Artificial intelligence and academic fraud in the university context

La inteligencia artificial y el fraude académico en el contexto universitario

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Abstract

The study arises from the growing observation of the use of AI in education and the inability of students to explain their processes, suggesting the misuse of AI in their work. The objective was to determine the relationship between the use of AI and academic fraud in the university context. The methodology was positivist, with a quantitative approach and correlational level. A virtual questionnaire was used, with a reliability of 0.980 and validated by five experts, applied to a sample of 144 faculty advisors (48 from Venezuela, 48 from Colombia, and 44 from Peru). The results showed a Pearson correlation of 0.980 between the use of AI and academic fraud, indicating a very strong positive relationship.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, academic fraud, correlation.

Resumen

El estudio surge de la observación creciente del uso de la IA en la educación y la incapacidad de los estudiantes para explicar sus procesos, sugiriendo un uso indebido de la IA en sus trabajos. El objetivo fue determinar la relación entre el uso de la IA y el fraude académico en el contexto universitario. La metodología fue positivista, con enfoque cuantitativo y de nivel correlacional. Se utilizó un cuestionario virtual, con una confiabilidad de 0.980 y validado por cinco expertos, aplicado a una muestra de 144 docentes tutores (48 de Venezuela, 48 de Colombia y 44 de Perú). Los resultados mostraron una correlación de Pearson de 0.980 entre el uso de la IA y el fraude académico, indicando una relación positiva muy fuerte

Palabras clave: inteligencia artificial, fraude académico, correlación.

Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is having a significant impact on education, revolutionizing academic processes and presenting numerous advantages for both students and teachers. Its impact on academic processes is becoming increasingly significant, offering numerous advantages and opportunities for both students and educators.

In this regard, Jofre (2023) highlights that the importance of AI in the educational field is evident in several aspects, as it allows teaching and learning processes to be adapted to the individual needs of each student, offering personalized study plans and individualized feedback. Additionally, it can automate administrative and repetitive tasks, freeing up time for teachers to focus on more important aspects.

According to Granero (2021), AI systems act as intelligent tutors, providing personalized assistance to students anytime and anywhere. At the same time, they can analyze data to identify patterns that might indicate learning difficulties, enabling early interventions. AI systems can continuously assess students' progress and provide detailed information to teachers and parents.

In this same context, Alonso & Quinde (2023) argue that AI can facilitate access to quality education for students in remote areas or with limited resources, as well as promote inclusion in the classroom by providing tools and resources that support students with special educational needs. It also helps drive educational research and development by providing tools to analyze large data sets and assess the effectiveness of different teaching strategies.

Considering the aforementioned points, it can be seen that the authors believe AI can foster creativity and critical thinking in students by providing them with tools to explore ideas and solve problems creatively. AI-driven education can help students acquire the necessary skills to thrive in a workplace transformed by AI.

However, the indiscriminate and unconscious use of AI can lead to adverse consequences in learning levels and intellectual production, as the responsibility of extracting information from these programs is often delegated without analyzing or questioning its accuracy. This suggests that while its impact on teaching and learning processes offers numerous benefits, new concerns arise related to the potential misuse of AI for academic fraud.

In this regard, García *et al.* (2024) point out that one form of academic fraud involving AI includes plagiarism, identity theft, the creation of false content, and data manipulation. This is significant, as it undermines academic integrity, affects educational equity, hampers the assessment of real learning, and discourages creativity and critical thinking.

According to Mayta *et al.* (2023), combating academic fraud in the AI era requires promoting a culture of academic integrity, implementing fraud detection measures, designing more innovative assessments, encouraging responsible use of AI, and fostering collaboration between educational institutions and technology developers.

Thus, the author of this study considers that AI presents both challenges and opportunities for education. It is essential to address the risk of its misuse for academic fraud by promoting academic integrity, implementing effective detection measures, designing robust assessments, and educating about the responsible use of AI. AI should not be seen as a threat but as a tool that, when used responsibly, can contribute to strengthening education and promoting honest and meaningful learning.

