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Hyper-surveillance and academic integrity: Racialized international students in the age of AI

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ABSTRACT

Artificial intelligence (AI) in higher education is widely heralded as both a linguistic support and an academic integrity risk, yet this study details how AI also functions as a racialized governance technology for international students (IS). Drawing on Critical Race Theory (Crenshaw, 1989; Ladson-Billings, 1998) within a heuristic case study at a commuter university in the Greater Toronto Area, the study examines how six racialized international students navigate AI-mediated assessment, proctoring, and infraction detection. IS accounts depict AI as an "academic survival infrastructure" that compensates for opaque academic norms, while simultaneously exposing them to hyper-surveillance, racialized suspicion, and an unequal burden of proving authorship and competence. The analysis identifies 4 themes: conditional legitimacy of AI use, the racialization of academic integrity, epistemic verification, and the internalization of surveillance. The article argues AI governance in internationalized higher education reallocates trust and credibility along raciolinguistic lines, demanding equity-focused alternatives to detection-driven integrity regimes.

Keywords: Racialized international students, artificial intelligence, hyper-surveillance, academic integrity, assessment, higher education governance

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INTRODUCTION

International students (IS) have become indispensable to the economic and internationalization agendas of Canadian higher education institutions (HEIs), yet they occupy a paradoxical position within public and institutional discourse. While institutions celebrate them as symbols of diversity, internationalization, and economic sustainability, broader political and public discourses increasingly cast them as objects of immigration control, labour market competition, housing insecurity, and academic suspicion (Arumuhathas, 2026a, 2026b; Buckner et al., 2021; Parnther, 2022). For racialized IS, these tensions are further compounded by linguistic, cultural, and racial hierarchies that shape whose knowledge, voices, and academic contributions are recognized as legitimate. As HEIs pivot to technological solutions to address complex educational challenges, these longstanding questions of legitimacy have become entangled with new forms of digital governance.

Artificial intelligence (AI), often presented as an objective and novel response to educational inequities, has become a particularly powerful site through which academic competence, authenticity, and trust are (re)evaluated. AI-powered technologies are frequently promoted as tools that support multilingual learners through translation, writing assistance, personalized learning, and academic adaptation (Ma et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2023). AI has also become entangled with expanding academic integrity regimes characterized by plagiarism-detection software, algorithmic monitoring, and heightened concerns about authorship and authenticity (Leaton Gray et al., 2025; Sweeney, 2023), especially concerning summative assessment and evaluation. For racialized IS, such scrutiny may operate as a form of hyper-surveillance, wherein institutional practices render particular students more visible, more accountable, and more vulnerable to suspicion than others (Acar, 2025). These dynamics are especially consequential in AI-mediated environments where questions of authorship, credibility, and authenticity increasingly become objects of verification. A growing body of scholarship has examined AI as a tool for facilitating academic adaptation among IS (Arslan et al., 2025), explored its ethical implications within HEIs (Zohra & Sassi, 2025), and investigated its relationship to academic integrity, authorship, and misconduct (Openo, 2019; Sweeney, 2023). Collectively, these studies have generated insights into how AI supports learning and challenges conventional understanding of academic honesty. However, they have paid considerably less attention to how racialized IS experience and perceive AI as a part of broader systems of institutional governance, surveillance, and credibility assessment. Little is known about how AI-mediated academic integrity practices intersect with racialization, linguistic difference and institutional assumptions of trustworthiness to shape students' experience of legitimacy and (conditional) belonging within contemporary HEIs. By repositioning AI as a governance mechanism rather than solely a pedagogical novelty or integrity concern, this study addresses a critical gap in international HE literature.

Technologies of monitoring within post-secondary education rarely operate in isolation from existing social hierarchies. Rather, scholars have argued that they may intersect with assumptions surrounding language proficiency, academic readiness, and legitimacy, potentially rendering some students more visible and thus responsible than others (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Suspitsyna, 2021). Against this backdrop, the growing integration of AI raises imperative questions about whether emerging technologies simply automate existing educational processes or have the potential to reinforce existing forms of verification for students navigating racialized and precarious positions within the university. Accordingly, this study explores how racialized IS experience and interpret the opportunities and challenges associated with AI-mediated academic practices within these institutional contexts.

Situated within a critical interpretivist paradigm and drawing on CRT, this qualitative case study, informed by heuristic principles, examines the experiences and perceptions of racialized international undergraduate and graduate students attending a public research-intensive commuter university in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) between 2022 and 2025. CRT provides a particularly relevant lens for this inquiry as it subverts and exposes assumptions of neutrality, objectivity, and meritocracy within institutional policies, practices, and technologies, foregrounding how seemingly race-neutral systems may

reproduce and legitimize existing inequities (Crenshaw, 1989; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Within this qualitative case study, CRT rejects the premise that AI-mediated academic integrity systems function as a politically objective instrument of verification. Instead, this study asks a more fundamental question: under what institutional conditions does AI participate in determining whose know is recognized as believable in the first place? Viewed through this lens, algorithmic governance is about the response to academic integrity concerns, but more importantly, the political practices that regulate recognition itself. Through ethical and equity reimagination, algorithmic governance has the potential to institutionalize existing relations of power, translating historically contingent predetermined ideologies about race, language, and trust into seemingly objective practices of surveillance and verification. Social constructions about race, language, legitimacy, and trust become sedimented within AI practices of verification. A CRT perspective enables this present study to examine AI as a governance regime through which credibility, authorship, and belonging are continually negotiated (Benjamin, 2019; Nobel, 2018). Guided by this theoretical approach, a heuristic case study design provides a bounded institutional context for an in-depth examination of these dynamics, while heuristic principles foreground the interpretive and meaning-making reflexive dimensions of participants' lived realities. Consistent with a heuristic orientation, the study aims to describe experiences with AI to illuminate how racialized IS construct, negotiate, and make sense of legitimacy and belonging within a particular university located in southwestern Ontario (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018).

Situated within these intersecting tensions, this study explores the experiences and perceptions of racialized IS at Golden Horseshoe University (GHU), a pseudonym for the participating institution, to illuminate how AI mediates whose knowledge is recognized as credible, whose academic practices are deemed legitimate, and whose belonging is rendered conditional within higher education. The study seeks to address the following research question(s):

- How do racialized IS experience, interpret, and negotiate AI-mediated academic practices within institutional regimes of academic integrity, linguistic expectations, and AI governance, and how do these practices shape experiences of credibility, legitimacy, and belonging at GHU?
- How do racialized IS utilize and understand AI technologies in relation to language learning, academic writing, and educational success?
- How do AI-related academic integrity policies, detection technologies, and surveillance practices shape students' experiences of trust, legitimacy, and belonging?
- In what ways do racialized IS perceive AI as influencing their linguistic agency, participation, and broader educational trajectories at GHU?

