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How Generative Artificial Intelligence has blurred notions of authorial identity and academic norms in higher education, necessitating clear university usage policies.

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How Generative Artificial Intelligence has blurred notions of authorial identity and academic norms in higher education, necessitating clear university usage policies.

Abstract

Purpose: This study examines the impact of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI), particularly ChatGPT, on Higher Education. The ease with which content can be generated using GenAI has raised concerns across academia regarding its role in academic contexts, particularly regarding summative assessments. This research makes a unique contribution to the literature by examining university student and staff perceptions of current and future issues pertaining to the role of GenAI in universities.

Design/methodology/approach: A qualitative method involving five one-to-one semi-structured interviews with four students and a lecturer explored ethical and practical issues of GenAI text generation in academia. An inductive thematic analysis was chosen as it provided nuanced insights aligned with the study's goals.

Findings: Use of GenAI was discussed within the context of a range of topics including perceptions of academic misconduct, authorial integrity, and issues pertaining to university policies. Participants universally defined traditional classifications of academic misconduct but were unable to provide clear definitions where the use of GenAI was included for writing summative assessments. Students showed a more open engagement with GenAI, considering it a tool for overcoming obstacles, rather than a means to plagiarise. Educators were generally more cautious, and less optimistic about the academic role of GenAI. Lack of clear institutional policies surrounding such tools also contributed to ethical ambiguities.

Originality: The study highlights diverging perspectives between students and academics, which necessitate a forum for dialogue, ensuring the need to develop clear policies to steer the integration of GenAI in a manner that is beneficial for students and academics.
Introduction

The impact of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) on Higher Education (HE) has elicited reactions ranging from calls for a complete ban on its use in scientific literature (Davidson, 2023; McCallum, 2023), to a complete remodelling of the global educational system (Naughton, 2023). AI’s growing popularity is evident in its uptake among major technology conglomerates. For example, Google have announced the introduction of GenAI chatbots into its productivity tools Gmail, Sheets and Docs (Kurian, 2023). Moreover, Microsoft are reportedly investing $3 billion into OpenAI (Linares et al., 2023) introducing GenAI features into their ubiquitous Microsoft Office programmes, which are used by most students in their university work (Kelly, 2023). The recent rise in both the availability and complexity of GenAI tools has understandably raised concerns across academia regarding potential issues related to authorship and academic integrity (Barnett, 2023). Furthermore, increased access to such software has forced HE institutions to re-evaluate policies surrounding appropriate usage as the sector moves towards establishing its role within it (Cotton et al., 2023).

It is important to note that the field of AI has been evolving since its inception in the 1950s (Anyoha, 2017). Over the decades, AI has branched into various subfields, one of which is GenAI. Tools like Grammarly and QuillBot have been utilising AI to enhance writing and paraphrasing tasks, providing users with grammar assistance and rephrasing suggestions based on learned patterns of language usage (Nurmayanti and Suryadi, 2023). The latest surge of interest in GenAI is significant for several reasons. First, advancements in computational power and algorithmic efficiency have enabled GenAI systems to be more extensive in their capabilities (Dhoni, 2023). Second, GenAI has become highly customisable, allowing for fine-tuning to specific tasks or styles required by users. This means that it can be adapted for a range of applications, from creative writing to technical documentation, reflecting the desired voice and tone with a high degree of precision (Javaid et al., 2023). Lastly, the sophistication of current GenAI models has reached a point where the output is often almost indistinguishable from that produced by a human.

ChatGPT is currently the most well-known and widely used GenAI software (Eysenbach, 2023) and early studies focused on HE highlighted its proficiency demonstrating an exam performance akin to a third-year medical student (e.g., Gilson et al., 2023). Jalil (2023) assessed ChatGPT’s answers to questions from a software testing textbook and found it provided wholly or partly accurate answers in 44% of the scenarios. The emergence of these results, and similar studies in this area (Gao et al., 2022; Malinka et al., 2022; Fowler, 2023; Biswas, 2023), have raised concerns across HE regarding the potential misuse of ChatGPT to write summative assessments (Dwivedi, et al., 2023). Sadasivan et al. (2023) tested 10,000 text samples, testing the efficacy of ten distinct detection modalities. The findings highlighted that, although certain detection methods showcased commendable accuracy, none proved to be entirely infallible. The analysis also revealed the growing proficiency of GenAI algorithms in producing content virtually indistinguishable from that written by humans. These findings added support to Gao et al. (2022) who submitted fifty ChatGPT generated abstracts to academic reviewers and had only 63% of these fakes detected. These findings demonstrated that there is a pressing need for research to devise more astute detection systems that can parallel the rapid evolution in AI to prevent issues surrounding academic misconduct and authorship. The onset of ChatGPT and similar software, blurs concepts of what constitutes authorship, and subsequently authorial integrity and definitions of academic misconduct (Cotton et al., 2023). Understandably, university policies will need to be developed to
incorporate use of AI insofar as delineating permissible use and specifically what constitutes misuse (Klimova, 2023).

