived benefits and ethical risks, and the academic writing challenges that shape students' engagement with these tools. The findings reveal near-universal AI adoption, with 98.4% of respondents reporting use of GenAI during their studies. ChatGPT dominates as the most widely used tool, followed by DeepL, which reflects the discipline-specific terminological needs of the students. While they acknowledge practical benefits, particularly time efficiency and writing support, respondents simultaneously express significant ethical concerns. A large majority recognise the risks of cognitive dependence, echoing Benjamin Moorhouse et al.'s (2025) finding that students describe GenAI reliance as leading to cognitive inertia and a reduced desire to think independently. Concerns about plagiarism and content fabrication emerge as further concerns, with students reporting concrete experiences of AI hallucination. The data on academic writing challenges reveal that students struggle most with skills such as paraphrasing, argumentation, and coherence development, and turn to GenAI as a compensatory strategy in these areas. The study concludes that, as Miriam Sullivan et al. (2023) argue, the pedagogical potential of these tools can only be realised alongside explicit institutional guidelines, and that Translation and Interpreting programmes urgently need AI literacy frameworks supporting informed, critical engagement with GenAI.*

**Keywords:** *artificial intelligence, translation studies, undergraduates, academic integrity, diploma paper writing.*

## Introduction

The expansion of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) tools has significantly transformed language education and Translation Studies, raising questions about academic integrity, authorship, and the evolving competences expected of future language professionals. Applications such as ChatGPT, DeepL, Gemini, and Claude have become

part of academic routines, reshaping how students approach tasks such as terminology management, text revision, summarisation, and argument development. Empirical research (Khampusaen, 2025; Neshkovska, 2025; Mun, 2024; Sawangwan, 2024) highlights a range of benefits of AI-assisted academic writing associated with the content and structure of student texts. These benefits include improvements in grammar and vocabulary, support for idea generation, immediate feedback, enhanced register awareness, increased motivation, as well as assistance with proofreading and editing. However, the literature also highlights persistent tensions between advantages and associated risks, including “students’ willingness to develop skills like writing and researching and essential cognitive processes such as problem-solving and critical thinking skills” (Dwivedi, 2023: 27), and ethical concerns related to authorship and plagiarism (Sanz-Tejeda, 2026: 10).

### **Generative AI and Academic Writing in Translation and Interpreting**

Within translation and interpreting (T&I) education, developments in GenAI are significant, as technological innovation has already reshaped professional practice and training requirements, prompting calls for the integration of AI-based tools into curricula to align student competences with labour market demands (Aleedy, Alshihri, Meshoul, 2025). At the same time, students engage with AI tools prior to formal instruction, raising questions about usage patterns, awareness, and ethical positioning in contexts where institutional guidance remains limited (Zhang & Doherty, 2025: 245-246). This is particularly relevant in language-related disciplines, where the boundary between linguistic support and ethically problematic AI-assisted production is often blurred. Therefore, transparency in the use of GenAI tools has been widely emphasised (Barrett & Pack, 2023: 18).

These developments are especially important in T&I education, where professional competence depends on the sustained development of independent analytical, interpretive, and decision-making skills. In this context, delegating cognitive tasks to GenAI risks undermining core competences central to translator training. Regular reliance on AI for terminological, syntactic, or argumentative support may reduce the cognitive effort required for skill development. This concern is supported by empirical evidence from Benjamin L. Moorhouse et al. (2025: 8), whose participants described GenAI dependence as producing cognitive “inertia” and reduced independent thinking.

These challenges are further intensified by the absence of clear institutional frameworks governing AI use in higher education, a situation that also applies to Moldova State University (MSU). Where guidelines remain underdeveloped, students often express uncertainty regarding appropriate and ethical use, and AI adoption may function more as a compensatory response to academic pressure than a deliberate pedagogical strategy. Recent studies suggest that embedding AI literacy within academic development, rather than relying on restrictive approaches, may better support responsible use (Hysaj et al., 2025; Nelson & Santamaría, 2025). While transparency and awareness of limitations remain essential, GenAI tools such as ChatGPT also demonstrate pedagogical potential, particularly in providing linguistic support and assisting with complex terminology (Sullivan, 2025: 6).

These aspects may be further positioned within broader theoretical perspectives on academic literacy. From this perspective, writing is understood as a socially situated process of knowledge construction and disciplinary participation (Lea & Street, 1998: 158), involving the development of epistemic practices and authorial voice. Within this

framework, increasing integration of GenAI raises questions regarding the delegation of cognitive and rhetorical work to external systems. This can also be interpreted through the concept of cognitive offloading, defined by Evan F. Risko and Sam J. Gilbert as “the transfer of mental processes to external technologies which, while reducing cognitive load, may also affect students’ analytical thinking” (2016: 677). Moreover, GenAI use raises questions of decreased human autonomy and agency (Krakowski, 2025), as the boundaries between student and machine-generated content become blurred, creating issues of ownership and responsibility in academic writing.