The significance of these inquiries extends beyond debates surrounding technological innovation or academic misconduct. For many racialized IS, AI occupies a precarious position where educational support and institutional scrutiny become increasingly difficult to disentangle, rendering participation itself contingent upon continual demonstration of credibility, authenticity, and legitimacy. On the one hand, AI-powered technologies have emerged as important tools for navigating linguistic transitions, unfamiliar academic conventions, and the broader challenges of studying across cultural and educational contexts (Arslan et al., 2025). On the other hand, the rapid expansion of AI-detection software, plagiarism surveillance systems, and integrity-driven governance frameworks has intensified scrutiny of the authenticity of students' academic work, particularly among populations historically positioned as academically suspect within institutional and public discourse (Fass-Holmes, 2017; Openo, 2019). Consequently, AI appears to tandemly facilitate participation while expanding mechanisms of (racial)surveillance, rendering support and suspicion increasingly difficult to disentangle (Davidovitch et al., 2025; Flores & Rosa, 2015; King et al., 2009; Williamson & Shay, 2020). In this sense, the growing integration of AI may reveal less about the technology itself than about the enduring assumptions, inequalities, and relations of power through which credibility, legitimacy, and belonging are negotiated within internationalized higher education. Understanding how these processes have been conceptualized

and, perhaps more importantly, overlooked requires a critical examination of the intersecting literatures on AI governance, academic integrity, internationalization, and racialized student experiences.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The growing integration of AI into HEIs has generated an emerging body of empirical, theoretical, and policy-oriented scholarship examining how IS utilize AI. Although much of this literature positions AI as a pedagogical resource that enhances language learning, academic adaptation, and student success, an emerging body of scholarship simultaneously raises concerns regarding academic integrity, institutional surveillance, governance, and the regulation of authorship. Collectively, these intersecting debates reveal that AI is no longer simply an educational novelty but an increasingly contested institutional phenomenon. To contextualize the present study, this review critically synthesizes scholarship on racialized IS experiences, academic integrity governance, and AI-mediated educational practices to illuminate how questions of credibility, legitimacy, and belonging are increasingly negotiated through AI within contemporary higher education.

AI as Academic Support, Academic Integrity, and the Experiences of IS

AI serves as a tool to support student learning and facilitate academic success. Generative AI technologies have been shown to assist students with idea generation, language editing, writing support, research organization, and personalized learning experiences (Arslan et al., 2025; Adekoya et al., 2026; Nguyen, 2025). For IS specifically, AI tools have been identified as particularly valuable for navigating language barriers, unfamiliar academic conventions, and cultural transitions associated with studying abroad. Research examining IS' engagement with AI consistently demonstrates that these assistive technologies can increase confidence, autonomy, and academic participation (Barakina et al., 202; Chauke et al., 2024). Zhao et al.'s (2024) study of Chinese IS using Wordtune reported that AI-assisted writing technologies supported students in improving the quality of their academic writing, particularly through formal language revision and sentence restructuring. Students with stronger English proficiency utilized the technology strategically to refine their writing coherently and succinctly, while less experienced users relied more heavily on AI-generated suggestions to overcome linguistic challenges.

Similarly, Arslan et al. (2025) reported that AI tools such as ChatGPT and Grammarly enhanced the writing proficiency of postgraduate IS, improved time management, and facilitated adaptation to unfamiliar academic environments. Such discussion has expanded to encompass areas beyond writing support, including tools and methods that enhance communication and comprehension. Adekoya et al. (2026) conceptualize AI as a "double-edged tool," demonstrating how generative AI can satisfy students' psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Findings suggest that AI enables greater self-directed learning, increases academic confidence, and fosters emotional resilience among postgraduate IS navigating complex educational environments. Likewise, research examining AI literacy initiatives for IS emphasizes the importance of equipping students with the technological competencies (Ma et al., 2024) necessary to participate meaningfully in increasingly digitized academic environments (Feng & Wang, 2023; Jiang, 2025). Rather than framing AI solely as a technological tool, these studies position AI literacy as an emerging educational necessity that supports equitable participation in contemporary HEIs.

Student success and outcomes from the use of AI transcend mere academic performance. Investigations into chatbot interactions reveal that AI technologies can also serve as emotional allies, especially for those grappling with loneliness, stress, or challenges in articulating emotional vulnerability. Chin et al.'s (2023) study showed that users often disclose emotional concerns more readily to conversational AI than on social media platforms, suggesting that AI may function as a supplementary support mechanism for students encountering challenges associated with academic adjustment and social

integration. Taken together, these studies portray AI as a potentially transformative educational resource capable of reducing barriers, enhancing engagement, and facilitating academic adaptation.

Taken together, this body of scholarship (Arslan et al., 2025; Zhao et al., 2024) positions AI as an important educational resource that supports teaching and learning for English language learners' adaptation, academic confidence, and participation among IS. Yet this predominantly optimistic framing has been complicated by emerging critical studies demonstrating that AI is also implicated in the production and regulation of academic legitimacy. Recent raciolinguistic research suggests that AI-assisted writing and AI policing may intensify academic language anxiety, self-monitoring, and pressures to approximate dominant English norms, revealing that students often feel they must continually "prove" the authenticity of their knowledge and language practices (Zheng, 2025). Likewise, Gao (2025) argues that institutional language ideologies rooted in English-only, incompetence, and exclusion continue to position IS as raciolinguistically deficient, reinforcing institutional whiteness through seemingly ordinary academic practices. What emerges from these intersecting debates is that AI cannot be understood as a pedagogical innovation or an academic integrity concern because it functions as an epistemic infrastructure through which HEIs determine whose knowledge is rendered believable, whose authorship is recognized as authentic. The central concern, therefore, is less whether AI is biased than how institutional histories of racialization become embedded within objective practices of algorithmic judgment.

The educational promises of AI have never existed independently of its regulatory consequences. As generative AI has become increasingly embedded within HEIs, it has simultaneously destabilized conventional understandings of authorship, originality, and academic honesty by blurring the distinction between human- and machine-generated work. Consequently, a growing body of scholarship (Balalle & Pannilage, 2025; Cong-Lem et al., 2024; Lee et al., 2024) has focused on the ethical implications of AI use within HEIs. Generative AI challenges traditional definitions of misconduct in academia, where, unlike conventional plagiarism, AI-generated content frequently produces original text that is hard to categorize and decipher as copied material, leading to uncertainty regarding institutional policies and academic standards (Lund et al., 2025). Survey-based studies demonstrate that students frequently distinguish AI use from conventional forms of cheating, perceiving it as a separate category of academic behaviour requiring new ethical frameworks and institutional responses (Shahzad et al., 2025). Importantly, Lund et al. (2025) found that students' ethical beliefs, not institutional policies, were the strongest predictors of AI use and perceptions of misconduct. Correspondingly, Pérez-Portabella et al. (2025) revealed that students generally viewed AI use as ethically acceptable when employed for idea generation, writing enhancement, or exam preparation, but expressed greater concern when AI entirely replaced student authorship. Findings such as this suggest that students do not necessarily view AI as inherently unethical but instead evaluate its appropriateness based on context, degree of involvement, and perceived academic legitimacy (Shaw, 2025).

Emphasizing AI detection technologies and responses based on surveillance can lead to an oversimplified understanding of the complex issues involved. Leaton Gray et al. (2025) contend that universities have become reliant on technological policing through AI detection software and digital monitoring systems, despite evidence that such approaches are often unreliable and may undermine trust between students and institutions. Rather than focusing exclusively on detection and punishment, Gaumann & Veale (2024) advocate for ethical pedagogies that emphasize student agency, authentic assessment, and meaningful engagement with academic integrity principles. Diverging perspectives shift attention away from technological solutions and toward broader questions about the purpose of assessment, student motivation, and institutional responsibility.

Within this broader discourse on academic integrity, scholars have investigated how IS navigate institutional expectations concerning plagiarism, authorship, and academic misconduct, considering factors such as cultural differences, language barriers, and unfamiliarity with institutional standards (Browman, 2017; Beasley, 2016; Hu & Lei, 2012). Parnther (2022) argues that IS encounter unique acculturation-rooted challenges related to language proficiency, academic preparedness, cultural adjustment, and policy comprehension, all of which may escalate vulnerability to academic integrity violations. Similarly, Openo's

(2019) integrative review emphasizes the substantial repercussions of allegations of academic misconduct, noting that IS often confront heightened academic, social, and immigration-related risks following such violations.

