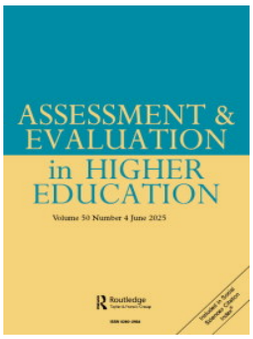

Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education

ISSN: 0260-2938 (Print) 1469-297X (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/caeh20

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To cite this article: Chahna Gonsalves (2025) Addressing student non-compliance in AI use declarations: implications for academic integrity and assessment in higher education, Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 50:4, 592-606, DOI: 10.1080/02602938.2024.2415654

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2024.2415654

ASSESSMENT & EVALUATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION
2025, VOL. 50, NO. 4, 592–606
https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2024.2415654

Addressing student non-compliance in AI use declarations: implications for academic integrity and assessment in higher education

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the factors driving student non-compliance with AI use declarations in academic assessments at King's Business School, where 74% of students failed to declare AI usage despite declaration being a requirement of a mandatory coursework coversheet. Utilising the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) as a framework, the research combines service evaluation survey data and semi-structured interviews to explore how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control influence compliance. Findings reveal that fear of academic repercussions, ambiguous guidelines, inconsistent enforcement, and peer influence are key barriers to AI use declaration. These factors complicate the declaration process, undermine transparency, and challenge academic integrity. The study extends the TPB model by highlighting the ethical and practical dilemmas posed by generative AI, which blur traditional norms of academic integrity. This research offers critical insights for policymakers, suggesting that clear, consistent, and trust-based policies are crucial in fostering ethical AI use. The findings underscore the importance of transparent communication and supportive institutional cultures to improve compliance. Ultimately, this study informs policy development by evaluating the effectiveness of declaration mechanisms and providing actionable recommendations to promote a culture of academic integrity in the evolving landscape of AI technologies.

KEYWORDS

Academic integrity; generative AI; AI declaration; compliance

Introduction

Students' rapid adoption of generative AI technologies, particularly tools like ChatGPT, has introduced significant challenges to academic integrity within higher education. Generative AI refers to technologies capable of autonomously producing content in various formats, including text, images, audio, and code (Moorhouse, Yeo, and Wan 2023). The sophistication of these tools blurs the lines between original student work and machine-generated content, threatening core principles of academic honesty and intellectual integrity (Hutson 2024). Large language models (LLMs) like GPT further exacerbate this issue by generating coherent, human-like text that is increasingly difficult to distinguish from student-authored content (Kumar and Mindzak 2024).

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Supplemental data for this article can be accessed online at https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2024.2415654.

The academic community is concerned that students might misuse these technologies to complete assessments, bypassing authentic learning processes and undermining academic integrity (Abbas, Jam, and Khan 2024). Indeed, a survey from early 2023 revealed that 30% of students used AI tools like ChatGPT for their assignments, with 17% submitting AI-generated content without edits (Welding 2023). This underscores the broader challenge of maintaining academic integrity in contexts like King's Business School. In response, universities have adopted varied approaches: some have banned generative AI or employed detection tools, while others permit and even encourage its use with appropriate acknowledgment (Perkins 2023; Sullivan, Kelly, and McLaughlan 2023; Xiao, Chen, and Bao 2023). This divergence highlights the urgent need for clear, consistent, and research-informed guidelines that ensure students understand and comply with ethical AI use in education.

Before the widespread availability of tools like ChatGPT, plagiarism in academic contexts was relatively straightforward, relying on the acknowledgment of original authors through citation (Nabee, Mageto, and Pisa 2020). However, the release of ChatGPT in 2022 fundamentally altered this dynamic, challenging traditional concepts of authorship and originality. AI-generated content can now be nearly indistinguishable from human-authored work (Hutson 2024; Luo 2024a). This shift disrupts established paradigms of written assignments, which have traditionally served as key components of academic assessment, reflecting students' understanding, intellectual engagement, and ability to articulate original ideas (Ritchhart, Church, and Morrison 2011). The integration of AI in text generation risks undermining students' analytical and writing skills, complicating the assessment process, and directly impacts teaching, writing, and research objectives (Perkins et al. 2024). Furthermore, the blurring of authorship resulting from human-AI collaborative writing complicates regulatory and pedagogical approaches in higher education (Kumar and Mindzak 2024).

