

Renegotiating Academic Integrity in the Age of Generative AI: A Case Study of the “Thinking Partner” Model in High School Learning

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of Generative Artificial Intelligence in secondary education has intensified concerns regarding academic integrity, particularly in argumentative writing practices. This study aims to examine how the Thinking Partner model, which positions AI as a dialogic cognitive partner, can reconstruct academic integrity while enhancing students' critical reasoning. Employing a qualitative case study design, the research was conducted in one eleventh-grade class at a public senior high school in East Java involving 28 students engaged in structured AI-assisted argumentative tasks. Data were collected from student–AI interaction transcripts, written argumentative outputs, and reflective journals, and analyzed using thematic analysis through iterative coding that combined inductive theme development with deductive alignment to the cognitive partnership framework. The findings indicate a marked shift from output-oriented AI use toward dialogic engagement characterized by questioning, counter-argument testing, and reflective revision. This transformation corresponded with increased argumentative complexity and the development of internalized intellectual ownership. The study concludes that structured and transparent AI integration does not inherently undermine academic integrity; rather, it can reinforce reflective accountability within Islamic Religious Education learning contexts.

Introduction

Since the public release of widely accessible Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) platforms, schools have begun to experience significant shifts in students' academic production practices (Bahroun et al., 2023; Mao et al., 2024). Teachers report increasing use of automatically generated texts in essay assignments, responses composed in remarkably short timeframes, and arguments that exceed the expected level of certain classes (Engeness, 2025; Gombert et al., 2024). This development has triggered renewed concerns about academic integrity, as the boundary between learning assistance and cognitive substitution becomes increasingly blurred. Unlike earlier search engines that still required selection and synthesis (Elbanna & Armstrong, 2024), Generative AI can produce complete responses ready for submission (McDonald et al., 2025). Such conditions create challenges unprecedented in

assessment practices. Schools are no longer dealing solely with technical issues of detection, but also with fundamental questions regarding honesty, originality, and intellectual responsibility in an environment where technology operates with growing autonomy.

At the high school level, the tension surrounding this phenomenon becomes even more complex. Some teachers perceive AI as a direct threat to academic honesty (Mathivanan & Rao, 2026; Rodrigues et al., 2025), as it opens new pathways for undetectable cheating practices. Institutional responses often involve restricting access to specific applications or tightening written assignment policies (Capano & Lepori, 2024). However, restrictive approaches do not fully resolve the issue, since students continue to access such technologies beyond classroom supervision (Mhlongo et al., 2023; Ocumpaugh et al., 2024). At the same time, alternative perspectives view AI as a potential catalyst for learning transformation, particularly in stimulating idea exploration and providing rapid feedback (Sanabria-Z & Olivo, 2024). The tension between regulatory control and pedagogical utilization suggests that the issue extends beyond technical considerations and is inherently ethical and instructional. The central question is therefore not simply how to prohibit AI, but how to manage its integration without undermining students' academic integrity.

Although scholarly debate on AI in education is expanding rapidly, much of the existing research remains oriented toward defensive strategies. Studies frequently focus on AI-text detection tools, linguistic similarity analysis, or algorithmic plagiarism prevention systems (Chaka, 2024). While these efforts are valuable in the short term, they tend to frame AI primarily as an external risk requiring surveillance. Such a perspective does not adequately address the need to reconstruct a culture of integrity within a transformed learning ecosystem. If students retain independent access to AI technologies, surveillance-based approaches alone are insufficient. What is required is a pedagogical framework that positions technology within a renewed structure of academic responsibility. The core challenge, therefore, extends beyond identifying violations to redefining how academic integrity is practiced when cognitive processes may be mediated by intelligent systems.

Within this context, the concept of AI as a Thinking Partner has emerged as a constructive alternative. Rather than functioning as an instant-answer generator, AI is positioned as a dialogic partner that prompts reflection and challenges assumptions. Through structured interactions involving probing questions, requests for clarification, and counter-arguments, students are encouraged to justify and refine their claims. This approach echoes the Socratic tradition, in which disciplined questioning becomes a vehicle for cultivating reasoning. However, the effectiveness of such a model cannot be presumed. A critical issue remains: how can AI-mediated dialogue be designed in ways that reinforce academic integrity rather than fostering subtle forms of dependency? Addressing this question requires empirical inquiry grounded in real educational contexts.