After reviewing some postulates and theories on this topic, the researcher believes that understanding the relationship between AI use and academic fraud is of great importance for maintaining academic integrity, which is a fundamental pillar of education, particularly at the university level in postgraduate studies. Understanding how AI can influence academic fraud helps institutions preserve high ethical and quality standards in learning and research, ensuring that academic achievements truly reflect students' abilities and efforts.

Additionally, this study aims to identify this relationship, as it allows educational institutions to develop clear policies and guidelines on AI use. Establishing limits and standards for its utilization ensures that AI is used ethically and responsibly. In this sense, these policies not only prevent

fraud but also promote the constructive use of technology in educational processes.

Moreover, understanding the risks associated with AI misuse is important for offering ethical education and training programs. It is also considered that understanding the relationship between AI and academic fraud can drive the development and improvement of plagiarism and fraud detection tools.

Furthermore, understanding how AI can affect the quality of education allows institutions to take proactive measures to ensure that students receive an authentic and valuable education. Universities have the responsibility to train ethical and competent professionals, and understanding the challenges posed by AI in terms of academic fraud is essential to fulfilling this social responsibility. In this sense, a figure is presented that, according to the researcher, gathers the factors that can influence academic fraud through the use of AI.

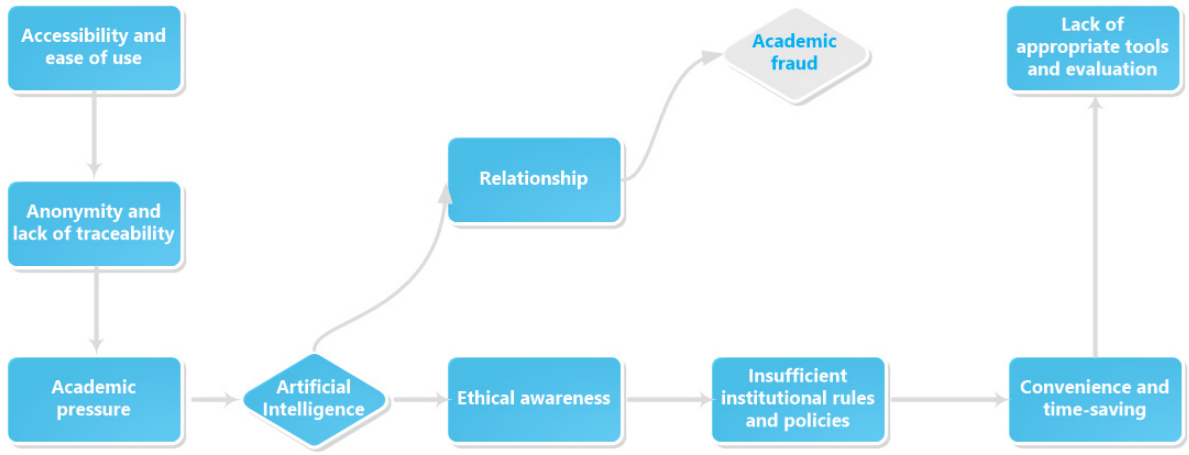

Figure 1. Factors that may influence academic fraud through the use of AI.
Fuente: Elaboración propia (2024).

Figure 1 shows that, according to the researcher, the relationship between AI use and academic fraud may be linked to the accessibility and ease of use of AI. These tools allow students to use content generation tools, such as chatbots and text generators, without the need for advanced technical skills. Additionally, academic pressure is another significant factor. Students may feel intense pressure to achieve high academic performance, which may lead them to resort to AI to complete tasks more quickly and efficiently, albeit dishonestly. Furthermore, the lack of proper education on the ethical use of AI and the consequences of academic fraud can cause students to underestimate the severity of using AI for dishonest purposes.

