

MITIGATING DIGITAL UNETHICAL PRACTICES AMONG EFL LEARNERS



Dr. Latifa SELLAM *

University of Saida Dr. Tahar Moulay

sellam.magda@yahoo.fr

Date of submission: 02/09/2025 Date of acceptance: 22/11/2025 Date of publication: 16/12/2025

Abstract: Collaboration among the department's teachers can be directed towards complementarity. Therefore, embracing this approach, in the sense of a jigsaw, has been proven to be an effective teaching method in conveying language items. Indeed, they can move beyond this epistemic role and unite their efforts to combat misconduct, particularly during examinations. A qualitative methodology was deemed relevant to the scope. By means of teachers' unstructured interviews and students' casual conversations, we addressed the concern of cheating in exams. The sampling consisted of 10 teachers belonging to the department of English Language and Literature at Saida University. They have encountered unresolved cases of striking similarities in answers, as well as exceptional responses from students who are otherwise of average learning ability. The question was, therefore, how the phenomenon could be possible with smartphone use prohibition. According to students' confessions, who tend to normalise this widespread malpractice, it is perceived as the only way to submit convincing answers and avoid the threat of repeating a year or, to a lesser extent, facing a resit exam. The results posited that by being proactive, an anti-misconduct policy can be implemented to eradicate those practices. Therefore, a corporate of digital proficiency should be part of the instructors' assets.

Keywords: Anti-misconduct; Collaboration; EFL learners; Misconduct; Proactiveness

Introduction: The present review article addresses a widespread issue at the University of Saida, which is digital dishonesty. Therefore,

* Corresponding Author

there seems to be an informal consensus among the department' teachers upon ethically using the AI to fruitfully contributing in building knowledge. However, this statement crashes other realities that tend to be far from what was expected. Accordingly, the instructors are grappling regarding that concern. Now, the matter at issue is that the AI that is supposed to be a heuristic assistant is pervasively invading learners' minds with all levels combined and altering creativity. This review addresses the most preoccupying concern in the learning process, which is the formative and summative assessment. Therefore, a natural flow of learning the target language is crucially important. This process can guarantee both a genuine occurrence of language attainment as well as authentic evaluation. It is perhaps a fool's errand for most of the teachers, notably the interviewees, to convince learners submitting human-performed endeavours, not machine-generated works, to fake them and pretend that these are theirs. Such academic misconduct is gaining ground among EFL students, and teachers are afraid that this tendency to normalise malpractice will turn one day against non-conformists. The study has one correlational research question, which is: To what extent does the AI constitute a threat to the normal process of learning the target language? And how to deal with academic ethics issues, particularly during the critical period of assessment?

It is therefore speculated, or perhaps more accurately believed, that humanity will endure a significant loss if the integration of technology does not proceed effectively. At the tertiary level, for instance, learners' reliance—more precisely, dependence—on these tools is markedly evident. Now, what worsened the matter is that they alter natural intelligence by the artificial one in every single academic duty, and that is what is burdening educational staff; this entails class/home assignments, tests, and quizzes. As a result, teachers are expressing their worries with regard to this malpractice. The purpose of this manuscript that encompasses theoretical and practical facets then is to link learning considerations with academic success parameters, while discarding practices that are non-compliant or even unethical.

THE FIRST TOPIC

THE BODY OF THE REVIEW

To address the matter at hand, it is particularly important to display the related literature. Perceived competence is a belief that one has skills in a particular area (e.g., maths, spelling, peer relationships). Self-esteem and perceived competence are necessary for students to take

risks in their learning and to bounce back after failure or adversity. Low self-esteem or lack of confidence leaves students doubting their ability to succeed, making them hesitant to engage in learning or take appropriate academic growth risks. Self-esteem is often built and buttressed through estimable acts and achievements—even small ones. According to the American Psychological Association (APA), self-esteem is the degree to which students feel satisfied with themselves and feel valuable and worthy of respect¹.

Self-esteem

Self-esteem is an internal influence or potential outcome that signifies an individual's overall evaluation of their competence about their self-value (Priya et al., 2019). A connection has been identified between academic accomplishment and self-esteem (Kasyoka, 2023). A study by Batista et al. (2022) discovered a meaningful and positive link between self-esteem and academic success among university students. Additionally, it revealed that engaging in physical exercise among middle-school students boosted their self-concept, self-esteem, and academic performance. Perveen et al. (2022) identified a notably positive connection between self-esteem and academic achievement. Regarding self-esteem, gender variations were noted, indicating higher levels among female participants than males. However, gender disparities were deemed insignificant concerning academic achievement. It is essential to acknowledge that while self-esteem is important, it might not be the exclusive factor determining academic success.