Academic misconduct is defined as using ideas, content, or formats without properly crediting the original source (Roig, 2015). The techniques of plagiarism used by students differ, with the most severe being the direct copying of original work. Other strategies encompass slight rewording by changing sentence constructs or substituting words, and using online platforms to restructure content, all tactics used to evade plagiarism detection (Elkhatat et al., 2021; Meusche and Gipp, 2013; Sakamoto and Tsuda, 2019). The International Centre for Academic Integrity (2020) conducted a comprehensive survey of approximately 70,000 undergraduates between 2002 and 2015. They found 39% of the students admitted to ‘cheating’ on tests, 62% confessed to misconduct in written assignments, and 68% acknowledged wrongdoing in both areas. Research suggests that if given the chance, students will utilise technologies to commit academic misconduct (Dolan and Smeepvangers, 2023; Prihar and Wanna, 2019). Some students may do so due to a desire to portray a better image of themselves (Norris, 2019), or because they feel the rewards outweigh the risks (Lancaster and Clarke, 2017). What many studies do not consider, is how or to what extent the use of AI contributes to or constitutes academic misconduct. GPT-4 (ChatGPT’s successor) passed the Uniform Bar Exam, scoring 10% above the student average (Katz et al., 2023) and, in a recent BBC report (2023), students claimed they had received first-class grades for essays written using ChatGPT. Turnitin is the foremost plagiarism detection software used by most universities across the globe (Turnitin for Universities, 2023). This software has been updated to include an ‘AI detection score’ to its software in response to the rising concerns of dishonest GenAI use (Turnitin for Universities, 2023). After several reports regarding the accuracy of its detection scores, a cautionary ‘flag’ was added, stating, “Percentage may not indicate cheating. Review required.” (Fowler, 2023, p.11). Tests on the efficacy of multiple other AI plagiarism detectors have yielded mixed results (Gao et al., 2022; Fowler, 2023; Biswas, 2023).

In the burgeoning landscape of AI-driven text generators, GPT-4 stands as a more advanced iteration compared to its predecessor, ChatGPT. While GPT-4 boasts enhanced accuracy and a larger word output, its inaccessibility to users without a paid subscription poses a critical question. With a current monthly subscription fee of $20, GPT-4 joins an increasingly exclusive club of AI technologies behind paywalls (ChatGPT, 2023). This raises important ethical considerations around access and affordability. If the need for generative AI tools becomes ubiquitous then the open and free access to them for all students becomes crucial. The absence of this is known as ‘Digital Inequity’, which is more broadly defined as the unequal distribution of access, understanding, and skill in using digital technologies, disproportionately affecting low-income populations and minority groups (Kuhn, 2023). Although $20 may be affordable to some, it may be unaffordable to others when coupled with the costs of laptops, course materials, and the exacerbating effects of the ongoing cost-of-living crisis (Koebel, 2023). Recent studies indicate that students are among those most impacted by rising living costs (Fellows, 2022; Wicklow, 2022; Francis, 2023). Therefore, the commercialisation of advanced AI tools like GPT-4 and ‘ChatGPT Enterprise’ risks widening the ‘digital divide,’ making it imperative to consider the socioeconomic ramifications of such technologies (Abebe, 2023; Liu et al, 2023; Wierdak, 2023; Bachmann, 2023).