Despite the growing body of research, significant gaps remain, particularly regarding how T&I students perceive the ethical dimensions of AI-assisted academic writing. Issues related to academic integrity, authorship, and ethical use of AI have so far received limited empirical attention in the context of T&I education. The present study seeks to address this gap directly. A closer examination of these issues is especially important in relation to diploma paper writing, which constitutes a central component of higher education and plays a crucial role in students’ academic development (Campbell, 2019; Bulqiyah et al., 2021).

From a socio-cognitive perspective, academic writing is both a socially situated and individually experienced process. It is often not taught as a standalone skill, which may contribute to its perception as an auxiliary rather than central academic competence, thus weakening students’ motivation to fully develop writing proficiency. Students frequently encounter difficulties in conveying ideas into structured written discourse, a process that Laura Gonzales (2015) conceptualises as linear and demanding in its requirement for logical organisation. Moreover, academic writing is often perceived as impersonal and rigid in tone (Hyland, 2006: 35), which may distance students from a sense of intellectual ownership and reduce engagement with scholarly writing as a form of knowledge construction. Additional challenges arise at the initial stages of writing, particularly in identifying points for argumentation and retrieving relevant information. This difficulty is further complicated by pressures between personal expression and academic convention.

It is within this broad disciplinary, pedagogical, and ethical context that this research is situated. Drawing on survey data collected from third-year undergraduates enrolled in the T&I programme at MSU, this study investigates students’ perceptions of GenAI through the lens of academic integrity, with focus on diploma paper writing as the primary academic task. The study addresses the following research questions (RQ):

- RQ1: What patterns of GenAI tool use do third-year T&I undergraduates exhibit in diploma paper writing?
- RQ2: How do T&I students perceive the benefits and ethical risks of GenAI use in academic writing?
- RQ3: What academic writing challenges do T&I students encounter in diploma paper writing, and how does GenAI use relate to these challenges?

### **Research design and data collection**

The present study aims to investigate third-year undergraduates’ perceptions and use of GenAI tools in the context of academic writing. Specifically, it examines the benefits and ethical dimensions of AI use, including its impact on writing quality, critical thinking, plagiarism risks, and content reliability, while also exploring the main difficulties students encounter in writing their diploma papers.

The study involved 64 third-year undergraduate students from the English-German, English-French, and English-Italian T&I programmes at the Department of Translation, Interpretation and Applied Linguistics (DTIAL), MSU. Participants were purposively selected due to their engagement in diploma paper writing, the most complex and demanding academic writing task of their undergraduate studies. As prospective language professionals, they also represent a relevant population for investigating AI use in language-related academic writing. Data were collected in March 2026. Participation was voluntary and anonymous.

To address the study's aim, we adopted a research design that combined quantitative items with open-ended questions to capture both patterns of AI use and students' nuanced experiences. The survey instrument (see Annex 1: Survey on Academic Writing Challenges and AI Tool Use in Diploma Paper Writing) included items on students' use and perceptions of GenAI in academic writing, as well as statements addressing writing difficulties. The survey was created and distributed using Google Docs and was structured to cover several interrelated dimensions: AI usage patterns (tools, frequency, purposes, and stages of use), perceived benefits and ethical concerns, self-reported advantages and disadvantages of AI use (including concrete experiences and prompts), overall attitudes toward AI, and the main challenges encountered in writing diploma papers in English. This design enabled the examination of both AI-related practices and broader academic writing difficulties.

Quantitative data were analysed descriptively, with responses used to calculate frequency distributions and percentage values for each item. Qualitative data were examined to identify recurrent patterns in students' experiences and perceptions.

### **Data analysis and findings**

Addressing RQ1, the survey data reveal near-universal adoption of AI tools among the participants: 98.4% of respondents reported having used AI tools during their studies. ChatGPT emerged as the most widely used tool (64.1%), followed by DeepL (18.8%), Gemini (7.8%), and smaller proportions using Copilot, Quillbot, and DeepSeek. While ChatGPT dominates as a general-purpose tool, the use of DeepL, a neural machine translation platform, reflects T&I students' specific linguistic and terminological needs beyond general academic writing support.