1. Students Experiencing Low Self-esteem or Low Perceptions of Competence APA Mental Health Primers

Self-confidence

The parallel considerations are worth mentioning, like study habits and physical activity, which have influenced academic achievement. Therefore, a comprehensive examination of multiple variables is necessary to understand the relationship between self-esteem and academic performance. Females displayed higher self-esteem, self-efficacy, and academic performance levels than males. Research established a notable positive association among adolescents between confidence in oneself, belief in personal capabilities, and success in academics, demonstrating that higher levels of confidence in oneself and belief in personal capabilities corresponded to improved academic

performance (Christy & Mythili, 2020). Predictive and descriptive modelling has established evidence of the connection between self-esteem and achievement. The study showcases a favourable connection between self-esteem and academic achievement (Jayanthi et al., 2018).

Environmental Considerations

Several factors have been identified as necessary in predicting academic achievement. These factors include mental health, financial situation, relationships with cohabitants and peers, repeating a course, cumulative average level of achievement, and year of admission to the university (Guerrero-López et al., 2023). The study conducted by Musaddiq et al. (2022) found that spatial and behavioural factors, such as students' academic success, are significantly influenced by their location-based characteristics and behavioural patterns across different semesters. Additionally, a study by Razak et al. (2021) uncovered that a prominent cause of low academic performance is a lack of self-confidence, often stemming from the pressure to prove oneself, particularly to family expectations. This lack of confidence impacts concentration and quality study time, both crucial for achieving success in academic pursuits. Other potential factors that can influence academic achievement include mental health, self-esteem, motivation, engagement, family relationships, and social support (Zhang & Li, 2020). Students with poor mental health may experience difficulties in managing their time, staying motivated, and coping with academic pressures, which can ultimately impact their academic achievement (Yuyao Jiang, 2022).

Anxiety

Anxiety accompanying performance might be among the prominent factors resulting in malpractice for some learners and despair for others. Accordingly, there is a blatant presence of all forms of cheating normalisation when suboptimal performance is conceived as intolerable while others do well. Likewise, trying to find flimsy excuses warranting a low-grade obtention is another facet of the spectrum, in addition to unfamiliarity with the concept and entailments of academic dishonesty. Moreover, pervasive ignorance of what unethicalities can bring as harm to students' self-satisfaction and careers, because they cannot outlook outcomes. Eventually, these dynamics are viewed as defence mechanisms or resilience when moral standards are not at work.

Embracing Unethical Practices

The other side of the sphere encompasses embracing unethical behaviours in handling school affairs. Scholars in the field of education have investigated and reported the stemmed causes of the phenomenon, as well as under which circumstances students might find refuge. Literature on academic dishonesty cites a number of factors that contribute to dishonest academic practices (Whitley and Keith-Spiegel, 2002). Contributing factors include performance anxiety; Excuse making; Situations that encourage academic dishonesty; Self-justification habits; Unfamiliarity with what constitutes academic dishonesty; Lack of understanding about consequences. The cited factors vary in degree, intensity, and spread.

THE SECOND TOPIC THE METHOD OF THE REVIEW

The method outlined for this review constitutes the roadmap for presenting the participants, research instruments, findings, and finally the discussion, before moving on to the final phase, which is the conclusion and future guidelines.

Participants

The study group consisted of ten (10) teachers from different fields of expertise. The post-examination phase revealed a lot regarding students' handling of academic duties. Therefore, the interviewees were deploring the fact of resorting to the AI in every single task achievement. They have spotted some anomalous cases, like similarities between different exam sheets, sophisticated answers, and advanced terminology emanating from average proficiency-level learners. Although the anti-cheating measures were taken, however, this device seemed sufficiently dissuasive, but some cheating practices remained undetected.