In response to these challenges, some universities have implemented policies requiring students to acknowledge AI use or cite AI-generated content, often through a coursework coversheet. These coversheets, attached to student assignments, provide essential information about the student, the module, and the assignment (Bloxham and Campbell 2010). Traditionally, coversheets have been key tools for promoting academic integrity, informing students of procedural requirements like plagiarism declarations (Voce 2015). In digital assessments, they serve as vital mechanisms for conveying academic integrity guidelines (Mulcahy and Goodacre 2004; Walker 2010) often requiring signed declarations or electronic acknowledgments for online submissions (Velliaris and Breen 2016). Despite their longstanding use, limited research exists on their effectiveness in capturing AI use information. While studies on coversheets specific to AI-related academic integrity are sparse, extensive literature highlights their role in fostering dialogue between assessors and students, enhancing student engagement in feedback, and supporting academic integrity (Bloxham and Campbell 2010; Arts, Jaspers, and Joosten-ten Brinke 2021; Harris, Blundell-Birtill, and Pownall 2023). This study seeks to fill the gap by examining the effectiveness of coversheet interventions in capturing AI use, while also acknowledging their broader applications in higher education.

An emerging stream of research focuses on the implications of generative AI on institutional academic integrity policies, transparency and guidelines, examining how these technologies challenge traditional notions of originality and ethical practices in assessments (Moorhouse, Yeo, and Wan 2023; Jin et al. 2024; Luo 2024a; McDonald et al. 2024; Perkins and Roe 2024). Moorhouse, Yeo, and Wan (2023) analysed 50 leading global higher education institutions and found that 57% had guidelines for AI use, primarily advising students to acknowledge AI use or cite AI-generated content. However, the case of King's Business School reflects that even with such guidelines, enforcement and student compliance are significant challenges, emphasising the need for context-specific interventions. Despite guidelines emphasising honesty and transparency, students often fear negative perceptions or potential marking down by teachers, making AI use declarations problematic (Luo 2024a; Tan, Alhammad, and Stelmaszak 2024). Addressing these challenges through targeted research and policy development is essential to preserving the integrity of assessments, especially as AI's role in academia continues to expand.

This study explores why students at King's Business School often fail to declare AI use in assessments on a mandatory coursework coversheet introduced in the 2023–2024 academic year. By examining the factors behind this non-compliance, the research aims to shed light on students' understanding, attitudes, and perceived risks related to AI in academic work. The findings will help develop strategies to promote transparency and uphold academic integrity in the AI era.

The research questions guiding this study are:

1. What are the reasons behind student non-compliance with AI use declarations at King's Business School?
2. How does non-compliance impact perceptions of academic integrity and assessment practices?
3. What strategies can be developed to improve compliance and ensure transparency in AI use in academic settings?

In addressing these issues, the study fills a crucial gap in the literature and offers practical solutions to enhance academic integrity amidst the growing influence of generative AI technologies. By focusing on coursework coversheets, it provides a unique perspective on challenges facing higher education, contributing valuable theoretical insights and actionable recommendations for educators, policymakers, and institutions worldwide.

Literature review

The Theory of Planned Behaviour and academic integrity

Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) offers a robust framework for understanding and predicting behaviours across various domains, including academic misconduct. TPB posits that behaviour is influenced by three key components: attitudes towards the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control, which collectively shape behavioural intentions as immediate predictors of actual behaviour. These three core components are key to predicting and explaining a wide range of behaviours, including academic integrity and ethical decision-making (Harding et al. 2007; Khathayut, Walker-Gleaves, and Humble 2022). In this study, where students must declare AI tool usage in academic work, TPB offers a valuable lens to explore why students comply or fail to comply with this requirement.

TPB has been widely applied to academic integrity behaviours such as cheating and plagiarism (e.g. Passow et al. 2006; Stone, Jawahar, and Kisamore 2009; Imran and Nordin 2013; Khathayut, Walker-Gleaves, and Humble 2022). However, the challenges introduced by generative AI require further exploration within this framework (Ivanov et al. 2024). The integration of generative AI offers a unique opportunity to extend the model, as the evolving technology blurs the lines between human authorship and machine assistance, complicating traditional notions of academic honesty. AI's rapid adoption introduces new complexities, reshaping student attitudes, norms, and perceived control in ways that differ significantly from conventional forms of misconduct. Applying TPB to AI use offers insights into compliance with academic integrity policies, while highlighting the need for a more nuanced understanding of its core components in the context of AI. Revisiting and expanding TPB is essential to account for the transformative impact of emerging technologies on academic behaviour.