Given the preceding review, the present study aimed to explore academic and student perceptions of GenAI. Specifically, the study aimed to explore students’ and staff knowledge of such tools, their perceptions of its impact on academic endeavours, to what extent students use AI software, and notions of what constitutes fair use, if at all, in academic contexts.
Method

Participants

The purposive sample for this study comprised four full-time university students studying film and media and one university lecturer (see Table I for details). All participants were actively studying/working in UK universities. Eligibility criteria included being a full-time student or faculty member with some experience or understanding of GenAI technologies. As per ethical obligations, all participant information was anonymised. Pseudonyms were used throughout the study to ensure confidentiality.

Table I

Procedure

Participants were invited to take part in a psychological research study focused on better understanding the role of GenAI in HE. Each participant received a participant information sheet, which clarified the aims of the study. Participants provided informed consent before taking part. All students were recruited by the lead researcher. Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time and up to 10 working days after (zero participants met this criterion). Participants were reminded that they could pause or stop the interview at any point. The participants were then asked eleven questions, which formed the interview schedule. Interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes during which participants were encouraged to elaborate on their responses to elicit as much information as possible. Interviews were transcribed by the lead experimenter. The study was approved by the local university ethics committee and adhered to the ethical principles of British Psychological Society Code of Human Research Ethics (Oates et al., 2021). Interviews were recorded using a portable digital device. In accordance with ethics protocols, all data were stored on a secure server.

Interviews

One-to-one semi structured interviews were conducted in-person. Interviews comprised of two parts, the first part consisted of three scenarios, presented to assess perceptions of academic honesty (see Table II below for details). The second part of the interviews consisted of ten questions focused on the use of GenAI in academic work, and their views on this topic. Participants were asked questions such as “Do you know the university policy on ChatGPT?”, “Do you know of anyone who has used/is using ChatGPT in their university work?” and “Do you think that assessments need to be changed due to ChatGPT e.g., oral presentations, group projects, and hands-on activities as a move away from traditional coursework done at home?” The entire interview guide can be requested from the authors. A debrief form was distributed at the end of the interview, outlining the study's purpose and significance, as well as options for data withdrawal and avenues for inquiries or complaints. Transcriptions were later created from these recordings for analysis.

Table II

Data Analysis

From a constructionist perspective, knowledge is not merely discovered but is actively constructed, and understanding is inherently subjective and influenced by context (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Consequently, the perceptions of GenAI are not viewed as a rigid or universal
truths but rather as social and cultural fabrications. Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-phase framework was utilised for analysis. This approach was influenced by its versatility, which offers both flexibility and the ability to yield in-depth, intricate themes. Inductive thematic analysis was used to identify themes within the data (Braun and Clarke, 2013). This facilitated the extraction of valuable insights and permitted the natural emergence of themes from the data. Initial coding was conducted by the lead researcher and subsequent themes reviewed by both authors. All themes were discussed and agreed, inclusive of the narrative around each theme.

Results and Discussion

The analysis revealed three main themes. The first theme ‘The Onset of AI has led to Ambiguities in the Definition of Academic Misconduct’ and its subtheme ‘Use of GenAI Blurs Notions of Authorial Integrity and Authenticity’ outline the complexity of GenAI within current definitions of academic misconduct. Theme two provides evidence for ‘Differences and Difficulties Conceptualising Fair Use of GenAI in Academia’. The final theme was ‘There is a need for clear university policies regarding use of GenAI software for summative assessments’ which discusses the consequences of a lack of clarity university policy regarding GenAI.

Theme 1: The Onset of AI has led to Ambiguities in the Definition of Academic Misconduct

All participants were aligned in their definition of academic misconduct when examining the phenomenon through traditional examples via the scenarios in part one of the interview. However, definitions became more nuanced when the mechanisms of GenAI were superimposed and the necessity to establish a threshold that delineates the permissible use of AI arose, exemplified by Vanessa’s comment:

“…number three, I would qualify as cheating. Because basically he or she did not write it herself. [...] I think there is a difference of being inspired by something or someone, guided or motivated by something that is not yourself, it could be a person. It could be the Internet.”

The consensus across various definitions of plagiarism was the principle that passing off someone else's work, ideas, or concepts as one's own without correct reference, constitutes academic misconduct, which aligns with university definitions (e.g., Leeds Trinity University, 2022; Cambridge University, 2020). However, regarding GenAI, the complexity lies in delineating the degrees of input, as Jackson explains:

“...if an AI can write the entire text and people give you good grades because it's a good text, then that's fine. It's some mix of course because if you just say to the AI write this text, you copy and paste and put it in, then you can’t really put yourself as an author on it. But it’s difficult to draw the line.”