On the other hand, considering Puche's (2024) argument, the absence of clear policies and institutional guidelines on the use of AI in education can create an environment where students do not know what is allowed and what is not, making it easier to commit fraud.

In another line of thought, Alonso & Quinde (2023) suggest that current plagiarism detection tools may not be fully equipped to identify AI-generated content, allowing fraud to go unnoticed. AI can provide a convenient and quick way to generate academic content, which may be tempting for students seeking to save time and effort.

Similarly, Alonso (2024) argues that students who use AI to complete tasks may not be engaged in the learning process, resulting in a disconnect between acquired knowledge and the work presented. The perception that teachers do not thoroughly review assignments or fail to detect AI use may encourage fraud, as students feel they will not be caught. Moreover, the absence of assessment methods that focus on the process rather than just the final product may allow academic fraud to go unnoticed.

Thus, the study's author infers that by addressing these elements through clear educational policies, ethical training programs, and the development of better detection tools, institutions can mitigate the risk of academic fraud associated with AI use. It is important for educational institutions to take a proactive approach to face these challenges and ensure academic integrity in the era of artificial intelligence. In this sense, the study aimed to determine the relationship between artificial intelligence and academic fraud in Venezuela, Colombia, and Peru.

Methodology

The study's methodology adheres to the processes of the positivist paradigm, which aims to be as objective as possible in the pursuit of knowledge, employing orderly and disciplined procedures that allow the researcher's ideas about the nature of the phenomena under study to be tested (Acosta, 2023). Additionally, the quantitative approach was considered, defined by Arias (2019) as one that is based on the idea that all things or phenomena studied by science are measurable.

The study is descriptive in nature, as Hernández & Mendoza (2018) state that descriptive research aims to describe the characteristics or properties of a phenomenon, situation, or area of study without manipulating variables or establishing causal relationships. Its focus is to provide a detailed and accurate representation of what is being studied.

It also presented a correlational level, as Hernández & Mendoza (2018) affirm that this type of study seeks to assess the relationship between two variables to examine the degree of correlation between them. This approach focuses on discovering how one variable changes as the other changes, analyzing the direction of movement and the strength of the relationship. It is important to note that correlation does not imply causality, meaning it does not establish a cause-and-effect relationship between variables.

According to Arias (2019), in this type of research, statistical tools are used to measure and understand the degree of correlation between the studied variables. For example, correlation coefficients, such as Spearman's coefficient, can be employed to analyze the obtained information and draw conclusions about the relationship between the variables.

The sample consisted of 48 teachers from Venezuela, 48 from Colombia, and 44 from Peru, all at the university level. The inclusion criteria required a teaching experience of over 5 years at the university level, a master's or doctoral degree, and involvement in teaching thesis seminars at the university level, selected from various universities in each country.

The survey technique was applied using a multiple-choice questionnaire (always, sometimes, never). This questionnaire was validated by 5 experts with doctoral degrees (2 from Venezuela, 2 Colombians, and 1 Peruvian) using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which yielded a reliability score of 0.980. Regarding ethical considerations, transparency was ensured; the study's objectives were made known, the data was safeguarded for academic and scientific use only, and the identity of the universities and participants was protected. Data were processed using descriptive statistics, with results presented in frequency tables. Additionally, inferential statistics were used to analyze the correlation between the study variables.

Results

Table 1
Elements influencing academic fraud

Dimensions	Indicators	Answer options					
		Always		Sometimes		Never	
		F	%	F	%	F	%
Negligence in supervision	Lack of proper instruction and guidanc.	93	66.42	37	26.42	10	7.14
	Lack of student progress monitoring.	88	62.85	40	28.57	12	8.57
	Lack of communication with teachers.	112	80.0	23	16.42	5	3.57
Facilitating behavior	Not challenging or questioning students' work.	91	65.0	39	27.85	10	7.14
	Not penalizing fraud.	124	88.57	16	11.42	0	0
Conflicts of interest	Close personal relationships with students.	99	70.71	20	14.28	21	15.0
Total		140	100	140	100	140	100

Note: Author's own work (2024).