Attitudes towards AI use and academic integrity

Attitudes, defined as an individual's favourable or unfavourable evaluation of a specific behaviour (Ajzen 1991), are critical in determining whether students declare their use of AI tools in assessments. Research indicates that attitudes significantly influence the intention to engage in or avoid academic misconduct. For instance, Stone, Jawahar, and Kisamore (2010) show that attitudes

towards academic dishonesty, such as cheating, directly impact students' intentions to engage in such behaviours. This finding aligns with Beck and Ajzen (1991), which identified attitudes as a key predictor of dishonest actions, including cheating and lying to avoid academic responsibilities.

Park and Blenkinsopp (2009) assert that attitudes are shaped by beliefs about the consequences of behaviour. In the context of AI usage, students who perceive AI tools as beneficial for improving the quality of their work may develop positive attitudes towards their use. However, these positive attitudes may conflict with academic integrity expectations, particularly if students fear that declaring AI usage might result in penalties or lower grades (Luo 2024a). This tension underscores the need for clear and consistent institutional policies that guide students on the ethical use of AI, helping to align their attitudes with academic integrity standards. Many students recognise that hiding AI use is academically dishonest but may still choose non-declaration due to perceived pressures or potential academic benefit (Beck and Ajzen 1991). This moral conflict emphasises the importance of educational institutions addressing attitudinal discrepancies by fostering clear policies and a culture of transparency (Tan, Alhammad, and Stelmaszak 2024).

Subjective norms and peer influence

Subjective norms, defined as the perceived social pressures to perform or avoid certain behaviours (Ajzen 1991), are shaped by the expectations of peers, instructors, and institutional policies. Seminal research demonstrates that individuals often conform to group behaviour, even when it conflicts with their ethical standards (Asch 1951). McCabe and Trevino (1993) found that students were more likely to cheat if they believed their peers were doing the same. Similarly, Ivanov et al. (2024) showed that when non-declaration of AI use is common within a peer group, students are less likely to comply with declaration requirements, reflecting how subjective norms influence academic dishonesty (Stone, Jawahar, and Kisamore 2009).

Subjective norms are also shaped by institutional culture. If students believe that faculty members tacitly accept or overlook AI usage, non-compliance with AI declarations may become normalised (Simkin and McLeod 2010). Addressing non-compliance thus requires a concerted community effort, where both students and educators are actively engaged in promoting ethical standards through open discussions about AI use, setting clear expectations and ensuring that faculty members consistently enforce declaration policies (McCabe and Trevino 1993).

Perceived behavioural control and the ease of compliance

Perceived behavioural control relates to the ease or difficulty of performing a behaviour, influenced by both internal and external constraints (Ajzen 1991). In this context, it involves students' perceptions of their ability to comply with AI declaration requirements. When students feel capable of understanding and following the rules, they are more likely to comply (Ajzen 2002). However, perceived barriers—such as unclear guidelines or fear of unfair penalties—can reduce students' perceived control over their ability to comply. Studies by McCabe, Trevino, and Butterfield (2002) and Harding et al. (2007) suggest that students are more likely to engage in dishonest behaviour when they perceive the risks of non-compliance as low due to lax enforcement or ambiguity in policies. TPB thus provides a robust structure for exploring how perceived control influences students' decisions regarding AI declarations.

The role of institutional policies and trust

The effectiveness of institutional policies in promoting AI use declarations hinges on clarity, consistency, and the trust students place in the system. The literature on academic misconduct

suggests that trust in the institution and its policies is a critical factor in promoting ethical behaviour (Carless 2013). The concept of 'two-way transparency' (Luo 2024b) highlights that while students must declare their AI use, institutions must be transparent about how such declarations will be assessed and the consequences of non-compliance. When students trust that AI declarations will be fairly evaluated, they are more likely to comply. Conversely, fear of negative outcomes—such as harsher grading or academic penalties—can lead to students withholding information, thereby undermining the policy's effectiveness (Tan, Alhammad, and Stelmaszak 2024).

Academic integrity and the evolving nature of plagiarism

Traditional concepts of plagiarism include various behaviours that misrepresent the origin and authorship of academic work: (1) Sham paraphrasing (verbatim copying acknowledged as paraphrased); (2) Illicit paraphrasing (paraphrasing without proper acknowledgment); (3) Other plagiarism (copying another student's work with their knowledge); (4) Verbatim copying (word-for-word copying without citation); (5) Recycling (submitting the same work for different courses); (6) Ghost-writing (third-party written work submitted as one's own); and (7) Purloining (copying without the original author's knowledge) (Walker 1998). Generative AI complicates these forms by enabling students to produce text that can be passed off as their own. Failing to declare AI assistance mirrors ghost-writing, while AI-generated content without acknowledgment resembles verbatim copying or illicit paraphrasing. This non-compliance misrepresents students' capabilities, undermining academic integrity (Hutson 2024).