In terms of frequency, 10.9% of students reported daily use, 31.3% weekly use, and 42.2% occasional use, with only 14.1% using AI tools rarely and 1.6% never. This indicates, when read through a socio-cognitive lens, that AI tool use has become a regular feature of academic practice for the majority of respondents. AI was used most intensively during drafting and the literature review stages, pointing to the integration of AI into the intellectual work of writing, rather than its mechanical revision. This is corroborated by students' reported AI uses, with grammar and coherence checking and summarisation being most frequent (54.7% each), followed by idea generation (43.8%), terminology management (35.9%), and paraphrasing (34.4%).

Analysis of students' prompts further illustrates the functional scope of AI use, with the most common requests positioning AI as a writing assistant for summarising, paraphrasing, grammar and tone checking, outlining, sourcing references, simplifying concepts, and identifying terminology and translation strategies, rather than as a knowledge-generation tool. Several students formulated discipline-specific prompts, such

as *“Write a list of linguists whose work is based on the study of lexical stylistic devices”, “Explain each translation technique, giving examples for better understanding”, “Summarize the arguments from the given source and give me a short overview, highlighting the main parts,” and “How to translate the word X in this context”*, underscoring the extent to which, in terms of writing practices, AI has been incorporated into the core analytical and linguistic tasks of Translation Studies.

Turning to RQ2, students expressed moderately positive views regarding the benefits of AI for academic writing. On the item *“To what extent do you agree with the following statement: AI tools save me time when writing or revising”*, 73.4% agreed or strongly agreed. This finding is consistent with qualitative responses, in which time efficiency was the most frequently cited advantage, with students describing AI as helping them *“save time for finding resources”, “expand information”, “summarise long chapters from books”, and “structure ideas coherently”*. One student characterised the advantage as follows: *“Saving time is the main and most important advantage of AI. If you run out of ideas it will give you a starting point”*.

On the item *“To what extent do you agree with the following statement: AI tools help me improve my academic writing quality”*, 48.4% agreed or strongly agreed, while 14.1% disagreed or strongly disagreed and 34.4% remained neutral, indicating a more divided perception of AI's actual impact on writing outcomes. Similarly, the item *“To what extent do you agree with the following statement: AI tools help me develop more coherent and structured arguments”* yielded 50% agreement or strong agreement, while 20.3% disagreed. The item *“To what extent do you agree with the following statement: AI tools assist me in finding accurate terminology and phrasing”*, particularly relevant in a T&I studies context, produced 54.7% agreement or strong agreement, though 25% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed, suggesting that students are already aware of AI's limitations in specialised terminological accuracy. Perhaps most telling is the item *“To what extent do you agree with the following statement: Using AI increases my confidence in academic writing”*, which recorded the lowest agreement rate among the benefit-related items, with only 32.8% agreeing or strongly agreeing and 39% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. This suggests that AI use does not uniformly enhance self-assurance, but rather reflects a tension between cognitive support and reduced authorial agency, and in some cases may even have the opposite effect. One interpretation is that students aware of ethical risks, such as plagiarism, dependence, and content unreliability, may feel uncertain about AI-assisted texts.

This ambivalence reflects a broader pattern in the data: students recognise the practical utility of GenAI while expressing significant ethical concerns about its use. These concerns constitute the second and most prominent dimension of RQ2, reflecting a shift in perceived cognitive responsibility under AI mediation, and emerge as the most significant area of concern across both the quantitative and qualitative data. On the item *“To what extent do you agree with the following statement: Relying too much on AI may reduce my own writing skills, analytical and critical thinking”*, 76.5% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed, with 48.4% expressing strong agreement. This suggests a widespread student awareness that reliance on AI may threaten the development of independent intellectual competences central to university-level education. Qualitative responses reinforce this concern in vivid terms, with students writing of *“losing creativity and originality”, “downgrade of critical thinking”, “degradation”, “damaging memory skills”, “generating inaccurate or too general information”* and becoming *“too lazy to comprehend information”*.

On the item *“To what extent do you agree with the following statement: I am concerned about plagiarism and errors when using AI tools”*, 53.1% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed,

with a further 17.2% neither agreeing nor disagreeing. Qualitative data show that concerns about plagiarism are pervasive and multifaceted, extending beyond deliberate misuse to include unintentional plagiarism caused by difficulties in distinguishing students' own ideas from AI-generated content. On the related item *"To what extent do you agree with the following statement: The boundaries between my work and AI-generated content are sometimes unclear"*, 14% agreed or strongly agreed, while 57.8% remained neutral, a result that suggests that many students may be normalising this ambiguity rather than resolving it.