Empirical and longitudinal research (Chan & Hu, 2023; Johnston et al., 2024) consistently demonstrates that differences in educational systems and prior academic cultures influence students' understandings of plagiarism, citation practices, collaboration, and authorship. Rowe's (2025) examination of academic integrity policies and IS experiences found that many students encounter a steep learning curve when adapting to Canadian academic integrity standards. Participants reported that institutional policies frequently assume prior familiarity with Western academic norms while neglecting the diverse educational backgrounds students bring. Likewise, Sanni-Anibire et al. (2021) found that although many IS possessed substantial knowledge of academic integrity principles, significant confusion remained regarding concepts such as self-plagiarism, duplicate submission, and contract cheating.

However, scholars caution against cultural deficit explanations that portray IS as inherently more prone to misconduct (Adekoya et al., 2026). Fass-Holmes (2017) and Parnther (2022) contend that simplistic cultural interpretations obscure broader institutional, structural, and pedagogical factors that shape academic integrity outcomes. Rather than locating misconduct within students themselves, these scholars call for greater attention to institutional communication, policy accessibility, academic support structures, and culturally responsive educational practices.

AI as Academic Support, Academic Integrity, and the Experiences of IS

While much of the emerging scholarship positions AI as either a pedagogical support mechanism or an academic integrity challenge, a limited but influential body of literature suggests that AI is also reshaping the governance structures of higher education itself (Barus et al., 2025; Luo, 2024). From this perspective, AI is not merely a tool that students use; rather, it functions as a regulatory apparatus through which universities monitor, evaluate, verify, and increasingly govern academic conduct. As institutions respond to the proliferation of generative AI, concerns have shifted beyond questions of effectiveness and ethics toward broader debates regarding surveillance, accountability, and the expanding reach of technological governance (Leaton Gray et al., 2025; Luo, 2024). Yet the implications of these developments extend beyond institutional regulation. AI-mediated systems participate in determining whose knowledge is recognized as authentic, whose academic practices are deemed legitimate, and whose credibility becomes subject to verification.

Such questions are particularly significant within the context of internationalized higher education. Existing scholarship has long demonstrated that IS occupy a contradictory position within universities, simultaneously celebrated as contributors to diversity and institutional prosperity, yet subject to deficit discourses, heightened scrutiny, and conditional forms of belonging (Arumuhathas, 2026a; Guo & Guo, 2017). Consequently, AI scholarship has paid remarkably little attention to how algorithmic governance intersects with existing racialized hierarchies of language, nationality, and institutional recognition (Arumuhathas, 2026b). This omission leaves unresolved whether emerging systems of AI governance regulate academic behaviour or if they may also reproduce existing hierarchies of legitimacy, trust, and recognition. For racialized IS, the central question may therefore be less whether AI supports learning and more how AI becomes implicated in the institutional production of credibility, authenticity, and belonging.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study mobilizes CRT as a disruptive analytic for interrogating how institutional power is reproduced through technologies that claim neutrality. Its relationship with critical interpretivism is complementary but analytically distinct. Critical interpretivism establishes the epistemological premise that knowledge is situated, mediated, and constructed through historically contingent relations rather than

discovered as an objective social fact (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). CRT politicizes that premise by asking why particular constructions of knowledge acquire institutional authority, whose interpretations become normalized as credible, and how race organizes the conditions under which some ways of knowing are rendered more believable than others (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). CRT is useful because its theoretical tenets suggest that AI-mediated academic integrity systems do not merely "detect" misconduct; they exacerbate and produce the conditions under which some students (of colour) are more readily imagined as suspect, deficient, or in need of verification (Crenshaw, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Within the context of international higher education, racialization operates through interconnected systems of oppression that shape students' material experiences and the conditions under which their knowledge, identities, and modes of participation are recognized as (il)legitimate. Race, nativism, socioeconomic status, caste, language, and nationality are not isolated axes as they operate as mutually constitutive systems of power that determine whose voices are amplified, whose competencies are assumed, and whose sense of belonging remains provisional within HEIs (Patton, 2016; Yao et al., 2019). The convergence of critical interpretivism and CRT participants' interpretations is approached as situated knowledge whose meanings must be understood empirically, while CRT interrogates the institutional and historical conditions that make interpretations, identities, and claims to knowledge intelligible in the first place. This distinction preserves interpretive openness while refusing the fiction that meaning is produced on terrain somehow unmarked by power, history, and racialization. Conceptualizing AI as a potential racialized governance mechanism consequently directs analytical attention toward how academic credibility may be differentially assessed, supervised, and allocated, interrogating how universal systems of verification can re-organize (and re-invent) visibility (Arumuhathas & Stroud, 2026), suspicion, and surveillance along existing racialized lines.

CRT redirects attention to the institutional arrangements that make bias and hyper-surveillance appear technical, procedural, and legitimate. This distinction is central. AI-enabled proctoring, plagiarism detection, and authorship surveillance do not operate outside race; they enter universities already structured by raciolinguistic hierarchies, immigration anxieties, and deficit assumptions about IS' academic preparedness. When racialized IS' writing, accents, grammar, or learning strategies become objects of suspicion (George Mwangi, 2016), AI does not simply misread them; it can authorize and automate pre-existing forms of doubt (Acar, 2025; Chu et al., 2024). Through CRT, this study therefore examines AI as a site where surveillance, academic integrity, language, and racialization converge. The framework enables an analysis of how racialized IS negotiate not only AI use, but the broader institutional demand to prove that their knowledge is legitimate, their authorship is authentic, and their belonging is deserved.

Critical interpretivism and CRT thus meet at a consequential epistemological juncture. Critical interpretivism attends to how participants make, negotiate, and contest meaning, while CRT presses further, asking how the institutional conditions within which such meanings become institutionally legible are already structured by histories of racialization, power, and differential recognition. The coalescence of these frameworks shifts the analytical gaze from what AI simply does to IS toward the institutional relations it can reconfigure: whose knowledge requires authentication, whose authorship is granted the presumption of authenticity, whose competence survives without explanation, and whose belonging remains contingent upon being believed.

METHODOLOGY

Research Paradigm and Design

This study is situated within a critical interpretivist paradigm (Arumuhathas & Stroud, n.d; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) and employs a qualitative case study design informed by heuristic principles (Creswell & Porth, 2018; Yin, 2018) to examine how racialized IS experience, interpret, and negotiate AI-mediated academic practices within Canadian HEIs. A critical interpretivist orientation is particularly appropriate

because the study is concerned not with measuring AI use or evaluating technological effectiveness, but with understanding how participants make meaning of AI within broader relations of power, surveillance, legitimacy, and institutional governance (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Consistent with CRT, knowledge is conceived as inherently perspective-dependent, constructed through counterstories that reflect lived experiences (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Counterstories emphasize that knowledge is socially situated and deeply influenced by ongoing historical, political, and institutional power structures; they subsequently defy the notion of knowledge as an objective entity, underscoring its contextual and constructed nature within specific social and cultural contexts (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Methodologically, these traditions perform distinct but complementary functions: critical interpretivism establishes the study's epistemological orientation, CRT provides its analytical lens, case study bounds the empirical inquiry, and heuristic principles inform reflexive, interpretive engagement with participants' experiential knowledge.