Subtheme 1.1: Use of AI Blurs Notions of Authorial Integrity and Authenticity

One of the purposes of the scenarios used in the present study was to distinguish between assistance and collusion. Collusion is defined as collaboration without proper acknowledgment; a collective effort passed off as individual work (Parkinson et al., 2022). No mention from either the students or lecturer, who in fact described scenarios two and three as the same, was made of citation of GenAI. Scenario three – having rolling commentary and guidance while writing an essay - could, under current definitions, be categorised as collusion, thus academic misconduct, if the ideas and concepts were not that of the students and the
supplier of them was not made reference to. Colin elaborates on this, though not when the ethicality of the scenarios was posited:

“I think if you’re just regurgitating someone else’s perspective, then you are lacking in authorial integrity because you’re just taking someone else’s opinions or ideas and passing them off as your own.”

Though there may be issues regarding citation of GenAI, as Tove highlights, when discussing writing pitches for a film producer:

“He advised me to make my texts I sent him anonymised because he's worried that if the people from the Film Institute would know that I was doing storytelling AI research, they would be worried that maybe I'm using it in my own work, which would affect my chances of getting the funding.”

This controversy also extended to whether ChatGPT should be cited in scientific literature (Sallam, 2023; Haman and Školník, 2023). Despite guidance on ChatGPT’s citation from APA (2023), a study of 100 university’s policies showed that only 4% of the universities, permitted its use with citation (Caulfield, 2023). Students and lecturers were found to have varying perceptions of the use of ChatGPT. Film student Tove described her creative use of ChatGPT to overcome ‘writer's block’, while Jack explains how he solicited feedback on his script:

“I made a script and I put it in there and I said, ‘give me some feedback’. Or ‘What storylines do you prefer?’ That was really interesting.”

Contrary to the fear of students copying from ChatGPT (Agomuoh, 2023), this research reveals a more nuanced engagement, consistent with elements of Schouffan’s (2023) findings, such that students appreciated ChatGPT’s assistance in studies, but questioned its accuracy and emphasised the need for background knowledge. Rozencwajg and Kantor (2023) recognised the advantages GenAI offers in terms of swift content generation and efficiency in scientific writing, but were equally keen to highlight the paramountcy of ensuring precision and scholarly diligence, a point that Jackson illustrates:

“You still have to be careful because there can be misinformation. You have to be you as a person have to be smart enough to do the right research [...] But again, this sounds like avoiding it. This is a tool of cheating. And to me, then you’re not going to learn how to use it properly in written work. And it’s an education, you have to educate people.”

This awareness of the deficiencies of this software and subsequently the employment of critical use, contrasts with the more apprehensive perspective of the lecturer Colin, who feared students’ reliance on GenAI software such as ChatGPT:

“...if you are just using ChatGPT as a prompt to write your essays for you, and if you find that ChatGPT has managed to get you through with a 2-2 or a 3rd, and you know they’ve not necessarily engaged to the degree you’d hope a student would.”

“...a student, had taken it upon themselves to generate an AI essay and give it to their tutor and their tutors mark it blindly and said they would give it a 3rd.”

The disparity between students and lecturer highlights the need for a nuanced approach for policy development and its clarification. The students' engagement with the technology reflects...
an openness to integrate it responsibly, contrasting with lecturers' fears of plagiarism. These opposing perspectives underscore issues of trust and the absence of a uniform policy to guide concepts of fair use. The implications are profound, requiring balanced policies that maintain authorial integrity while utilising technological advancements for educational enrichment, as Tove insightfully concludes:

“Yeah, just as with any other technology, I believe that you should learn how to incorporate it in a helpful way where you still learn something yourself.”

Theme 2: Differences and Difficulties Conceptualising Fair Use of AI in Academia

In the digital era, students are engaging with technology in multifaceted ways that both augment and complicate the academic learning experience. Within this paradigm, students' perceptions and actions concerning academic misconduct become significantly nuanced. Data analysis revealed notions of moral disengagement in relation to using GenAI for academic purposes (Bandura, 1991; Schaefer and Bouwmeester, 2021).