As the boundaries of authorship evolve, institutions must update their definitions of plagiarism to explicitly include AI-generated content and provide guidelines for proper attribution (Moorhouse, Yeo, and Wan 2023). Beyond requiring AI use declarations, it's crucial to educate students on the ethical implications of AI-assisted work and the importance of transparency in academic submissions (Jin et al. 2024).

By applying TPB to AI use declarations, institutions can better understand the factors driving student non-compliance and develop policies that promote a culture of transparency and integrity. Educators and policymakers can adapt practices to address these influences and ensure compliance with academic integrity standards.

Context

In October 2023, King's Business School introduced a coursework coversheet to address academic integrity concerns related to generative AI. This was the first formal AI guidance developed by a working group, which required students to acknowledge their use of AI but lacked a mechanism for them to do so. The coursework coversheet was then revised to include a section for students to declare their AI use, correcting this oversight in the policy. Students were required either to declare that no AI tools were used or to specify how AI contributed to their work (see Supplementary Material Appendix 1). Despite this, compliance was low, with up to 74% of students across undergraduate and postgraduate modules failing to complete the AI declaration. Other sections of the coversheet, such as the anonymous candidate identification number, were routinely filled out, while the AI declaration was frequently left blank. This raises important questions about students' understanding and attitudes towards AI usage in academic work.

The coversheet was made available through Moodle, aligning with the university's broader AI guidance, which emphasises transparency in AI use but does not require students to cite AI tools as authoritative sources. Instead, students were expected to acknowledge tools like ChatGPT, Midjourney, Quillbot, or Grammarly. The policy stated that as long as AI use was acknowledged and followed assessment guidelines, it would not negatively impact grades. Understanding why students did not comply with this requirement is crucial for refining AI-related academic integrity policies.

Methodology

This study uses a single case study methodology, effective for addressing complex 'how' and 'why' questions within a specific real-life context (Yin 2003). Focusing on King's Business School during the 2023–2024 academic year, this approach enables an in-depth examination of AI declaration policies and their impact on student behaviour. While not offering the broad generalisability of large-scale surveys or experimental designs, case studies provide rich insights into unique dynamics, capturing subtleties that alternative methods may overlook (Ellinger, Watkins, and Marsick 2005). This method is particularly suited for investigating AI use and academic integrity, where context-dependent factors are crucial in shaping behaviour (Creswell 2003). This case study offers insights that can inform policy and practice at the focal institution and others considering or evaluating AI declarations.

A sequential mixed-methods approach was used, incorporating an initial anonymous service evaluation survey (see Supplementary Material Appendix 2), followed by semi-structured interviews (Creswell 2003). The survey invitation was sent to all full-time undergraduate and postgraduate students *via* Moodle announcements. Given the sensitive nature of AI use, a low response rate was expected, and a raffle entry to win a £50 e-shopping voucher was offered as an incentive.

The interviews, the primary data source, explored themes identified in the survey. Seventeen semi-structured interviews were conducted *via* Microsoft Teams, lasting between 56 min and 1 h 43 min, with participants from various programs, across all levels within the Business School. The interview schedule focused on key themes such as students' perceptions of AI use, perceived risks, the role of instructors and peers, and responses to the AI declaration process. Participants received £30 for participation. Following explanation of the study aims, participants consented to video recording and anonymisation upon transcription.

Data were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006, 2023). Initial coding identified and tagged significant segments of data that conveyed participants' expressed views, followed by theory-driven and emergent coding aligned with TPB dimensions. Iterative refinement ensured coherence and distinctiveness in the themes. As the sole researcher, I strived for reflexivity and transparency through multiple data readings, reflective journaling, and critically engaging with the analysis process to mitigate potential biases (Ruona 2005).