Case study was selected as the primary methodological design because it enables an in-depth examination of a bounded phenomenon within the institutional conditions through which it acquires meaning (Yin, 2018). Heuristic principles complement this design by foregrounding sustained interpretive engagement, reflexivity, and the meanings participants attribute to lived experience, without positioning heuristic inquiry as a separate or parallel methodology (Moustakas, 1990). Heuristically, it creates analytical space to understand how institutional realities come to be accepted as natural, inevitable, or self-evident, enabling an interrogation of the assumptions that underpin them, the forms of knowledge they privilege, and the subjectivities they produce. In this sense, the study is concerned less with documenting technological adoption than with illuminating the often-unquestioned logics through which academic credibility, authorship, and educational legitimacy are constituted and made governable within a HEI. The heuristic orientation further aligns with CRT's emphasis on centering under-(and mis)-represented voices and counter-stories by foregrounding the experiential knowledge of racialized IS whose perspectives are frequently absent from dominant discussions of AI governance within HEIs. Operationally, this heuristic orientation informed the research process through sustained reflexive engagement across interviewing and analysis, including reflexive memoing, iterative revisiting of participants' accounts, and attention to moments of resonance, discomfort, contradiction, and interpretive uncertainty that shaped the researcher's developing understanding of the phenomenon.

Research Paradigm and Design

Researcher positionality was understood not as an autobiographical preface to inquiry, but as one of the conditions through which the inquiry itself became possible. As a racialized (and first-generation Canadian) scholar working within Canadian HEIs, with prior proximity to international education, I encountered participants' accounts from a position of partial familiarity. This is close enough for certain institutional silences, coded assumptions, and racialized encounters to resonate, yet never close enough to claim their experiences as extensions of my own. Such proximity is epistemically productive but methodologically dangerous: recognition can cultivate relational trust and interpretive sensitivity, while also tempting the researcher to mistake resonance for equivalence, familiarity for understanding, or solidarity for interpretive authority (Berger, 2015; Fine, 1994; Pillow, 2003). Reflexivity therefore functioned less as an assurance against bias than as an ongoing interrogation of how I came to know what I believed I knew. This required attending not only to what participants disclosed, but to moments when their accounts unsettled my expectations, resisted the theoretical vocabulary available to me, or refused the coherence I might otherwise have imposed upon them (Finlay, 2002; Holmes, 2020). Throughout interviewing and analysis, reflexive memos documented affective responses, interpretive hesitations, assumptions, contradictions, and moments of discomfort; these were subsequently read alongside transcripts as part of the analytic process. Consistent with heuristic engagement, researcher subjectivity was neither denied nor elevated to evidentiary authority; it was made available for scrutiny as part of the relational conditions under which meaning was co-constructed (Moustakas, 1990). The ethical obligation,

then, was not to speak for participants because aspects of their accounts felt familiar, but to remain answerable to the differences, ambiguities, and refusals through which their accounts exceeded my own ways of knowing (Fine, 1994; Pillow, 2003).

Case Study Site Description: Golden Horseshoe University (GHU)

This study was conducted at GHU, a pseudonym for a large public research-intensive commuter university located within the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), Ontario, Canada. GHU was purposefully selected as the research site due to its sizeable IS population, longstanding commitments to internationalization, and its location within one of Canada's most diverse urban regions. As a university situated at the intersection of global student mobility, linguistic diversity, and rapidly evolving institutional responses to artificial intelligence, GHU offered a particularly relevant context for examining how racialized IS experience and negotiate AI-mediated academic practices.

Table 1 Participant Characteristics in Golden Horseshoe University (GHU)

Participant	Place of Origin	Racial-Ethnic Identity	Gender	Student Enrollment Status	Program	Years of Study
Gayatri	India	South Asian	Female	Undergraduate	Business Management	2+
Indu	India	South Asian	Female	Undergraduate	Healthcare Service Management	2+
Tomas	Chile	South Asian	Male	Undergraduate	Journalism	4+
Ashton	United States of America	Euro-Caribbean descent (Bi-racial)	Male	Graduate	Journalism & Mixed Media	2+
Arulselvan	India	South Asian	Male	Undergraduate	Computer Science	2+
Niranjan	Nepal	South Asian	Male	Undergraduate	Computer Engineer	2+

Note: Participant names are pseudonyms. Racial-ethnic identities reflect participants' self-identification and are analytically distinct from place of origin. Tomas identified Chile as his place of origin and South Asian as his racial-ethnic identity; he was born in Chile to South Indian immigrant parents.

Following institutional research ethics approval, participants were recruited through purposive sampling using institutional listservs, social media platforms, student networks, and targeted outreach to IS communities. The final sample consisted of 6 racialized IS, including 4 males and 2 females, representing undergraduate (n = 5) and graduate (n = 1) programs across 5 academic disciplines. Participants originated from India (n = 3), Nepal (n = 1), Chile (n = 1), and the United States (n = 1), contributing diverse racial, linguistic, educational, and migration experiences that enriched the depth and complexity of the data. Eligibility criteria required participants to be enrolled as IS at GHU for a minimum of 1 academic year and sufficiently proficient in English to participate in an in-depth interview. While the sample size was intentionally modest, it is consistent with the aims of qualitative case study research (employing heuristic principles), which privileges in-depth, micro-reflexivity, and rich experiential accounts over breadth or statistical representation (Moustakas, 1990; Stake, 1995). Recruitment occurred during a period characterized by heightened public and political scrutiny of IS in Canada, shifting immigration policies, declining international enrolments, and the academic demands associated with end-of-term examinations, all of which influenced participant availability and engagement. Nevertheless, the 6 participants generated

rich and nuanced biographical accounts that provided substantive insights into how AI, academic integrity, credibility, and belonging are experienced and negotiated at GHU. In light of this study, the case does not claim statistical or demographic representativeness; its analytic value lies in examining how particular experiences make visible institutional processes that may otherwise remain obscured. The 6 accounts are situated as forms of experiential knowledge through which the relations among AI governance, credibility, and institutional recognition can be critically examined.

Data Collection

Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted between February 2022 and April 2025. Interviews as an instrument enabled participants to reflect upon and narrate their experiences with AI-mediated academic practices in their own words, while allowing the researcher to probe emerging meanings, tensions, and contradictions (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Each participant engaged in 2 interviews, each lasting 60-90 minutes, via Zoom. The second interview, conducted roughly 1-2 weeks later, was designed to facilitate rapport and reflective consideration on the part of both the researcher and the interviewee. Interview questions explored participants' understandings and uses of AI technologies, experiences with academic integrity policies, perceptions of AI detection and surveillance systems, and the broader implications of AI for learning, authorship, credibility, and belonging within GHU. Consistent with the study's heuristic inquiry, interviews were treated as an iterative interpretive encounter: emerging meanings, tensions, and contradictions from earlier conversations informed subsequent probing without imposing predetermined explanatory categories on participants' accounts (Moustakas, 1990).

Data Analysis

Semi-structured interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed through an iterative process informed by the study's heuristic orientation, critical interpretivism epistemology, and CRT analytical framework. Analysis moved beyond identifying recurring themes to conducting a more nuanced, methodologically grounded examination of how participants constructed meaning around AI, academic integrity, and institutional legitimacy. Analysis involved iteratively interrogating participants' accounts and how they narrated, justified, and problematized their encounters with AI-mediated practices within broader regimes of surveillance and governance, paying attention to language, positionality, and the power-laden contexts in which these meanings were produced.