Instruments

The unstructured interview aligned with the study's intent, which was collecting the teachers' stances and recommendations regarding unethical academic behaviour, i.e., cheating in exams and submitting fake answers predominantly AI-generated. Therefore, in order to obtain a consistent feedback, casual conversations were undertaken aiming at spotting students' perspectives on this matter. This is the study's roadmap to tackle the sensitive components of the topic in hand. In fact,

the observed phenomenon is increasingly ascendant, and educational staff has to react as urgently as possible to confront it.

Key Findings

According to the interviewees, today's students, who are rather cybernised, favour electronic handling of educational affairs, which turned progressively to a tech-reliance. Furthermore, most of them are heavy users of technology, and only 04% can generate personal productions, when it comes to summative and formative assessments. Teachers also highlighted the fact that there is a lack of self-confidence and self-esteem. Likewise, apprehension towards writing is among salient students' fears, since they flee personal style adoption.

Discussion

The above-mentioned assets appeared to be of pivotal need for good learning performance, therefore, satisfactory learning outcomes. Besides, linguistic knowledge is viewed as foundational. There is, however, much debate currently around the fact that a language learner has to take his responsibility upon learning and that self-regulated students are likely to be the most successful learners because they can take charge of their learning. Instructors, then, whose role consists of monitoring, guiding, and facilitating, can just be, to some extent, knowledge transmitters and facilitators. The new role attributed to them hereafter consists of police officers safeguarding ethics and normative academic practices, rather than coaching.

THE THIRD TOPIC CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Educational staff should be all involving into an anti-misconduct campaign to better manage malpractice in general, notably using the AI unethically. Therefore, drastic measures should be undertaken to make end, or at least, mitigate the phenomenon at issue. Efforts therefore, should be directed toward limiting the AI use in class-daily assignments to gauge the true students' performance, and then identify their genuine potentials. In formal exams, on the other hand, the artificial intelligence should be strictly prohibited via enforcing restrictions upon electronic assistance. Likewise, teachers should further encourage personal initiatives in academic tasks performance. In

addition, they should be deploring or exhibiting the unworthiness of those tools in the process of learning. Thus, undermining machine generated contributions, no matter small the endeavour is. Eventually, empowering digital literacy is part of the strategy by implementing AI trackers and detectors in everyday-class and amid assessment periods. The following are some riders:

- Proactiveness suggests the fact of being prepared and taking control over an upcoming or urgent situation, thence, instructors have to be proactive about their students' struggles and needs. According to Webster (2025) proactive means acting in anticipation of future problems, needs, or changes

- Teachers have to consider confiscating smartphones when assigning students.

- Based on students' revelations, they use the AI with all its types mainly to meet instructors' expectations that tend to be much above their abilities.

- On the other hand, students' passiveness has a part to play in the AI overuse.

- However, tutors play a crucial role in decreasing the tech-reliance among learners, as they have to consider making further effort suggesting curriculums involving critical thinking and autonomy, alongside the terminology needed to cover content.

- Correspondingly, equipping them with relevant strategies homogenously conducive to learning language items.

.On the other hand, training courses should be offered to teachers so they may successfully include artificial intelligence tools into systems of student support and counseling (Abdelkader, 2025).

. By the same token, future AI-powered counseling programs will evolve into integrated systems that deliver precise and personalized services while balancing technological advancements with human values. The primary goal will remain improving individuals' quality of life and fostering their potential while ensuring adherence to ethical and professional standards (Boutaraa & Soufi, 2025).

In sum, instructors have to show resilience and comprehensiveness

in combating all forms of digital dishonesty, and this by rehabilitating students to trust themselves and restore self-reliance and confidence as well. “People who tend to react to a problem only when it has gotten serious could be called reactive people. Until recently, reactive (in this sense) did not really have an antonym. So, proactive was coined to describe the kind of person who is always looking into the future in order to be prepared for anything. A good parent attempts to be proactive on behalf of his or her children, trying to imagine the problems they might be facing in a few months or years.” (Webster, 2025)

Bibliography List

Books

Whitley, B. E., Jr., & Keith-Spiegel, P. (2002). *Academic dishonesty: An educator's guide*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publisher.

Journal articles

Abdelkader, H. (2025). Artificial Intelligence techniques in the service of educational guidance: Opportunities and challenges. *Qabas Journal of Studies Human and Social*, 09(1), 1640–1653.