Table 1 reveals the elements influencing academic fraud. The first dimension corresponds to "Negligence in supervision," with the first indicator being the lack of proper instruction and guidance. It was observed that 66.42% of respondents indicated that this always occurs, 26.42% noted that it happens sometimes, and 7.14% stated that it never happens. Regarding the lack of student progress monitoring, 62.85% of participants reported that this lack always occurs, while 28.57% said it happens sometimes, and 8.57% mentioned that it never occurs. Finally, concerning the lack of communication with teachers, 80.0% of respondents believe that this lack always exists,

16.42% indicated that it happens sometimes, and 3.57% stated that it never occurs.

Referring to the dimension "Facilitating behavior," which is analyzed through two indicators: not challenging or questioning students' work and not penalizing fraud. For the first indicator, 65.0% of respondents said that challenging or questioning students' work is always avoided, 27.85% indicated that it happens sometimes, and 7.14% mentioned that it never happens. Regarding not penalizing fraud, 88.57% of participants reported that this behavior always occurs, 11.42% said it happens sometimes, and no respondents stated that it never happens.

In relation to the dimension "Conflicts of interest," it was observed that, according to the results, 70.71% of respondents indicated that these close relationships between tutors and students always exist, 14.28% said they occur sometimes, and 15.0% noted that they never occur.

In this context, the researcher considers that the results indicate that negligence in supervision, facilitating behavior, and conflicts of interest are significant problems in the evaluated academic environment. Additionally, the lack of proper instruction, insufficient monitoring of student progress, and poor communication with teachers are commonly reported practices, suggesting inadequate supervision. Furthermore, the lack of penalties for fraud and the absence of questioning students' work reflect permissive behavior that can negatively affect academic integrity. Finally, close personal relationships with students reveal potential conflicts of interest that may compromise fairness and impartiality in dealing with students.

Table 2
Common Frauds Committed Using AI

Dimensions	Indicators	Answer options					
		Always		Sometimes		Never	
		F	%	F	%	F	%
AI-assisted plagiarism	Generate complete works using AI tools.	123	85,41	17	11,80	0	0
	Paraphrase existing text to avoid plagiarism detection.	110	46,38	23	15,97	7	4,86
AI-assisted creation of false content	Use AI tools to create interview responses.	40	27,77	50	34,72	50	34,72
AI-assisted creation of false content	Fabricate data or research results.	70	46,61	35	24,30	35	24,30
AI-assisted misappropriation of ideas.	Present AI-generated work as one's own.	92	63,88	38	26,38	10	6,94
	Fail to properly cite AI sources.	140	100	0	0	0	0
Total		140	100	140	100	140	100

Note: Own elaboration (2024).

Table 2 reveals the results for analyzing the most common frauds committed using AI. Concerning the dimension "AI-assisted Plagiarism," specifically regarding the indicator of generating complete papers using AI, 85.41% of respondents indicated that students always engage in this practice, while 11.80% believe they do it sometimes. Additionally, regarding the practice of paraphrasing existing text to avoid plagiarism detection, 46.38% of respondents noted that students always use AI for this purpose, 15.97% said they do it sometimes, and 4.86% stated that they never do it.

Regarding the dimension "AI-assisted Deception," 27.77% of participants mentioned that students always use AI tools to create responses in interviews, while 34.72% do it sometimes. Additionally, 34.72% believe that students never engage in this practice.

When analyzing the dimension "AI-assisted Creation of False Content," specifically regarding fabricating data or research results, it was found that 48.61% of respondents indicated that students always engage in this practice, 24.30% said they do it sometimes, and another 24.30% believe they never do it.