As discussed above, academic misconduct has acquired the status of normative behaviour among students (Zhang et al., 2023). Studies have categorised students or institutions with higher rates of academic misconduct, but the situational variability of academic misconduct has not been accounted for (Newton and Essex, 2023). As the data elucidates, participants such as Tove, Jack, and Jackson expressed conflicting viewpoints on the ethical implications of using GenAI in academic settings. They all initially denounced misuse in the scenarios, but later attempt to formulate a fair use of GenAI within similar parameters. Jackson's stance encapsulates this:

"If you just copy paste, then you can't really put yourself as an author on it [...] If AI can write the entire text and people give you good grades because it's a good text, then that's fine... if you've got a 20-page assignment and one part is completely written by AI, that's fine for me."

An intriguing point of analysis is the calculator analogy employed by Jack and Jackson to explain the ethical dynamics of GenAI’s involvement in their work. Jack equates the process to a calculator, stating:

“it's just like a calculator you have to know yourself what to put in there and then they can help you out with the result. And I think that's not cheating because you knew yourself. You made a decision.”

Jackson goes further with the analogy:

“When calculators just came out, I'm sure that was the thing. “Oh no, that's cheating. You're not doing math in the brain.” If you're a school and you tell students you're not allowed to use calculators, these students come out into the real world where everybody uses calculators, and they're not going to know how to navigate in a world filled with calculators. If AI is getting more and more advanced, and if an AI can write an assignment better than you, why even learn to write assignments?“

The analogy comparing ChatGPT to calculators oversimplifies the issue. It reduces the complex task of writing to a procedural process, overlooking the intellectual development that
comes from grappling with ideas, crafting arguments, and synthesising information, thus inadvertently justifying academic misconduct. Unlike calculators, which have clear functions, ChatGPT, for example, introduces ambiguity between assistance and plagiarism, and thus the analogy diminishes the seriousness of academic misconduct.

**Theme 3: There is a need for clear university policies regarding use of AI software for summative assessments**

This study revealed variations in the students’ definitions of academic misconduct, along with the justification of their perpetration. Among many possibilities, an understandable lack of university policy regarding acceptable use of GenAI may be one. Current research suggests that a lack of clarity in institutional policies around academic misconduct enables students to rationalise behaviours they might otherwise consider unethical (Mulder et al., 2015). Norrbehbahani et al. (2022) found that stricter university policies correlate with reduced rates of academic misconduct. In the present study, none of the participants could articulate their university's policy on AI use as evidenced below:

"I think it's very difficult for academic institutions to enforce very specific policies. So, off the top of my head, I could not tell you the most recent position statement that the university has put out, but I know it's currently in flux."

"I guess they're trying to find some policy for it. So just to plug it at the moment, but I think they need to like come up with something a little more creative than just banning it."

"So, I don't know the specific policy. I don't think we have one yet, but I know that they are very interested in getting to know and learn."

The literature delineates four categories of factors contributing to academic misconduct, as elucidated by Norrbehbahani et al. (2022). These categories encompass pedagogical influences, institutional frameworks, intrapersonal traits, and social milieu. Firstly, pedagogical factors relate to the teacher's perceived competence and commitment to upholding academic integrity, which can have a considerable impact on student behaviour. Secondly, institutional considerations play an important role. Thirdly, intrapersonal traits, including student interest in the course material and their overall academic performance, were identified as significant determinants. Finally, the environmental aspect focuses on the influence of peer behaviour, demonstrating how communal norms can either promote or undermine ethical academic conduct. This study reveals a critical gap in policy communication and policy development, and therefore, the moral choices students make in such settings may not be solely a reflection of their individual ethical compass. Given this, there is an urgent need for universities to clearly define and effectively communicate their policies to mitigate the ethical complexities this technology introduces.