Data were analyzed through an iterative, abductive thematic coding process involving first- and second-cycle coding. Initial first-cycle open coding involved close, line-by-line engagement with interview transcripts, generating descriptive and process-oriented codes grounded in IS' language and experiential accounts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Saldaña, 2009). Early codes captured AI-assisted learning, strategic and cautious AI use, ethical boundary-making, institutional ambiguity, integrity warnings, experiences of monitoring and suspicion, authorship verification, linguistic scrutiny, and the perceived need to explain or defend academic work. Through ongoing constant comparison, these first-cycle codes were examined within and across IS' accounts and subsequently consolidated through second-cycle pattern coding into higher-order conceptual categories, including anticipatory scrutiny, self-surveillance, differential credibility, authentication labour, procedural vulnerability, and conditional recognition (Saldaña, 2009). Conceptual categories were examined for convergence, divergence, contradiction, and negative cases, with analytic significance determined through patterned meaning and contextual relevance rather than frequency alone. CRT subsequently operated as a sensitizing analytical framework rather than a predetermined coding template, enabling questions of racialization, institutional power, surveillance, and epistemic legitimacy to be interrogated where supported by participants' accounts rather than presumed in advance. Themes were iteratively developed by moving between codes, conceptual categories, theoretical interpretation, and the

original transcripts, ensuring that increasing levels of analytical abstraction remained accountable to participants' experiential accounts.

Analytic and reflexive memoing was used throughout to document emerging interpretations, theoretical insights, affective responses, and moments of uncertainty. Reflexive memos were read alongside participants' transcripts throughout analysis to distinguish, as far as interpretively possible, meanings grounded in participants' accounts from assumptions introduced through the researcher's own experiential proximity to the phenomenon. Guided by CRT, particular attention was paid to narratives of credibility, suspicion, linguistic legitimacy, surveillance, and belonging, enabling an examination of how participants' experiences were shaped by broader structures of racialization and institutional power. Emerging themes were generated through an iterative process of interpretation, refinement, and theoretical engagement, privileging depth, complexity, and contextual understanding over categorical reduction.

RESULTS

Racialzied IS' narratives revealed 4 interconnected findings that illuminate how racialized IS experience, interpret, and negotiate AI-mediated academic practices within GHU: (1) AI as an Academic Survival Infrastructure; (2) From Learning Support to Suspicion: The Conditional Legitimacy of AI Use; (3) The Racialization of Academic Integrity: Hyper-Surveillance, Visibility, and Differential Scrutiny; and (4) The Burden of Proving Authenticity: AI, Credibility, and Epistemic Verification. Taken together, these emerging themes illuminate participants' experiences with AI that extended far beyond questions of technological utility or academic misconduct. Collectively, these lived realities explore how emerging AI university governance frameworks may not simply regulate academic conduct but also condition whose knowledge is recognized as legitimate, whose authorship is deemed authentic, and whose belonging remains conditional within internationalized higher education.

AI as an Academic Survival Infrastructure

Contrary to dominant accounts that frame AI primarily as a threat to academic integrity, participants overwhelmingly described AI as an essential resource for navigating unfamiliar linguistic, academic, and institutional expectations at GHU. AI is frequently understood as a compensatory mechanism that enables IS to participate more confidently in higher education environments structured around implicit assumptions of academic and cultural familiarity. For Gayatri, an undergraduate business management major, the issue was not a lack of willingness to learn, but the absence of explicit guidance on core academic practices that course professors seemed to assume she already knew and in which she demonstrated competence. Faced with unfamiliar expectations and no formal instruction, she turned to AI as a necessary support rather than a shortcut, she explained:

> Yes, I have used AI and because, how can I work and do my assignments right? I can't even understand. I don't know what APA is. No one teaches it to me. So, how do I use APA? I need to pass this course. I need to do well. I'm paying so much money in tuition. So in that context, have you or peers, peers that perhaps you know, been accused of plagiarism or misuse of AI tools like ChatGPT?

Rather than viewing AI as a substitute for learning, Gayatri positioned it as a means of accessing knowledge that she felt had never been explicitly taught. In this context, AI-assisted tools and citation generators became part of what she described as an informal "academic survival kit." Gayatri experimented with online citation generators, grammar checkers, and AI-based writing assistants to piece together what counted as legitimate academic work. She further explained that citation generators and AI-assisted tools helped her navigate unfamiliar academic conventions:

> Initially, I didn't even know about references, so I just talked to the professor and then learned about them to get better at it. And I use a couple of tools that can help me, like putting in the website

> name, and it can generate the APA 7th citation for me. So I think I have to be cautious in ways that I am using AI because it is the future, and everyone is using it, even professors must be using it, but it's just about like how we use it, like we have to be cautious of not being caught or not being accused of that, but using it in like, a holistic way that can save us time, but also not like get us caught in situations.

Gayatri's use of AI indicates how she mobilized these tools to navigate Western academic referencing conventions that are not widely taught or used in many Global South educational systems. She also remains acutely aware of the potential repercussions of AI misuse and the risk of being accused of academic dishonesty. Similarly, Niranjan, a Nepalese computer engineer student, described AI as a tool that facilitated understanding rather than a means of circumventing learning:

> I just started using AI for school, and I like to use it for referencing because I am not used to it, you know. Look, I think we can all use, like, AI's help, but, like, not for cheating. That's the thing. We use textbooks to understand. You don't need to go through all the materials in the textbooks. You just learned the main point… I use AI wisely to filter things out. Like I have a hard time explaining things, I am trying to think, and I may not have the words right then and there. But when I have to, like, explain, I can do it with AI.

Niranjan's statement illustrates how he employs AI as a pragmatic "academic survival infrastructure" to navigate unfamiliar referencing conventions and linguistic expectations, using it to clarify ideas rather than to cheat. His emphasis on "using AI wisely to filter things out" suggests how IS may experience AI-integrity regimes as overlooking ethical, learning-focused uses of these tools while positioning them under heightened suspicion and hyper-surveillance.

In another account, when reflecting on tutorial discussions, Gayatri described often feeling adrift when her peers made pop culture references she was unfamiliar with. In these moments of uncertainty, and to avoid being ridiculed or othered, she lamented:

> Many of the terms are new to me. Like, I didn't even know what a Looney Tunes was until I used AI to tell me what it was one year ago. So, I think for those things, AI can be really beneficial. Like, maybe I can just give ChatGPT a prompt that tells me, like, 10 or 15 phrases I need to know as an international student to just fit in, or the slang people use.

Evidently, her experience depicts how her position at GHU as an always-not-quite-belonging subject who subsequently pivots to strategically mobilize AI to decode cultural references and perform "fit," revealing how institutional discourses of global inclusion obscure the everyday labour required of racialized IS to be recognized as legitimate participants.

In addition to using AI for navigating academic conventions, some IS also turned to these tools to mediate everyday communication in English. Indu, a healthcare service management student, for instance, reflected on how AI-supported writing strengthened her language skills and simultaneously exposed her to new forms of scrutiny:

> I think AI does help us improve our English when writing, especially for written assignments. So that might also throw some people off, or make them more like, if it's like, if, like, I don't know, suspecting. Yeah, yes.

Indu's observation shows how AI-mediated language support functions tandemly as both a tool for linguistic empowerment and a trigger for heightened suspicion, revealing how racialized IS's efforts to "improve" their English can inadvertently intensify peer scrutiny of their academic legitimacy.