Despite the conceptual appeal of AI as a cognitive partner, in-depth studies at the Indonesian high school level remain limited. Much of the available research concentrates on higher education settings or short-term experimental designs. There is a lack of contextualized case studies examining how students actually engage with AI in authentic learning environments, particularly during transitional periods such as school breaks or distance learning phases, when direct supervision is reduced. In such situations, student autonomy becomes more pronounced and personal responsibility more decisive. Without a nuanced understanding of AI use under these conditions, it is difficult to determine whether the technology strengthens academic character or gradually erodes it.

Against this backdrop, the present study aims to explore how high school students' interactions with AI as a thinking partner influence the quality of their arguments while maintaining academic integrity. Employing a case study approach, this research examines the

implementation of the Thinking Partner model within a specific learning context. The analysis focuses on patterns of dialogue between students and AI, shifts in argumentative structure, and students' reflections on intellectual responsibility throughout the process. In doing so, this study seeks not merely to assess technological usage, but to provide a contextualized understanding of how academic integrity may be constructively renegotiated within a Generative AI-driven learning ecosystem.

Method

This study employed a qualitative case study design to examine the implementation of the Thinking Partner model (Hartman, 2017) in a public senior high school in East Java, Indonesia. The case was bounded to one eleventh-grade social science class consisting of 28 students and conducted during a transitional post-holiday learning period characterized by partial remote engagement and reduced direct supervision. This context provided a relevant setting to explore how students navigated AI-assisted reasoning under conditions of increased autonomy (Lin & Chen, 2025). Participants were purposively selected based on their active engagement in argumentative writing tasks and their willingness to reflect on AI-assisted learning processes, ensuring alignment with the study's focus on intellectual responsibility and dialogic engagement.

The intervention was implemented by operationalizing the Thinking Partner model through structured prompts that positioned AI as a dialogic interlocutor rather than an answer generator (Macagno, 2023). The implementation followed three sequential stages: (1) orientation, in which students were introduced to the principles of dialogic AI use and intellectual responsibility; (2) guided interaction, where students engaged with AI to formulate questions, develop counter-arguments, and clarify reasoning; and (3) reflective consolidation, in which students documented key AI interactions and provided reflective annotations to maintain cognitive ownership of their work. Direct submission of fully AI-generated responses was explicitly prohibited to ensure authenticity of student reasoning (Johar et al., 2019).

Data were collected from three primary sources to ensure methodological triangulation: (1) student–AI interaction transcripts, capturing patterns of questioning, counter-argument construction, and dialogic engagement; (2) written argumentative outputs, analyzed in terms of argument structure, depth of reasoning, and revision patterns; and (3) reflective journals, which provided insights into attribution awareness, perceptions of academic integrity, and cognitive ownership.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis through a systematic and iterative coding process. In the first stage, open coding was applied to identify emergent patterns in student–AI dialogue and argumentative development. In the second stage, axial coding was conducted to categorize and relate codes, particularly focusing on indicators of intellectual responsibility such as attribution awareness, acknowledgment of AI assistance, and reasoning transparency. In the final stage, selective coding was employed to integrate core themes and align them with the conceptual framework of AI as a cognitive partner, ensuring theoretical coherence.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, this study applied several validation strategies, including data triangulation across multiple sources, iterative comparison of coding results, and analytic memoing to document interpretive decisions throughout the research process. These procedures ensured credibility, consistency, and rigor in capturing the complexity of AI-assisted learning interactions. Data were collected from three primary sources to ensure methodological triangulation, as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Data Sources and Analytical Focus

Data Source	Description	Analytical Focus
Student–AI Interaction Transcripts	Recorded dialogue between students and AI during argumentative task development	Patterns of questioning, counter-argument formation, dialogic engagement
Written Argumentative Outputs	Final written essays produced after AI-assisted interaction	Argument structure, reasoning depth, revision patterns
Reflective Journals	Students' written reflections on AI use and learning responsibility	Attribution awareness, perception of academic integrity, cognitive ownership