Finally, concerning the dimension "AI-assisted Misappropriation of Ideas," it was observed that 63.88% of respondents said that students always present AI-generated work as their own, 26.38% do it sometimes, and 6.94% never do it.

According to the researcher, the results suggest a significant reliance on AI tools to produce academic work without authentic personal contribution. It is also observed that, according to the surveyed teachers, there is a significant prevalence of misuse of AI tools by students for committing plagiarism and deception.

Table 3
Correlation Coefficient Between Variables

			Artificial intelligence	Academic fraud
Spearman's Rho	Artificial intelligence	Coeficiente de correlación	1	0,980**
		Sig. (bilateral)		0,000
		N	140	140
	Academic fraud	Coeficiente de correlación	0,980**	1
		Sig. (bilateral)	0,000	
		N	140	140

Note: Own elaboration (2024).

Table 3 shows a Pearson correlation between the variables AI and academic fraud, indicating a Pearson correlation of 0.980, which signifies a very strong positive relationship. This means that as the use of artificial intelligence in education increases, academic fraud also tends to rise. However, it is important to emphasize that correlation does not imply causation. In other words, just because two variables are correlated does not mean that one causes the other.

Discussion

Considering the results regarding teachers' perceptions of students' use of AI when conducting research, Cáceres & Ulloa (2023) suggest that students often misuse AI, largely due to negligence in supervision, which negatively impacts the quality of education by allowing students to deviate from learning objectives without timely correction.

In line with this, Granero (2021) argues that when supervisors do not adequately monitor student performance, students may develop poor study habits, lack direction in their projects, and in extreme cases, resort to dishonest practices such as plagiarism or the use of AI to create false content. This lack of oversight fosters an environment where academic standards decline, and students fail to reach their full potential.

Moreover, Granero (2021) also highlights that inadequate instruction and guidance prevent students from clearly understanding academic expectations and how to meet them. According to García *et al.* (2024), without proper guidance, students may feel lost and resort to quick fixes, such as using AI tools to complete assignments. This not only hampers their learning and skill development but also perpetuates a culture of dependency, rather than encouraging critical thinking and problem-solving. The absence of clear instruction undermines students' confidence in their abilities and the educational system as a whole.

Similarly, Crawford (2023) posits that the lack of monitoring of students' progress hinders timely identification of challenges and areas for improvement, leading to late or nonexistent interventions. Without continuous monitoring, students' academic and personal struggles may go unnoticed, increasing the risk of demotivation, underperformance, and even dropout. García *et al.* (2024) assert that the absence of constructive feedback leaves students without guidance on how to improve, affecting both their academic and personal development. This lack of attention can lead to a general decline in educational quality and student success.

Belda (2019) adds that the lack of communication with professors creates a gap in the educational process, where students do not receive the necessary guidance for their academic and personal development. Without effective communication, teachers cannot identify students' individual needs or provide adequate support. This can result in an incomplete understanding of the material, unresolved difficulties, and a lack of direction in learning. The disconnection between students and professors can also lead to decreased motivation and engagement with their studies.

In this context, Soria *et al.* (2022) and Vries (2023) argue that facilitator behaviors, such as not challenging or questioning students' work, contribute to poor educational quality by failing to promote critical thinking and self-assessment. Mayta *et al.* (2023) suggests that when students are not challenged to justify and reflect on their work, the opportunity to develop analytical and reasoning skills is lost. This lack of academic rigor allows students to settle for minimal effort, failing to reach their full potential and perpetuating a culture of mediocrity rather than excellence.

On the other hand, Puche (2024) emphasizes that failing to sanction fraud creates an environment where academic dishonesty can proliferate without consequences, undermining the integrity of the educational system. The lack of clear and consistent sanctions sends a message that fraud is tolerated, which may encourage more students to engage in dishonest practices. This not only affects fairness and justice in academia but also devalues degrees and certifications, harming both honest students and the reputation of the educational institution.