Unlike participants who primarily described using AI for idea development or citation support in academic papers, Tomas, an undergraduate student in journalism and mixed media studies, emphasized AI's role in enhancing visualization and experimentation in artistic expression. He explained that he primarily employs AI for ideation:

> So I'm doing a program [within my major] called mixed media. So it's basically just like media, but with newer forms of media. So it'd be kind of like using technology, kind of specializing in

> artificial intelligence and stuff like that. I have recently started using them in my assignments, and it has already started giving me new ideas and inspirations.

Tomas's account conveys that AI can function not only as linguistic or organizational support but also as a creative collaborator that expands the possibilities of artistic practice within emerging media fields.

Taken together, these accounts challenge dominant narratives that frame AI primarily through the lens of misconduct. Instead, IS positioned AI as an academic survival infrastructure that empowered them to navigate linguistic, cultural, and institutional gaps. Notably, IS rarely characterizes AI as a replacement for their intellectual labour. By contrast, they explained that they used it to access, translate, organize, and communicate knowledge at GHU, whose expectations were often implicit rather than transparent. Markedly, AI emerges less as a mechanism for unfair academic advantage and more as a tool for educational adaptation and survival.

From Learning Support to Suspicion: The Conditional Legitimacy of AI Use

Although racialized IS overwhelmingly describe AI as a valuable educational resource, their lived realities also revealed a persistent tension surrounding its use. Across interviews, IS detailed navigating an institutional environment in which AI was encouraged, normalized, and, in some cases, expected, yet simultaneously framed as a potential threat to academic integrity. In the absence of clear or consistent guidance, IS frequently encountered contradictory messages about when, how, and to what extent AI could be used.

For Indu, the mixed messages around AI had become impossible to ignore. She noticed a clear shift in how professors talked about it, even as their expectations and suspicions seemed to rise:

> In the beginning, professors and teaching assistants were like, no, not at all [to AI]. But recently they started saying that you can use it to enhance your answers. They are starting to expect a higher quality of work, but at the same time, they don't want you to be copying everything.

Indu's remarks reveal how shifting AI policies move from outright prohibition to conditional acceptance in ways that normalize heightened expectations and suspicion, which she experienced as positioning racialized IS as continually monitored subjects whose "improved" work must still be proven authentic.

These ambiguities were also evident to Arulselvan, a computer science undergraduate, who observed that his professors and teaching assistants sometimes relied on AI to draw connections and examples in class, reflecting:

> Most students use it as a guide. The problem is that people think that if you use AI, you're automatically cheating, but that's not really how students and professors use it.

Arulselvan's observation thus reveals how AI use is simultaneously normalized (when employed by faculty) and stigmatized in the classroom, exposing the inconsistency between institutional reliance on AI and the persistent assumption that students who use it are inherently suspect.

In one instance, Gayatri portrayed how she carefully monitored and adjusted her own behaviour to keep her AI use within institutional expectations, particularly after her course teaching assistants implicitly invited students to use AI. Instead of perceiving AI as inherently problematic, she framed responsible use as requiring continual vigilance and self-regulation, despite the accepted use. Gayatri explained:

> I think I am very cautious about the use of AI. Definitely, I don't even feel ashamed to say that I don't, because it is the future, and it just makes our work easier. But then I have enough consciousness to use it properly, like, if I am doing some research, I don't just copy and paste it into my work. I make sure that I humanize it, or, like, change things a bit, or just take ideas from there and then frame my own or use my own language. Because if you use, like, Turnitin and stuff, which is built in when we submit our assignments, I think it's very important that we are cautious.

Gayatri's thought is striking as it reveals how institutional concerns surrounding AI become internalized within students' academic practices. Her repeated emphasis on being "cautious" and ensuring that AI-generated content is sufficiently "humanized" insinuates that the obstacle is not simply learning how to use

AI but learning how to use it in ways that remain recognizable as legitimate. Rather than relying upon AI uncritically, Gayatri actively modifies, translates, and reworks AI-generated outputs to align with institutional expectations of authentic authorship. Such an account illuminates how students become active participants in regulating their own behaviour, anticipating potential scrutiny before it occurs.

Comparably, Ashton, a graduate journalism student, recalled a time in a class that was also shaped by anticipatory suspicion and routine verification. Reflecting on the proliferation of AI detection technologies, he noted:

> Yeah, there's definitely, like, monitoring a level of suspicion, I know that. Like, there are a lot of profs who harp on every assignment, like we're going to run this through eye checkers, you know, every single time and all that. And like, it sucks because, like, sometimes a lot of these students are using it, so it's hard to, like, it's hard to get on them too much. I don't know to what extent black [international] students are using them, but it definitely increased suspicion. But, like, I've actually seen plenty use AI on these assignments. And, yeah, it's that whole thing that's disheartening.

While Ashton acknowledged that some students do use AI inappropriately, his comments reveal how AI governance has become embedded within everyday teaching and assessment practices. Verification does not emerge only when misconduct is suspected; it operates pre-emptively, positioning students as subjects whose work must continually be authenticated. In this sense, AI use becomes conditionally legitimate: students may be permitted to engage with AI, yet they do so within an environment where its use is simultaneously anticipated, monitored, and potentially questioned.

Across the accounts, IS distinguished between using AI as a learning aid and outsourcing their work, yet worried that instructors, policies, and detection systems did not recognize this difference. As a result, they engaged in continual self-monitoring, editing AI-generated text, documenting their processes, or restricting AI use altogether to pre-empt suspicion. AI, thus, emerged in participants' accounts as a site where they felt compelled to continually demonstrate that their learning practices are authentic, ethical, and deserving of institutional trust.

The Racialization of Academic Integrity: Hyper-Surveillance, Visibility, and Differential Scrutiny

Beyond uncertainty surrounding acceptable AI use, participants also described broader experiences of surveillance and differential scrutiny within academic integrity processes. While it is generally acknowledged that maintaining academic standards is vital, several questioned whether suspicion, monitoring, and enforcement were experienced equally across racial student populations. Rather than viewing surveillance as a procedural institutional practice, participants often interpreted it through their experiences as racialized IS, observing patterns of visibility and scrutiny that appeared unevenly distributed. Gayatri suggested how pre-existing assumptions about IS could influence perceptions of misconduct:

> There's a lot of racism right now surrounding us, and if it's in the thought, then even if you see so many Canadians [students] doing it, they will pick on people like me, pick out those racialized IS, because, you know, they're already targeted. I think it's just the mindset of the professors or whoever is using them, and the bias they bring. I can definitely say, like, they would love to pick up international students, because domestic students make up the majority of the population. International students are already fewer, and if it comes to racialized, then, like South Asians, they have a lot of hatred against them already, so maybe they have that bias in their mind that they are just going to use AI. They are just here to steal their jobs and all those things which keep being repeated in their minds. They're gonna use that to target international students again, especially, like, racialized ones, right? It's just about bias.

Gayatri's account exemplifies her perception of academic integrity scrutiny through racially motivated assumptions concerning IS, particularly signalling that suspicions of AI misuse are often pre-emptively attributed to racialized IS, especially South Asians, irrespective of similar conduct exhibited by domestic peers. Her account raises the possibility that ostensibly impartial integrity practices may be experienced as

intersecting with deficit-oriented racial assumptions, constructing racialized IS as inherently suspect, hyper-visible targets of surveillance whose academic presence is framed as a threat to jobs and institutional order rather than as legitimate participation.