Result and Discussion

Result

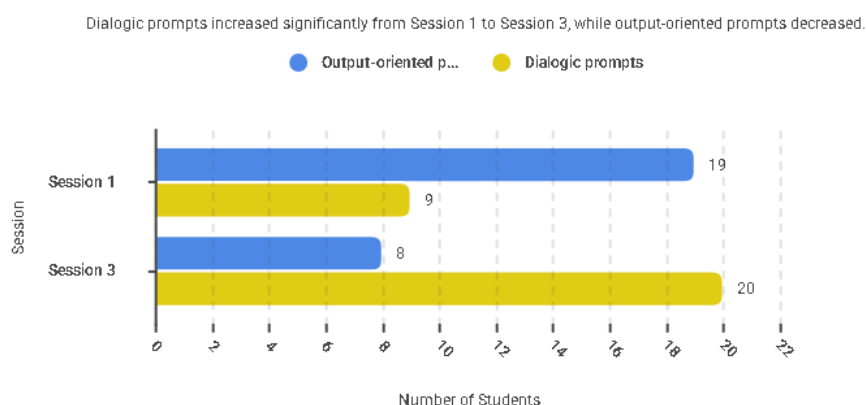
The case examined in this study involved 28 eleventh-grade students from a senior high school in Indonesia participating in a structured argumentative writing assignment during a transitional post-holiday learning period. This contextual condition provided a bounded setting to observe how students navigated AI-assisted reasoning under reduced direct monitoring.

1. Shift in Prompting Orientation within a Bounded Classroom Case

During the first AI interaction session, a dominant output-oriented pattern emerged. Nineteen of the 28 students initially used prompts requesting complete essays, direct arguments, or ready-made explanations. Only nine students formulated prompts that invited critique or clarification.

After structured instruction on dialogic use emphasizing questioning, counter-argument testing, and reflective annotation a noticeable shift emerged in subsequent sessions. By the third session, only eight students continued using predominantly output-oriented prompts, while twenty students adopted dialogic prompts such as “identify weaknesses in my reasoning” or “suggest a counter-position to challenge my claim.” Nevertheless, a small number of students continued to rely on output-oriented prompts even after structured guidance, indicating that dialogic adaptation was not uniform across participants. This change in prompting orientation across sessions is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Shift in Prompting Orientation Across AI Interaction Sessions (n = 28)



As shown in Figure 1, there is a clear shift in students' prompting orientation across interaction sessions. In Session 1, most students relied on output-oriented prompts (n = 19), while dialogic prompts were less frequent (n = 9). By Session 3, this pattern reversed, with

dialogic prompts increasing significantly ($n = 20$) and output-oriented prompts decreasing ($n = 8$). This change was accompanied by longer and more iterative interaction sequences. Rather than single prompt–response exchanges, students increasingly engaged in multi-step clarification cycles.

The documentation requirement appears to have contributed to this transformation, as students were aware that their interaction logs would be reviewed. However, reflective journal data indicate that the shift was not merely compliance-driven. Several students reported identifying “hidden weaknesses” in their arguments through AI-mediated critique. Moreover, dialogic prompts increasingly incorporated metacognitive markers such as “why” and “how,” indicating a transition toward analytical and reflective questioning. These findings suggest that, within this classroom context, AI engagement evolved from answer-oriented use toward dialogic reasoning development and greater intellectual responsibility.

2. Development of Argumentative Complexity and Integrity Awareness

Comparative analysis of students’ initial and final argumentative drafts demonstrated qualitative improvement in reasoning structure. In the initial drafts, only eight students incorporated substantive counter-arguments that were meaningfully integrated into their essays. Most arguments were linear, assertive, and minimally reflexive.

Following two structured AI-dialogue cycles, twenty-one students incorporated explicit counter-arguments and structured rebuttals in their final submissions. Rather than simply extending essay length, students reorganized argumentative flow to address opposition before reinforcing their main claims. This indicates development in argumentative layering rather than surface expansion.

Reflective journals revealed a parallel shift in academic integrity perception. Early entries framed integrity primarily as rule compliance, often linked to fear of plagiarism detection. Over time, students’ reflections began to articulate responsibility in more agentic terms. This shift suggests movement from externally regulated morality toward self-regulated academic agency. Later reflections emphasized intellectual ownership and decision-making. Students frequently distinguished between “AI suggestions” and “my final argument.” One participant noted, “AI gave me options, but I decided which argument truly represented my reasoning.”

Despite reduced supervision during partial remote engagement, documented misuse remained limited. The transparency requirement and dialogic framing appeared to foster accountable AI use. Within this bounded case, integrity was not eroded by AI availability; rather, it evolved toward reflective responsibility.

Discussion

1. AI as Dialogic Mediator in a Structured Pedagogical Design

The observed shift in prompting orientation demonstrates that AI’s impact is not inherent but pedagogically mediated (Bai & Wang, 2025; Kang et al., 2025). When positioned as a dialogic interlocutor rather than an output generator, AI can stimulate evaluative reasoning. The structured prompt design and reflective annotation requirement were central to this transformation (Fox, 2025; Gonsalves, 2024). The results align with dialogic learning perspectives emphasizing questioning as a catalyst for cognitive depth. Rather than reducing intellectual effort, AI redistributed it toward critical evaluation. Students were required to defend, revise, and justify their positions. This redistribution suggests augmentation rather than substitution of cognitive processes.