Continuing the analysis of the study's results, Vander & Cury (2024) argue that conflicts of interest, such as close personal relationships with students, can compromise impartiality and objectivity in academic evaluation and supervision. These conflicts may lead to favoritism, where certain students receive preferential treatment or unjustly positive evaluations, affecting classroom fairness. Moreover, these relationships can make it difficult to enforce disciplinary sanctions and base academic decisions on merit. The presence of such conflicts erodes trust in the integrity of the educational process and can create an environment of distrust and resentment among students.

In the same vein, Zuñiga & Polanco (2023) highlight that AI-assisted plagiarism occurs when artificial intelligence technology is used to copy and present others' work as one's own. This manifests in texts or assignments containing entire phrases or paragraphs that match existing sources without proper citation, which can be easily identified through plagiarism detection software.

However, Alonso & Quinde (2023) point out that these works often exhibit inconsistent or unnatural writing styles, as the copied parts do not integrate well with the rest of the original content. The use of AI tools to paraphrase or reword content without significantly altering its meaning is another key indicator. These elements reveal the reliance on AI to create academic or professional work that is not entirely original.

Regarding AI-assisted creation of false content, Franganillo (2022) explains that it involves using artificial intelligence technologies to generate texts that are not authentic. Jofre (2023) asserts that this seriously impacts educational quality by flooding the academic environment with inaccurate or misleading information, making it difficult to distinguish between real and fabricated facts. This can lead to the spread of erroneous knowledge among students and teachers, compromising the integrity of learning and research.

According to Villalobos (2024), it fosters a culture of distrust in information sources and reduces the value of genuine academic work, while also discouraging critical thinking and rigorous fact-checking. These effects erode the credibility and effectiveness of the educational system in its mission to educate informed individuals capable of positively contributing to society.

Contrasting these results with Gallent et al. (2023) theory, which posits that AI-assisted misappropriation of ideas occurs when AI tools are used to take others' original ideas and present them as one's own, this is evident in project proposals, research, or presentations that reflect ideas or concepts previously presented by others without proper acknowledgment. The study data reveal a significant weakness concerning this dimension (AI-assisted misappropriation of ideas).

In this context, Díaz (2023) argues that works showing advanced or detailed knowledge that does not align with the author's level of experience are also suspect. Alonso (2024) adds that using AI to explore research databases and then slightly rephrase the findings without crediting the original authors is a common practice. This reveals that discrepancies between the author's knowledge of the subject and the quality of the work presented indicate possible dependence on AI to misappropriate others' ideas.

Considering the results obtained, it is evident that students are not using AI appropriately. Instead of employing it as a support tool to enrich and facilitate their academic work, students are delegating the construction and writing of every element of their research to AI. This is based on the high level of correlation determined between the analyzed variables, suggesting an excessive dependence on AI for tasks that should be completed by the students themselves.

In this regard, the misuse of AI has serious implications for educational quality, as students are not developing the critical skills necessary for their academic and professional growth. The lack of personal involvement in the research and writing process can lead to a superficial understanding of the content and an inability to apply acquired knowledge in real-world contexts.

To address this issue, a meeting was held with faculty members (research supervisors) who participated in the survey and shared their observations and concerns. By consensus, some guidelines were established to curb the misuse of AI. These guidelines aim to promote the responsible and ethical use of technology, ensuring that students develop the skills necessary for their academic success.

In this context, it was considered essential to incorporate mandatory workshops or modules in postgraduate programs to educate students on the responsible use of artificial intelligence in research and thesis writing. These programs should address the scope and limitations of AI tools for writing and content generation, as well as the ethical and academic standards related to the integrity of intellectual work.

Additionally, it is important to inform students about the consequences of plagiarism and the misuse of AI, guiding them in its proper use. This virtual assistant can aid in searching and organizing information, analyzing data, generating visualizations, and writing and reviewing academic texts. A series of activities were proposed as part of the solution to this problem.