Indu recalled how patterns of monitoring in proctored online exams in lecture halls seemed to converge around clusters of racialized IS, particularly when invigilators suspected potential AI use:

> Yes, I think that international students are mistrusted. I think they definitely do stay towards certain areas. It also depends, I think, on the group, like, I know, like people speak in foreign languages and have big friend groups. And like I see, I do always see an invigilator over there standing near that friend group. So I think, like, that's one way that people used to identify international students as well, yeah, but I do agree with that, yeah, okay.

Her account implies how monitoring practices may be perceived by racialized IS as a form of differential or hyper-surveillance, marking IS of colour as pre-emptively suspect and disproportionately subject to scrutiny under the guise of neutral academic oversight. The repeated presence of invigilators around particular groups of students contributed to the perception that monitoring was not uniformly distributed but was instead attached to specific bodies and identities.

Arulselvan likewise recounted an incident involving a fellow IS who was accused of cheating during a large examination with the use of AI. His friend from Gujarat was accused of cheating despite watching others openly break the rules:

> He was so confused because he wasn't cheating ... he could see people cheating. I know of other people cheating too ... but because he was at that part of the classroom, he was randomly called out.

While Arulselvan could not definitively determine why his friend was singled out, the account is significant because it indicates that he perceived academic integrity enforcement as neither transparent nor evenly applied. The issue was not merely the accusation itself but the apparent discrepancy between who became visible to institutional scrutiny and who remained unnoticed. Such narratives suggest that (selective) surveillance may be experienced less as an objective mechanism for integrity assurance and more as an administrative process by which particular students become subject to differential scrutiny and arbitrary suspicion.

Given the alarming number of reported academic integrity violations involving AI infractions that are often presumed to be disproportionately committed by IS of colour, many asynchronous online exams are now being converted into in-person, written assessments. Ashton interprets these shifts as follows:

> I think it’s partly a way of mitigating that. So, in the classes I’ve had that weren’t journalism classes, like for Spanish or history, it’s been in person, pen and paper, right? So you can’t really ‘AI’ those. But there’s still a level of distress, because you can see who the invigilators are looking at, right? At the very least, it’s not AI-specific, but definitely, you can tell who they trust to be on the up and up and who they don’t. They’re definitely looking at you a whole bunch of times. But, like, yeah, it’s one of those things you just get used to, right?

Ashton’s account displays how racialized IS may experience themselves as anticipatorily cast as suspect bodies whose presence in exam spaces invites intensified monitoring, such that institutional responses to AI are less about upholding integrity enforcement than about reproducing long-standing hierarchies of whose conduct is trusted and whose must be continually scrutinized.

It becomes apparent that participants rarely rejected academic integrity policies themselves. The abovementioned accounts indicate that surveillance operates as a mechanism for detecting misconduct masked as due process through which trustworthiness is differentially assigned. Consequently, AI-mediated integrity systems may reinforce existing hierarchies of credibility by rendering some students more hyper-visible, scrutinized, and accountable than others. In this sense, participants' narratives disclose how academic integrity governance at GHU becomes intertwined with broader questions of race, legitimacy, and institutional belonging.

The Burden of Proving Authenticity: AI, Credibility, and Epistemic Verification

Perhaps the most intriguing finding to emerge from participants' narratives was the persistent expectation that racialized IS must demonstrate, defend, and verify the legitimacy of their academic work. While previous themes illuminated how AI concurrently functions as a learning resource and a mechanism of surveillance, participants' accounts revealed a deeper concern: credibility required continual verification. Across interviews, IS elucidated experiences in which academic success, strong performance, and even innocence became subject to explanation. In this sense, the issue extended beyond AI itself and toward broader institutional, predetermined assumptions about who is perceived as a legitimate knower. Niranjan articulated one experience directly which his academic performance appeared to invite skepticism rather than recognition:

> I've had to, like, explain myself in the past as well. So, like, whenever I did well, and in a test or an assignment, they're like, how? ... I'm like, I just studied, honestly. As for, online submissions, I always had a feeling that I had with myself, like, whenever, if it's like, an interaction with the TA, or like a professor, whenever they're marking the papers, I had to, like, explain a few more things, like, on my behalf … yeah, I didn't do anything wrong. It's just, like in the moment, I feel like I'm made to feel this way, and I must explain. I've, like, had to explain a few of the steps I took to complete the task before they marked me. I'm not sure if it was a comment that came out of racial intention, but if that's the case, that's the nearest I've come to my experience with this.

What is particularly striking in Niranjan's thoughts is that suspicion emerged not following misconduct but following academic success. Rather than receiving the benefit of the doubt, he described a sentiment compelled to justify how he had attained his achievements. Such experiences indicate that credibility is not evenly distributed but is often mediated by assumptions about who is expected to succeed and whose success requires further explanation.

Similarly, Indu outlined the institutional processes by which IS accused of AI misuse or academic misconduct were required to account for themselves before disciplinary decisions were made. Reflecting on the experiences of peers, she explained:

> I have not used AI, but I do know my peers that have, and then they ended up like they usually. What they usually do is, when they catch you, they give you a chance to meet the prof or the TA and have a discussion, explain yourself. And then sometimes you get a chance to redo it, but like, some of my friends just completely missed the email that they got. So they just ended up getting a zero.

While Indu was not describing her own experience, her account is significant because it exemplifies how institutional responses to suspected misconduct often hinge upon students' ability to successfully explain, justify, and defend their actions. The issue is not whether misconduct transpired, but how credibility must be established through institutional encounters. Viewed alongside other participants' narratives, the expectation to "explain yourself" suggests that legitimacy is frequently treated as something to be verified rather than presumed. Altogether, these accounts suggest that AI-related integrity regimes' processes may be experienced as producing a racialized epistemic burden of proof, wherein racialized IS must continuously perform and defend their originality in ways other students are permitted to take for granted.

RESULTS

AI occupies a far more contradictory position within internationalized higher education than current scholarly and institutional discourses often acknowledge. While existing literature tends to frame AI as either an educational support mechanism or an academic integrity challenge (Arslan et al., 2025; Leaton Gray et al., 2025), racialized IS narratives uncover that AI functions simultaneously as a technology of inclusion and regulation. For racialized IS, AI was not experienced primarily as a technological innovation but as a site through which legitimacy, trust, and (conditional) belonging were continually negotiated.

Participants utilized AI to navigate linguistic barriers, unfamiliar academic conventions, and hidden institutional expectations. Consistent with prior research (Adekoya et al., 2026; Zhao et al., 2024), AI served as a valuable learning and andragogical support. Yet the findings extend this literature by demonstrating that students often adopted AI not simply to enhance learning but to compensate for institutional gaps in academic socialization. AI serves as an informal infrastructure through which IS accessed knowledge and conventions that were assumed, but rarely explicitly taught, within GHU.

However, students' lived realities simultaneously reveal a paradox. The very technologies that facilitated participation also intensified conditions of scrutiny. Racialized IS describes an institutional environment in which AI use was seemingly normalized, encouraged, and sometimes expected, while remaining persistently suspected. This contradiction suggests that, from participants' perspectives, contemporary academic integrity practices at GHU may be reconfiguring expectations of authorship and legitimacy. Rather than providing clarity, AI governance appears to introduce new uncertainties about what constitutes acceptable academic practice, as it is neither transparently communicated nor outlined in the course syllabus or expectations. IS of colour were therefore felt obligated to engage in continual self-surveillance (despite the hyper-surveillance they were prone to), carefully modifying, documenting, and justifying their use of AI in anticipation of an inquisition regarding academic infractions. In terms of governmentality, surveillance no longer operates solely through detection but through the internalization of monitoring itself. Participants' narratives signal that the most consequential effect of AI governance may not be punishment but the production of self-disciplinary subjects who learn to anticipate suspicion before it materializes.