Results

Survey overview and sample characteristics

The initial survey aimed to gather insights into the reasons behind student non-compliance with AI use declarations at King's Business School. The sensitive nature of the topic likely contributed to a low response rate, with only 57 students providing valid responses, representing 3.7% of the population. The sample comprised a diverse mix of undergraduate (63%) and postgraduate (37%) participants, with undergraduates spread across different years: 16% were in their first year, 21% in their second year, and 26% in their third year. The participants represented a range of disciplines, including Business Management (23%), Economics and Management (9%), Accounting and Finance (5%), and various other specialised programs such as International Management, Economics, and Computer Science with Management. Additionally, 79% of respondents reported using AI tools, and the majority were either very familiar (42%) or extremely familiar (28%) with AI, indicating a high level of engagement with these technologies across the sample. Despite the low response, the survey provided crucial insights that informed the design of the subsequent interviews, prompting a deeper exploration into the factors behind non-compliance.

Key findings

AI tool usage and declaration compliance. The survey revealed that 79% of students reported using AI tools like ChatGPT, Grammarly, and Quillbot in their coursework. Yet, only 65% of these students reported consistently completing the AI declaration on their coursework coversheets. The primary reasons for non-compliance included fears of academic repercussions, such as potential grade penalties or accusations of misconduct, and confusion over what constitutes AI use that must be declared. This reflects TPB's 'attitudes' component, as students' negative evaluations of the potential consequences of declaring AI use deterred compliance.

Perception of the AI declaration process. Many students found the AI declaration process unclear and intimidating, with significant variations in how it was emphasised across different modules. This inconsistency led to uncertainty about what to declare and how it would be assessed, which relates to perceived behavioural control, as students felt unsure of their ability to comply due to unclear guidelines. Students expressed a need for clearer guidelines, suggesting that the university should provide more consistent communication and examples of what constitutes acceptable AI use. They also recommended that the declaration process should be simplified to alleviate fears and confusion.

Thematic analysis of interviews on student non-compliance

The interview data revealed five key themes—fear of academic consequences, ambiguity and lack of clarity in guidelines, belief that AI use should remain private, perceived inconsistency in enforcement, and the role of peer influence and competition—which offer a nuanced understanding of student non-compliance. Each theme aligns with TPB's framework, reflecting attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control that shape students' intentions to declare AI use.

Fear of academic consequences

A pervasive theme among students was the fear of academic repercussions associated with declaring AI use. This fear is deeply rooted in concerns about being unfairly judged or penalised, despite adhering to institutional policies. Many students perceived the act of declaring AI use as a potential risk which could lead to accusations of misconduct or even allegations of plagiarism. As one student vividly described, 'It seems like a bit of a trap, like you're admitting to plagiarism. By declaring, you're also exposing yourself to more risk and attention.'

This sentiment highlights a significant psychological barrier to compliance: the fear that transparency could backfire, turning a declaration into an admission of guilt. This aligns with the 'attitudes' aspect of TPB, where students' negative evaluations of AI use declarations drive their non-compliance. Students expressed anxiety about the subjective nature of grading, fearing that markers might interpret AI use as a lack of originality or effort. This is especially problematic in an academic environment where the distinction between AI assistance and academic dishonesty remains ambiguous. Another student captured this dilemma succinctly: 'If I don't declare using AI, the marker might think I'm a genius for doing so well, but if I do declare it, they might judge me harshly for not doing the work myself.'

This fear, tied to students perceived behavioural control, is compounded by the moral ambiguity surrounding AI use. Students grappled with the ethical implications of their actions, questioning whether they should declare every instance of AI interaction. One student reflected, 'Morally, you should have to declare, but it is quite difficult to reference what you got from AI.

It's hard to track, and it becomes more difficult to declare every step you took with every prompt.' This highlights a critical challenge: the iterative nature of AI use, where multiple interactions with AI tools blur the lines between human and machine contributions, making it difficult to determine what should be declared.

Ambiguity and lack of clarity in guidelines

The second theme centres on the confusion and ambiguity surrounding what constitutes AI use that needs to be declared. Many students found the guidelines provided on the coursework coversheet to be unclear, leading to uncertainty and inconsistent compliance. One student articulated this confusion: 'The instructions on the coversheet are really vague. I wasn't sure what counted as 'using AI,' so I didn't fill it out.'

This lack of clarity creates a significant barrier to compliance, as students are left to interpret the guidelines on their own, often erring on the side of caution by not declaring AI use at all. The placement of the AI declaration alongside plagiarism statements further exacerbates this issue, fostering a sense of suspicion rather than transparency. This uncertainty reflects TPB's perceived behavioural control as students felt unable to confidently navigate the ambiguous guidelines. One student explained their hesitation to declare 'because of [Turnitin] similarity [reports] and concerns over academic integrity. We don't know what the ramifications are…' Another expressed their hesitation caused by the negative tone of the declaration, presented alongside the plagiarism statements on the coversheet which made them suspicious. 'It felt like admitting to something wrong, even if I was just using AI to enhance my work.'