The reliability of AI-generated content emerges as a closely related ethical concern. On the item *"To what extent do you agree with the following statement: AI tools sometimes generate inaccurate or fabricated information, which limits their reliability"*, 78.1% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed, with 42.2% strongly agreeing. Qualitative responses document numerous concrete experiences of AI hallucination: students report receiving *"non-existent sources"*, *"invented quotations"*, *"wrong statistics"*, *"fabricated books"*, and *"erroneous terminology"*. One student described the phenomenon as follows: *"It lies a lot, you always have to check the sources and make sure AI didn't make it up based on lots of random information found on the Internet"*. Another noted: *"It was recommending non-existing literature and would even provide some quotations of its own, while I asked to find existing sources"*. These first-person accounts lend qualitative depth to the concern about reliability and highlight the particular risks of hallucination in translation and language research, where source accuracy and terminological precision are important.

Finally, on the item *"To what extent do you agree with the following statement: Universities should provide clearer guidelines on the ethical use of AI"*, 59.4% agreed or strongly agreed, with only 1.6% strongly disagreeing. This shows that students are aware of the ethical challenges of using AI and expect their institution to provide clear guidance, which has direct implications for T&I programme policy.

When asked to characterise their overall attitude toward AI in academic writing, the largest proportion of students described AI as *"a tool used only for technical corrections"* (40.6%), followed by those who view it as *"a writing assistant supporting my ideas"* (37.5%). Only 14.1% described AI as *"a co-author collaborating equally"*, and 7.8% reported preferring not to use AI at all. These patterns suggest that students use AI mostly as a support tool rather than to generate content directly. Overall experience ratings were positive (53.1%) or neutral (43.8%), with only 3.1% reporting a negative experience and none reporting a very negative one, suggesting that despite expressed ethical concerns, students generally perceive AI as a net benefit when used carefully.

Addressing RQ3, the findings highlight the academic writing challenges that prompt GenAI use, revealing difficulties related to paraphrasing (69%), argumentation (61%), and coherence and cohesion (56%). The data confirm a pattern in writing: students struggle more with constructing and organising ideas than with grammar. At the same time, the survey data point to a set of moderate linguistic challenges, including academic vocabulary use (53%), sentence structure (41%), and referencing and citation practices (44%). Although these aspects remain problematic for a significant number of respondents, they appear to be secondary to difficulties related to argument development and source integration, which are more cognitively demanding components of academic writing.

In addition, the survey revealed a strong tendency among students to rely on digital and AI-based tools as compensatory support mechanisms in the academic writing process. Overall, 94% of respondents reported using such tools, with the majority indicating weekly (45%) or occasional (30%) use. These tools are primarily employed for paraphrasing,

summarising, generating ideas, and improving linguistic accuracy, suggesting that students delegate cognitively demanding writing tasks to AI tools. This indicates that AI technologies have become an integral part of students' writing practices. However, this reliance coexists with significant concerns: 44% of respondents were highly worried about plagiarism, and 46% felt they lacked confidence in paraphrasing. This reflects both the perceived usefulness of AI-assisted writing tools and the awareness of their potential risks, particularly in relation to academic integrity and the development of independent writing skills.

### Conclusions

This study investigated third-year T&I undergraduates' perceptions and use of GenAI tools in diploma paper writing at DTIAL. The findings show that almost all students use GenAI regularly, and that it has become a core part of their writing process, used not just for basic corrections but for more demanding tasks such as generating ideas, summarising, and structuring arguments. While students see clear practical benefits, especially in terms of efficiency and writing support, they are also well aware of the ethical risks, including over-reliance, plagiarism, and inaccurate or fabricated content.

The results also show that students often turn to GenAI to compensate for difficulties with key academic writing skills, particularly paraphrasing, argumentation, and coherence, all of which are central to T&I education. More broadly, these findings contribute to ongoing debates about authorship, cognitive engagement, and writing agency in AI-assisted environments. In the context of T&I studies specifically, they raise important questions about how growing reliance on generative AI may affect the development of the analytical, linguistic, and critical-thinking skills that are essential to translator and interpreter training.

From a pedagogical perspective, the study highlights the need to embed AI literacy into T&I curricula, going beyond academic integrity to address the cognitive, ethical, and professional dimensions of AI-assisted writing. Rather than focusing mainly on restrictions, higher education institutions should develop clear, evidence-based guidelines that encourage critical, transparent, and responsible use of GenAI tools. This approach can help students use AI as a thinking aid while maintaining independent thinking, disciplinary competence, and a sense of authorial responsibility.