CRT offers an important intervention into these dynamics by questioning the presumed due process of surveillance and verification systems of assessments. Racialized IS repeatedly conveyed that scrutiny was not experienced uniformly. While the study cannot claim that AI technologies themselves are inherently discriminatory, the findings indicate that these systems operate within institutional environments already structured by racialized assumptions regarding language proficiency, academic preparedness, and trustworthiness (Flores & Rosa, 2015; George Mwangi, 2016). Consequently, AI does not create suspicion ex nihilo; rather, it appears capable of amplifying pre-existing hierarchies of credibility. This finding underscores how invigilating and assessment practices related to generative AI policies and technologies that appear objective can nonetheless reproduce and legitimize existing inequities through routine procedures (Crenshaw, 1991; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). What emerges is not simply technological surveillance, but a form of racialized verification in which some students are routinely required to furnish more evidence of their legitimacy than others.

Perhaps the most significant contribution of this study concerns the relationship between AI and epistemic legitimacy. Across IS' narratives, the central issue was rarely whether misconduct had occurred; rather, it was how quickly racialized IS became positioned as needing to explain, defend, or authenticate their academic work. Niranjan's account is especially instructive. When he described having to explain himself after doing well on a test or assignment, his success did not appear to function as straightforward evidence of competence. Instead, achievement itself became suspect, prompting a moment when he felt compelled to demonstrate that his performance was legitimately earned. Similarly, Indu's description of students being required to meet with professors or teaching assistants to "explain yourself" after suspected AI use reveals how academic integrity processes can transform students into subjects of evidentiary burden. Credibility is mediated by racialized assumptions about language, academic preparedness, and trustworthiness.

AI-mediated integrity regimes not only ask whether a racialized IS transgressed GHU's student conduct and cheated; they also participate in deciding whose authorship is believable, whose improvement is plausible, and whose success requires further verification. In turn, AI governance produces new forms of epistemic (invisible) labour for racialized IS, requiring them to continually perform authenticity before their knowledge can be recognized as legitimate. Gayatri's repeated emphasis on being "cautious," "humanizing" AI-generated material, and avoiding being "caught" signifies how this burden is internalized

before any formal accusation occurs. Here, GHU does not need to accuse every student directly; the possibility of accusation is enough to reorganize how racialized IS write, edit, cite, and present themselves.

Notably, the GHU is a case study of contradiction within contemporary internationalization. Universities recruit IS as symbols of diversity, global engagement, and institutional vitality, yet the same students are often positioned as risky subjects requiring monitoring, regulation, and verification (Guo & Guo, 2017; Arumuhathas, 2026a). AI intensifies this contradiction. For Gayatri, Niranjan, and Indu, AI offered practical support for navigating APA conventions, academic English, citation practices, and unfamiliar expectations. Yet, these same supports could also make their work appear too polished, too improved, or insufficiently "authentic." Indu's observation that AI can improve English while simultaneously making instructors more "suspecting" captures this incongruity sharply. The very instrument that aids racialized IS in approximating institutional expectations may also expose them to renewed suspicion when their writing no longer conforms to deficit expectations.

Ultimately, the case study suggests that AI should be understood not as an educational technology but as a governance technology that participates in the allocation of trust, legitimacy, and recognition within higher education. The experiences of racialized IS at GHU reveal that debates about AI are also debates about who is believable in the university. Consequently, ethical AI governance cannot be reduced to accuracy, detection, misconduct, or policy compliance. It must also confront the racialized and raciolinguistic conditions through which some students' knowledge is presumed authentic while others are required to prove that their authorship, competence, and belonging are deserved.

Limitations

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of this pilot study. First, the analysis rests on a small sample size of 6 racialized IS at a single research-intensive commuter university in the Greater Toronto Area, limiting the range of experiences and institutional conditions represented. Second, recruitment took place during final examinations and amid heightened public and political scrutiny of international students and Canadian immigration policy, contexts that likely shaped who participated and how they narrated their experiences. Third, the study relies on self-reported accounts that foreground participants' meanings and perceptions but do not independently corroborate institutional practices or decisions related to AI governance and academic integrity. Finally, because AI technologies, detection systems, and policy frameworks are evolving rapidly, the study captures a temporally specific moment rather than a stable or generalizable configuration of AI-mediated governance.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how racialized IS at GHU experienced and negotiated AI-mediated academic practices within contemporary higher education. The findings suggest that AI is an educational technology but also a governance mechanism through which credibility, legitimacy, and belonging are regulated. While participants frequently relied on AI to navigate linguistic transitions, unfamiliar academic conventions, and institutional expectations, they also described intensified scrutiny surrounding authorship, academic integrity, and authenticity. Consequently, AI emerged as both a tool of participation and a site of surveillance, exposing a growing tension between institutional commitments to inclusion and the lived realities of racialized IS.

These findings raise important implications for international higher education policy and practice. Universities cannot meaningfully advance equity, diversity, inclusion, and decolonization (EDID) and internationalization agendas while simultaneously relying upon systems that position particular student populations as subjects of verification and suspicion (Guo & Guo, 2017; Parnther, 2022). HEIs should establish participatory AI-governance structures that include international and racialized students alongside faculty, academic-integrity personnel, teaching and learning centers, international education administrators,

and EDID practitioners in the development and periodic review of AI policies. Such recommendations must nevertheless be situated within an evolving institutional landscape: generative AI remains a comparatively recent disruption to HEIs, and many like GHU are grappling with how to define acceptable use, establish coherent policy parameters, and respond to technologies whose capabilities continue to outpace institutional policy-making. This uncertainty warrants iterative and adaptable governance, but it should not become a rationale for postponing questions of equity, accountability, and IS protection while institutional policies continue to take shape. Where AI-generated evidence or detection technologies contribute to misconduct allegations, institutions should require meaningful human review, disclose the evidentiary basis of allegations, and provide IS with accessible opportunities to respond and appeal before consequential academic penalties are imposed. Institutions should further conduct periodic equity audits of AI-related integrity cases, where legally and ethically appropriate, examining patterns in allegations, sanctions, and overturned decisions to identify potential disparities requiring institutional intervention. Faculty development should similarly address raciolinguistic assumptions surrounding authorship and academic competence so that linguistic difference, changes in writing style, or unexpected academic performance do not themselves become proxies for technological misconduct.

More fundamentally, AI governance requires reconsideration of where the burden of academic credibility is placed. Institutions should work toward a presumption-of-authorship principle in which students are not informally required to prove the authenticity of their knowledge merely because their work attracts technological or subjective suspicion; responsibility for substantiating misconduct should remain with transparent and procedurally accountable institutional processes. Future research should continue examining how AI intersects with race, language, migration, and power across diverse institutional contexts. Overall, the challenge is not simply how universities govern AI, but what forms of institutional power become governable through AI and who is required to become more visible, more explainable, and more verifiable in return (Yao et al., 2019).

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Declaration of Artificial Intelligence

The author affirms that no generative artificial intelligence tools were used in the preparation of this manuscript, including its conceptualization, research design, data collection, analysis, interpretation, or writing. All scholarly contributions, analytical judgments, and interpretations presented herein are the independent intellectual work of the author, who assumes full responsibility for the manuscript's originality, accuracy, and academic integrity.

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