Some students suggested that the declaration process should allow for more detailed explanations of how AI was used, believing that this would provide a more accurate representation of their academic process. Instead of just ticking a box, participants thought they should be able to specify how we used AI. One student stated that this would 'give more scope to show the marker that it's been part of my workflow to enhance the work.' However, there was also recognition that this could complicate the process, increasing the workload for both students and markers, and could still lead to misinterpretation and negative outcomes.

Belief that AI use should remain private

The third theme reflects a belief among some students that AI tools are personal aids, akin to calculators or spellcheckers, which do not require formal disclosure. This perspective is rooted in a sense of ownership over their work and the tools they choose to use. One participant remarked, 'I see AI as just another tool, like a calculator. Why should I have to tell anyone that I used it?' Another student stated 'It feels invasive to have to declare every little tool I use. It's my work, and I should be able to use whatever helps me.'

This belief is further complicated by concerns over potential bias from instructors and the subjectivity of judgement, in line with the subjective norms aspect of TPB. Students expressed unease about how their AI use might be perceived, fearing that it could unfairly influence the grading process. As one student noted, 'Who does the marking and how the person/student positions it can lead to a lot of bias.' This theme reveals a deeper tension between students' desire for autonomy in their academic work and the institutional demand for transparency. The perception that AI use is a private matter reflects broader concerns about academic freedom and the extent to which students should be required to disclose their use of technology.

Perceived inconsistency in enforcement

A significant factor contributing to non-compliance was the perceived inconsistency in the enforcement of AI declaration policies across different courses and instructors. Students reported

varying degrees of emphasis on the importance of AI declarations, leading to confusion about what was expected of them. One student explained, 'In some courses, the professors didn't even mention the AI declaration, so I didn't think it was important.'

This inconsistency creates uncertainty for students about whether declaring AI use is necessary or beneficial. Varying enforcement across modules complicates subjective norms, as students are influenced by inconsistent expectations from instructors. These mixed messages undermine the policy's credibility and increase anxiety around compliance. As another student added, 'If one professor tells you it's okay to use AI and another says it's not, it's really hard to know what's expected.' Another pondered, 'Should we just declare our use of AI anyway even if we didn't use it because it's safer?'

This uncertainty often led students to question whether they should declare AI use at all, with some opting for non-declaration as a safer alternative. The lack of consistent enforcement also contributed to a sense of scepticism about the institution's commitment to upholding the policy, further eroding trust and compliance.

The role of peer influence and competition

The final theme examines the role of peer influence and competition in shaping students' decisions around AI use and its declaration. The widespread normalisation of AI tools in academic work has created a perception that using AI is not only common but also necessary to keep pace with peers. As one student bluntly stated, 'Everyone is using it,' a sentiment echoed in 13 of the 17 interviews, illustrating the strong expectation for AI use in academic contexts. This directly aligns with TPB's subjective norms, where perceptions of peer practices strongly influence student behaviour.

This influence is particularly pronounced in group work, where AI tools have become so ingrained that one student remarked, 'ChatGPT is like the fourth man,' referring to the way AI has become an integral, albeit unofficial, member of group projects. This analogy underscores how AI use is not just accepted but expected, with students perceiving its use as a collective decision rather than an individual one, reinforcing TPB's emphasis on peer norms shaping behaviour and decision-making. The competitive and collaborative dynamics of group work further complicate the issue, as students view AI tools as shared resources that enhance performance.

However, this normalisation also fosters anxiety about self-presentation and capability. Students fear that declaring AI use might lead to perceived inadequacies in the eyes of their peers, undermine their perceived capabilities or give others an advantage. The pressure to conform to peer behaviour leads to non-declaration, as students worry about being judged as less capable for relying on AI. This dynamic is exacerbated by the limited open discussion about AI use among peers. As one student noted, 'They seldom discuss it amongst peers. There's something special about AI—it's all in or nothing. If we're not using the benefits of AI, then we look stupid.' This reluctance to openly discuss AI use reinforces the idea that it should remain private, despite its increasing ubiquity. The lack of open discussion of AI use further entrenches non-compliance, as students navigate the tension between fitting in with peers and adhering to academic integrity guidelines.