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### **Annex 1. *Survey on Academic Writing Challenges and AI Tool Use in Diploma Paper Writing* (description)**

Questions Responses 64 Settings

## Survey on Academic Writing Challenges and AI Tool Use in Diploma Paper Writing

Dear 3rd-year students,

This survey aims to gather information on the challenges you encounter when writing your diploma paper, as well as on your use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools in the academic writing process. Your responses are anonymous and will be treated confidentially, being used exclusively for research purposes.

Thank you for your participation.

**1. Gender**

Female; Male

**2. Study programme**

English-German Translating and Interpreting Studies

English-French Translating and Interpreting Studies

English-Italian Translating and Interpreting Studies

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**3. Which stage of diploma paper writing do you find most difficult?**

Choosing a topic

Formulating research questions

Structuring the paper

Writing the literature review

Writing the analysis

Writing the conclusion

**4. How difficult do you find academic writing in English?**

Very difficult; Difficult; Moderately difficult; Easy; Very easy

**5. Which aspects of academic writing do you struggle with most?**

Academic vocabulary

Grammar and sentence structure

Coherence and cohesion

Argumentation

Paraphrasing and summarising

Referencing and citation

Avoiding plagiarism

**6. How confident are you in paraphrasing and avoiding plagiarism?**

Very confident; Confident; Neutral; Not very confident; Not confident at all

**7. How often do you experience difficulty expressing your ideas clearly in writing?**

Always; Often; Sometimes; Rarely; Never

**8. How often do you seek feedback on your writing?**

Very often; Often; Sometimes; Rarely; Never

**9. How do you usually cope with difficult stages of writing?**

I take a break

I seek guidance from my supervisor

I consult peers/classmates

I use AI or online tools

I work independently

I consult reference materials/model papers

**10. Do you use any non-AI tools or resources to support your writing?**

Yes; No

**11. What type of support would help you improve your academic writing?**

More writing practice

Feedback from teachers

Workshops on academic writing

Guidelines/templates

Examples of good diploma papers

Training on using AI tools responsibly

**12. What is the biggest challenge you face when writing your diploma paper?**

**13. How often do you use AI tools for academic writing?**

Daily Weekly Occasionally Rarely Never

**14. How often do you use AI tools for academic writing?**

Daily; Weekly; Occasionally; Rarely; Never

**15. Which AI tools do you use most frequently?**

ChatGPT; DeepL; Copilot; Gemini; Grammarly; Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**16. For which purposes do you use AI tools?**

Generating ideas/outlines

Paraphrasing

Translating/terminology

Grammar/coherence checking

Style improvement

Summarising sources

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**17. At which stage do you use AI tools most?**

Topic selection

Literature review

Drafting

Editing

Final proofreading

**18. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: "AI tools help me improve my academic writing quality."** (1 = strongly disagree (SD); 2 = disagree; 3= neither agree nor disagree; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree (SA))

**19. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: "AI tools save me time when writing or revising."** (1 = SD; 5 = SA)

**20. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: "AI tools help me develop more coherent and structured arguments."** (1 = SD; 5 = SA)

**21. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: "AI tools assist me in finding accurate terminology and phrasing."** (1 = SD; 5 = SA)

**22. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: "Using AI increases my confidence in academic writing."** (1 = SD; 5 = SA)

**23. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: "I am concerned about plagiarism and errors when using AI tools."** (1 = SD; 5 = SA)

**24. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: "Relying too much on AI may reduce my own writing skills, analytical and critical thinking."** (1 = SD; 5 = SA)

**25. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: "The boundaries between my work and AI-generated content are sometimes unclear."** (1 = SD; 5 = SA)

**26. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: “Universities should provide clearer guidelines on the ethical use of AI.” (1 = SD; 5 = SA)**

**27. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: “AI tools sometimes generate inaccurate or fabricated information (“hallucinations”), which limits their reliability in academic writing.” (1 = SD; 5 = SA)**

**28. How would you describe your overall attitude toward AI?**

AI as a writing assistant (supporting my ideas)

AI as a co-author (collaborating equally)

AI as a technical tool (used only for technical corrections)

I prefer not to use AI at all

**29. In your opinion, what are the main advantages of using AI in writing your diploma paper?**

**30. What are the main risks or disadvantages you perceive when using AI in academic writing?**

**31. Please describe any positive and/or negative experiences you have had while using AI in your research project/ diploma writing process.**

**32. List three prompts that you gave to an AI tool to receive support with academic writing tasks.**

**33. Overall, how would you rate your experience with AI tools in academic writing?**

Very positive; Positive; Neutral; Negative; Very negative