This finding is consistent with recent studies showing that structured AI scaffolding enhances higher-order thinking rather than replacing it (Chen et al., 2025; Liu et al., 2025; Wang & Zhang, 2026). However, unlike prior research that emphasizes AI as a productivity

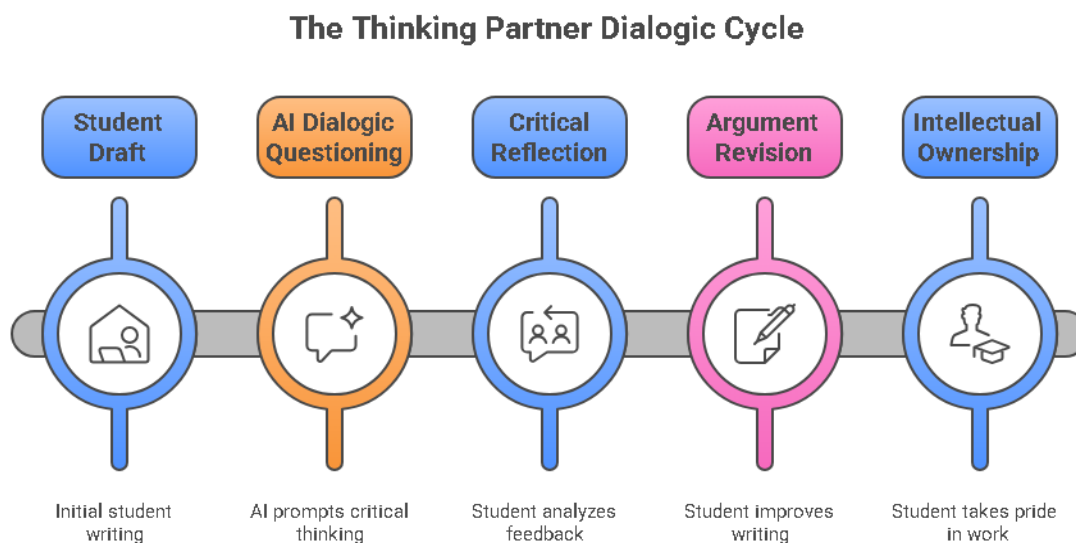
tool (Necula et al., 2024; Shaikh et al., 2023), this study highlights its function as a dialogic cognitive partner, thereby extending the conceptualization of AI-mediated learning beyond efficiency toward epistemic engagement.

2. Renegotiating Academic Integrity in AI-Mediated Learning

Traditional academic integrity frameworks emphasize monitoring and deterrence (Alsharefeen & Al Sayari, 2025; Khan, 2024). However, the findings from this bounded classroom case indicate that reflective accountability may be more effective in AI-mediated contexts. When AI use is normalized within transparent ethical boundaries, concealment decreases and self-regulation increases (McNealis, 2026).

The concept of renegotiation in this study does not imply weakening standards. Instead, it reflects adaptation of integrity practices to technologically mediated cognition. Students learned to distinguish between assistance and authorship. This internal boundary-setting represents a shift from external enforcement toward reflective ownership. This finding challenges dominant integrity frameworks that rely heavily on surveillance and plagiarism detection systems (Gbadago et al., 2025; Giray et al., 2025), which have been criticized for fostering compliance rather than ethical understanding (Jedličková, 2025). In contrast, this study supports emerging perspectives in international literature (Poole & Bunnell, 2024) that emphasize formative and reflective approaches to academic integrity in AI-rich environments. The dialogic cycle emerging from this case is summarized in Figure 2.

Figure 2. The Thinking Partner Dialogic Cycle Derived from the Present Case Study



As illustrated, the cycle emphasizes iterative movement between AI questioning and reflective ownership. Unlike linear revision models, the cycle foregrounds recursive reflection as the core mechanism of intellectual ownership formation. The model does not depict a linear progression but a recursive process in which revision reinforces intellectual accountability. While the findings are limited to one high school case, they illustrate that structured AI integration can support both reasoning development and ethical responsibility. The case demonstrates possibility rather than generalization, but it challenges deterministic assumptions that AI inevitably undermines integrity.