One pressing concern for educators revolves around mitigating the effects of AI writing tools in academic settings. Faculty members are currently wrestling with the dilemma of how to redesign assessment strategies to outmanoeuvre these tools (D’Agostino, 2023). This idea of higher education adapting to GenAI was met with agreement from the participants. Encapsulated by Vanessa:

"I hope to believe that it's getting more integrated in my school and students in five years. They would, like, be benefited from it. I was just be happy about that, I guess. Then it will be more advanced in another way."
Some institutions such as Cambridge University have begun to lay the groundwork for GenAI policies in academia (Cambridge University, 2023). Under Cambridge's directives, GenAI contributions must be explicitly disclosed, though the university asserts that the authorship criteria are not satisfied by GenAI-generated work. The policy further emphasises that academic contributions should only consist of the author's original work, and appropriate citation and transparent referencing of borrowed content are mandatory.

The absence of well-defined policies concerning the usage of GenAI in educational settings has additional risks. A recent OpenAI paper (2023) warns that the newer GPT-4 model disseminates misinformation in a way that is "more convincing and believable than earlier GPT models." (p. 2.13). The paper warns that such persuasive flaws could lead both students and educators to overly trust the tool, reducing vigilance in error identification or encouraging its application in areas beyond one's expertise. Moreover, excessive reliance on these tools could "hinder the development of new skills or even lead to the loss of important skills" (p. 2.14) adding another layer of complexity to the already intricate landscape of GenAI in higher education. As GenAI technologies continue to evolve, the absence of robust policies and guidelines poses a multifaceted challenge that higher education institutions must urgently address. Future research should explore the sociotechnical aspects of GenAI adoption in academia, taking into consideration generational perspectives and the ethical implications of GenAI-assisted educational strategies.

**Limitations**

A limitation to the study was that only one academic was included. The disparity of opinions in the analysis between the students and the lecturer was very interesting and ultimately important in the future development of policy regarding the interplay of GenAI and academic work. Future research should therefore incorporate a wider range of opinions to form a clearer perspective from which to formulate definitions of fair use. As GenAI continues its rapid evolution, with more advanced versions such as GPT-4 now available, it is important that research moves in tandem with such developments to ensure that our understanding of the role of GenAI in academia is as clear as it can be.

**Conclusion**

The present study highlighted differences in what constitutes misuse of GenAI tools in academic contexts and the difficulties in establishing fair use policies. Students may take a more laissez-faire approach to GenAI, viewing it as a complimentary tool and part of the writing process. Academics may view it in a more negative light and a tool which is perhaps more likely to jeopardise authorial integrity. At the time of writing, new GenAI detection software is being developed and tested to identify AI-generated text (Sadasivan *et al.*, 2023; OpenAI, 2023). It may therefore be the case that, in time, such software may nullify the overarching issue of the use of GenAI in academia. However, at the time of writing, the effectiveness of these tools is varied (Elkhatat, 2023) and many people may be unaware of them (Üney, 2023). Furthermore, use of these tools would introduce a raft of further issues pertaining to policy, usage, and licensing. Given this, the findings of the present study are pertinent to shifting landscape of GenAI in academia and warrant attention. This study highlights the need for education on fair, reasonable and ethical GenAI use, not only to guard against misuse but to equip both students and university staff with the competencies needed to
harness GenAI for academic and professional pursuits. This is particularly important given the need to upskill students in the use of GenAI as they leave university into their chosen careers, which may require such knowledge. The diverging perspectives evidenced in this study necessitate a forum for dialogue, ensuring the integration of GenAI is beneficial for both students and HE institutions. If these GenAI tools become ubiquitous, equitable access will need to be assured by institutions. Future research should explore the impacts of subscription models and student engagement with the ‘double dipping’ of subscription and data monetisation. As such, the commercialisation of GenAI will impact equity and access in a world that is indelibly entwined with GenAI. Finally, further research is essential to track the evolving relationship between GenAI and academic misconduct, particularly as GenAI systems become more sophisticated and capable of generating even more complex and nuanced outputs.

References


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Table I: Demographic Information of the Participants

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<td>Jackson</td>
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<td>Tove</td>
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<td>Jack</td>
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Table II: Scenarios presented to participants in part one of the interview.

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<td>A second-year university student has a sibling who has just graduated from the same subject at university. The student has their sibling help them find the right materials, books, and websites to score the best mark.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Same scenario but the student’s sibling sits with them and guides them as they write their assignment. They are the student’s words but there is rolling commentary and guidance from their sibling who is helping them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The sibling writes the entire assessment for the student.</td>
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