[https://scholar.google.com/scholar?q=Abdelkader,+H.+\(2025\).+Artificial+Intelligence+techniques+in+the+service...&hl=fr&as_sdt=0&as_vis=1&oi=scholar](https://scholar.google.com/scholar?q=Abdelkader,+H.+(2025).+Artificial+Intelligence+techniques+in+the+service...&hl=fr&as_sdt=0&as_vis=1&oi=scholar)

Batista, M., Ramos, L., Santos, J., Serrano, J., Petrica, J., & Honório, S. (2022). Exercise Influence on Self-Concept, Self-Esteem and Academic Achievement in Middle-School Children. *Revista Romaneasca Pentru Educatie Multidimensionala*, 14(4 Sup.1), 369–398.

<https://doi.org/10.18662/rrem/14.4Sup1/678> Accessed 07 March 2025 at 02pm

Boutaraa, I., & Soufi, N. (2025). AI Supported Guidance and Counseling Programs: A Theoretical Vision for a Guidance Program in the Context of Artificial Intelligence. *AL-Rawaiz Review*, 09(1), 522–541. https://doi.org/ai-supported-guidance-and-counseling-programs-_a-theoretical-vision-for-a-guidance-program-in-the-context-of-artificial-intelligence.pdf

Christy, X. I., & Mythili, T. (2020). Self-esteem, Self-efficacy and Academic achievement among Adolescents. *Journal of Indian Association for Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, 16(2), 123–135.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0973134220200209> Accessed 07 March 2025 at 02pm

Guerrero-López, J. B., Monterrosas, A. M., Reyes-Carmona, C., Guerrero, A. A., Navarrete-Martínez, A., Morones, F. F., Flores-Ramos, M., & Hernández-Ruiz, H. F. (2023). Factors related to academic achievement in medical students. *Salud Mental*, 46(4), 193–200.

<https://doi.org/10.17711/SM.0185-3325.2023.024> Accessed 07 March 2025 at 03pm

Jayanthi, M., Kumar, R., & Swathi, S. (2018). Investigation on association of self-esteem and students' achievement in academics. *International Journal of Grid and Utility Computing*, 9, 211.

<https://doi.org/10.1504/IJGUC.2018.093976> Accessed 07 March 2025 at 03pm

Kasyoka, A. (2023). Self-Esteem, Study Habits and Academic Achievement among University Students. *African Journal of Education and Practice*, 9(2), 43–53.

<https://doi.org/10.47604/ajep.1995> Accessed 07 March 2025 at 03pm

Musaddiq, M. H., Sarfraz, M. S., Shafi, N., Maqsood, R., Azam, A., & Ahmad, M. (2022). Predicting the Impact of Academic Key Factors and Spatial Behaviors on Students' Achievement. *Applied Sciences*, 12(19), 10112.

<https://doi.org/10.3390/app121910112> Accessed 07 March 2025 at 03pm

Perveen, S., Ikram, H., & Nisa, Q. U. (2021). RELATIONSHIP AMONG LIFESATISFACTION, SELF-ESTEEM, AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN PAKISTAN. *Humanities & Social Sciences Reviews*, 9(3), 406–417.

<https://doi.org/10.18510/hssr.2021.9341> Accessed 13 Aug.2025 02:45pm

Priya, S., Venkatesan, L., Mary, H. R., Vijayalakshmi, K., et al. (2019). Impact of self-esteem upon academic performance of college students. *International Journal of Advance Research, Ideas and Innovations in Technology*, 5(6). Retrieved from

www.ijariit.com. Accessed 07 March 2025 at 03pm

Razak, W. Alia Izzati, W. Binti. Khairul, N, A Akmal. et al. (2021). Factors Affecting Student's Academic Performance. *International Journal on Perceptive and Cognitive Computing* 7 (1):99-107.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/353480670_Factors_Affecting_Student's_Academic_Performance Accessed 07 March 2025 at 03pm

Jiang, Y. (2022). Statistical analysis of several factors in predicting student achievement. International Conference on Statistics, *Applied Mathematics, and Computing Science* (CSAMCS 2021)

<https://doi.org/10.1117/12.2628062> Accessed on 12 Aug.2025 04:30pm

Zhang, L., & Li, K. F. (2020). Factors for Academic Achievement Prediction (pp. 447–457)

https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-44038-1_41 Accessed 07 March 2025 02:30pm

Dictionaries

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Proactive. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary. Retrieved August 13, 2025, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/proactive>