Suggestions for improving compliance

Students suggested clearer guidelines, consistent enforcement, and educational support to improve compliance. They recommended a 'checklist' for AI declarations and 'Workshops on how to use AI ethically would be really helpful, especially if they were integrated into the curriculum.' Another called for a more supportive approach to AI use, framing it within a context of trust and support, rather than suspicion and punishment, noting, 'If King's Business School could have a friendly policy on AI, then students wouldn't hesitate to talk about how they are using it.'

Discussion

This study significantly advances the discourse on AI use and academic integrity by directly addressing three key research questions (RQ): (1) Why do students often fail to declare AI use? (2) How does non-compliance impact academic integrity? and (3) What strategies can improve compliance? The focus on a specific intervention—the coursework coversheet—offers valuable insights into its effectiveness in capturing AI use, narrowing broader implications previously explored in the literature (e.g. Moorhouse, Yeo, and Wan 2023; Jin et al. 2024; Luo 2024a; McDonald et al. 2024; Perkins and Roe 2024).

Regarding RQ1, fear of academic consequences, guideline ambiguity, and peer influence drive non-compliance, complicating the distinction between legitimate work and misconduct. For RQ2, non-compliance undermines academic integrity by fostering distrust. Perceived unclear or inconsistent policies increase the likelihood of behaviours that compromise honesty. Addressing RQ3, clearer guidelines, consistent policy enforcement, and educational initiatives emphasising transparency and ethical responsibility are suggested strategies for improving compliance.

Theoretical implications

This study reaffirms the influence of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control on students' intentions to comply, aligning with the TPB framework (Ajzen 1991; Passow et al. 2006; Khathayut, Walker-Gleaves, and Humble 2022). It extends Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behaviour by illustrating how these factors interact specifically in the context of AI use in academic settings, uncovering both moral and practical dilemmas students face when deciding whether to declare AI use. While TPB traditionally assumes that attitudes are shaped by a clear understanding of a behaviour's consequences (Ajzen 1991; Park and Blenkinsopp 2009), this study shows that the ambiguity surrounding AI policies complicates students' ability to form clear attitudes about compliance. More specifically, students are navigating an ethically ambiguous landscape where the line between legitimate academic work and misconduct is blurred. Many students viewed AI declaration as risky due to fears of academic penalties, challenging TPB's assumption that attitudes are straightforward predictors of behaviour.

This study also finds that non-compliance is often a deliberate decision driven by fear, with students viewing AI declarations as potential self-incrimination as opposed to a neutral administrative task (Stone 2023). This highlights psychological barriers that go beyond unconscious ignorance or negligence (Li, Brown, and Hawe 2023), suggesting that students' reluctance to declare AI use is a strategic choice to protect their academic standing and self-presentation. While TPB effectively explains general behavioural intentions, its application to emerging technologies like AI may oversimplify the complex motivations and deterrents at play. This study's findings that fear of academic repercussions (Luo 2024b) and institutional inconsistencies (Simkin and McLeod 2010; Stone 2023) complicate students' decision-making processes, challenge TPB's focus on individual attitudes, and highlight broader institutional and technological factors.

Moreover, the iterative and integrated nature of AI complicates the concept of perceived behavioural control, as students struggle to identify and disclose instances of AI use. Consequently, attitudes towards AI declarations are shaped not only by moral considerations but also by the practical challenges of adhering to these requirements. This challenges TPB's assumption that individuals easily assess and control actions (Ajzen 1991, 2002), suggesting the model may be too simplistic for AI usage contexts.

In line with prior research, findings of this study reveal that the influence of subjective norms, particularly the pressure to conform to peer behaviours and group norms, influences academic integrity behaviours (Asch 1951; McCabe and Trevino 1993; Ivanov et al. 2024). This challenges TPB's emphasis on individual decision-making (Ajzen 1991; Beck and Ajzen 1991) by emphasising the collective nature of behaviour, where the desire to conform to peer norms can override

ethical considerations. Additionally, while TPB views subjective norms as external pressures, this study shows norms are internalised in complex ways beyond simple conformity. The normalisation of non-compliance within peer groups suggests that subjective norms are not only external pressures but can also become internalised as justifications for ethically questionable behaviour (Asch 1951; Stone 2023), further complicating the decision-making process. This internalisation challenges TPB's traditional view of subjective norms as merely external influences and points to the need for a broader understanding of how norms are shaped by rapidly evolving technologies.