Table 4
Suggestions for addressing the misuse of AI in committing academic fraud.

Activity	Description	Benefits for preventing misuse of AI in theses
Fomentar la educación sobre la IA y la ética académica	• Incorporate mandatory workshops or modules into graduate programs. • Educate students on the responsible use of artificial intelligence in research and thesis writing, including: (a) The scope and limitations of AI tools for writing and content generation. (b) Ethical and academic standards related to intellectual integrity. (c) The consequences of plagiarism and misuse of AI in thesis preparation. • Promote the use of AI tools for learning and research: • Guide students in the appropriate use of AI tools to support their learning and research process, such as: searching and organizing relevant information; data analysis and generating visualizations; writing and reviewing academic texts. • Emphasize the importance of critical thinking and originality: encourage students to develop critical thinking and analytical skills to evaluate information obtained through AI and generate their own ideas and arguments. • Define the types of allowed AI tools: Specify which AI tools may be used by students in the development of their theses, considering their impact on the originality and academic value of the work. Establish limits on AI usage: Determine the amount of AI-generated content that can be used in a thesis, ensuring that the primary work is conducted by the student Require transparency in AI usage: Require students to clearly cite any AI tool or resource used in the preparation of their thesis, including a description of its function and impact on the final content.	• Helps students understand the capabilities and limitations of AI in the academic context, promoting responsible and ethical use. • Provides students with tools and strategies to effectively leverage AI in their learning and research processes without compromising the originality of their work. • Encourages the development of critical thinking and analytical skills, essential for evaluating information, formulating arguments, and generating original knowledge.

Establish clear guidelines for the use of AI in thesis development	• Define the types of allowed AI tools: Specify which AI tools may be used by students in the development of their theses, considering their impact on the originality and academic value of the work. Establish limits on AI usage: Determine the amount of AI-generated content that can be used in a thesis, ensuring that the primary work is conducted by the student Require transparency in AI usage: Require students to clearly cite any AI tool or resource used in the preparation of their thesis, including a description of its function and impact on the final content.	• Provides students with clear guidance on what is expected regarding the use of AI in their theses, preventing confusion and potential violations of academic standards. • Ensures that the majority of the thesis work is carried out by the student, promoting the development of their research and writing skills. • Encourages transparency and traceability in the use of AI, allowing evaluators to understand the thesis preparation process and the student's actual contribution.

Note: Own elaboration (2024).

Conclusions

The study results reveal a Pearson correlation of 0.980 between the use of AI and academic fraud. This value indicates a very strong positive relationship, suggesting that as the use of AI in education increases, academic fraud also tends to increase. However, it is important to highlight that correlation does not imply causation. Although the two variables are strongly related, it cannot be concluded that AI use directly causes academic fraud. Other factors may be influencing this relationship.

These findings underscore the need to implement regulations and educational policies that address the ethical use of AI. Additionally, educating students about the responsible use of AI tools and establishing clear guidelines can help mitigate the risk of academic fraud. Promoting the development of critical thinking and analytical skills in students is crucial for them to use AI ethically and responsibly. These skills will help them evaluate AI-generated information and develop their own arguments and conclusions.

In this context, it is also inferred that implementing fraud detection and evaluation strategies, such as plagiarism detection software and peer reviews, is essential to ensure academic integrity. These measures can help identify and prevent AI-related academic fraud. Additionally, fostering a culture of academic integrity is fundamental to reducing the incidence of academic fraud.

It is also important to inform students about expectations, ethical standards, and the consequences of fraud, along with recognizing and rewarding ethical behavior, to encourage honest and responsible academic conduct. Therefore, while the study revealed a very strong positive relationship between AI use and academic fraud, it is crucial to address this issue from multiple angles, including education, regulation, evaluation, and the promotion of a culture of academic integrity. Only through a holistic and multifaceted approach can the challenge of academic fraud in the context of increasing AI use be effectively addressed.

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