Finally, the philosophical divide among students regarding AI as either a personal tool or a resource requiring disclosure highlights the context-dependent nature of attitudes. This divide indicates that students' perceptions of AI are far from uniform; instead, they differ significantly based on individual beliefs about the role of technology in academic work. This variation suggests that while TPB offers a valuable foundation, its application to emerging technologies like AI may need to be complemented by additional theories that better address the complex interplay between personal ethics, technological integration, social influences, and the impact of technology on individuals' perceived ability to control and understand their behaviour. Recent discussions, like Mogaji et al.'s (2024) exploration of the Technology Acceptance Model—a derivative of TPB—in the generative AI era, indicate that established models may need revision to stay relevant. This study's findings highlight the necessity of revising and extending TPB to better address the ethical and practical challenges brought by rapidly advancing technologies such as generative AI.

Practical implications

This study provides actionable recommendations for educators, policymakers, and institutions to improve compliance with AI use declarations and uphold academic integrity. First, institutions could benefit from developing clear and consistent AI use policies, including detailed examples of acceptable use and the appropriate way to declare it (Perkins and Roe 2024). Rather than proposing sweeping changes, these policies could be gradually introduced and tailored to the specific needs of different courses and student bodies. Faculty training is crucial for ensuring consistent communication and enforcement, but such initiatives should be adaptable to institutional resources (Simkin and McLeod 2010).

Reframing AI policies to emphasise academic innovation and ethical responsibility, rather than focusing solely on compliance, may also positively influence student perceptions. By presenting AI as a learning enhancement tool, institutions can reduce students' fear of self-incrimination and encourage transparent declarations. This approach should be implemented incrementally, starting with small-scale initiatives that build trust between students and faculty (Baumeister 2005; Stone 2023). Embedding these policies in the context of shared academic integrity responsibility helps cultivate a positive approach to compliance.

Building institutional trust is essential. Institutions must create a supportive, transparent environment where students feel confident that honest AI declarations will be assessed fairly (Carless 2013; Tan, Alhammad, and Stelmaszak 2024). Introducing AI use in low-stakes formative assessments is a practical first step towards normalising declarations, which can then be applied to higher-stakes summative assessments. Leveraging peer influence through mentoring programs and workshops on ethical AI use can encourage a community-driven approach, where transparency becomes a shared responsibility which underpins a culture of academic integrity.

Institutions must tailor AI policies to their specific contexts, addressing the unique needs of their student bodies rather than relying on generic frameworks. Consistent communication across courses is essential for clarity and fairness, but policy design and enforcement should reflect each institution's particular needs. Regular evaluations and updates, informed by research and feedback from students and faculty, will ensure policies remain clear, reduce ambiguity, and foster

compliance. Establishing committees to monitor AI trends and encouraging cross-disciplinary dialogue will help keep policies adaptable to technological advances, ensuring they continue to promote ethical AI use and uphold academic integrity.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

This single-case study offers an in-depth exploration of student non-compliance with AI declarations in a specific context, which limits its generalisability. The unique cultural and policy environment of King's Business School may restrict the broader applicability of these findings. However, triangulating survey data, interviews, and thematic analysis provides a more comprehensive perspective. These findings should be interpreted cautiously due to the small scale and context-specific nature of the study, and the recommendations should be viewed as part of an incremental approach to policy development. Further validation through larger-scale studies is needed to assess their effectiveness in diverse educational settings.

Future research should explore the transferability of these findings across different institutions with varying levels of AI integration and cultural attitudes. Comparative case studies (Ellinger, Watkins, and Marsick 2005) could help identify best practices. As this study captures only the early phase of AI policy implementation, longitudinal studies are necessary to track changes in student attitudes and compliance as AI becomes more embedded in academia (Gustilo, Ong, and Lapinid 2024). These studies could also examine the long-term sustainability of AI policies and the ethical challenges that may arise over time.

A holistic approach involving faculty, administrators, and policymakers is crucial to addressing enforcement challenges. Expanding TPB or integrating other theoretical perspectives is needed to capture the complexities of generative AI use. Qualitative methods could refine the theoretical framework and develop empirical scales for quantitative assessment that consider attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control.

Further research should also examine psychological and social factors like fear and peer pressure that influence non-compliance. Experimental designs could explore the impact of feedback, rewards, or social incentives on AI declarations and assess how AI ethics education influences long-term student behaviour. Addressing these areas will enhance understanding of AI's role in higher education, helping institutions promote compliance and foster a culture of ethical AI use.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Ratchada Caliendo-Chan, Nathifa Hall-Ezea and Zoe Fear for their assistance with data collection.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Ethical approval

Approval to conduct this study was obtained from the King's College London Research Ethics Committee (MRA-23/24-44991).

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