3. Educational Policy Implications

Beyond the level of classroom implementation, the findings of this study carry significant implications for educational policy in the context of Generative Artificial

Intelligence integration. Institutional responses to AI have largely emphasized restriction, surveillance, and punitive regulation (Capano & Lepori, 2024; Ulbricht & Yeung, 2022). However, the present case demonstrates that prohibition-based approaches are insufficient in environments where students maintain independent and ubiquitous access to AI technologies. Accordingly, policy frameworks should transition from reactive containment strategies toward structured pedagogical integration. This shift entails the formulation of institutional guidelines that explicitly delineate acceptable AI use, mandate transparent documentation of AI-assisted learning processes, and embed reflective accountability within assessment design. Rather than imposing categorical bans, educational authorities should develop dialogic usage protocols, professional development programs for teachers on AI-mediated instruction, and assessment models that prioritize transparency of reasoning over mere product originality. Such policy orientation reframes AI governance from a control-centered mechanism into a formative educational strategy aligned with intellectual responsibility.

This policy direction is supported by recent international policy analyses (Saheb & Saheb, 2023) which argue that AI governance in education should shift from prohibition to guided integration frameworks. Empirical studies in both global and Indonesian contexts indicate that structured AI use policies (Estrada et al., 2023) are more effective in promoting ethical engagement compared to restrictive bans.

4. Epistemological Boundaries of AI as a Mediation Agent

Notwithstanding its pedagogical potential, it is essential to recognize the epistemological limitations of AI as a mediational agent in learning processes. While structured AI dialogue can stimulate questioning, revision, and analytical refinement, AI systems lack intentionality, moral agency, and contextual consciousness (McNealis, 2026). Their outputs are probabilistic constructions generated through large-scale pattern recognition rather than situated reasoning grounded in lived human experience. As such, AI can support reflective engagement but cannot substitute for human judgment, ethical deliberation, or contextual interpretation. Excessive reliance on AI-generated critique risks encouraging epistemic dependency if learners uncritically attribute authority to algorithmic responses. The pedagogical imperative, therefore, lies in preserving human epistemic primacy while positioning AI as a scaffold rather than an arbiter of truth. Acknowledging these epistemological boundaries ensures that AI remains a mediational support within dialogic learning, not a replacement for intellectual authorship or moral accountability.

Recent scholarship in AI epistemology further supports this position by emphasizing that AI-generated knowledge lacks intentional grounding and contextual accountability (Cruz-Aguilar, 2025; Popow, 2026), reinforcing the necessity of human-centered interpretive authority in learning processes.

5. Theoretical Contribution and Implications

The present study advances current debates on AI and academic integrity by introducing a dialogic reconstruction framework grounded in empirical classroom practice. Beyond theoretical refinement, the findings also generate broader institutional implications. This study contributes to the scholarship on Artificial Intelligence in education by reframing academic integrity as a dialogically mediated practice rather than a compliance-driven construct. While much existing literature treats AI as a technological risk requiring detection and control (Chaka, 2024; Rodrigues et al., 2025), this case study proposes an alternative paradigm in which integrity is reconstructed through structured cognitive partnership. By grounding the Thinking Partner model in a secondary school context, the study shifts the discourse from surveillance-oriented responses toward reflective accountability embedded in pedagogical design.

The findings extend dialogic learning theory into AI-mediated environments by demonstrating how questioning, counter-argument testing, and iterative revision can be operationalized through structured AI interaction. AI is positioned not merely as a tool or threat, but as a mediational agent whose influence depends on instructional framing. The proposed Thinking Partner Dialogic Cycle illustrates how intellectual ownership can emerge through recursive engagement between student reasoning and AI-generated prompts.

Methodologically, this research enriches AI-in-education studies by presenting a contextually grounded case from Indonesian secondary education—an underrepresented setting in global scholarship. Through triangulated qualitative analysis of interaction transcripts, argumentative texts, and reflective journals, the study captures shifts in both cognitive structure and ethical orientation. Practically, it encourages institutions to move beyond restrictive AI policies toward dialogic frameworks that normalize transparent use while sustaining standards of authorship and responsibility.

Compared to existing studies that predominantly frame AI as either a threat to academic integrity or a tool for learning efficiency (Perkins & Roe, 2024; Popow, 2026; Vetter et al., 2024), this study offers a distinct contribution by empirically demonstrating how dialogic structuring can transform AI into a medium for ethical and cognitive development. This positions the Thinking Partner model not merely as an instructional strategy but as a conceptual bridge between dialogic learning theory and AI-mediated pedagogy, thereby addressing a gap in both international and Indonesian scholarship.

Conclusion

This study provides empirical evidence that academic integrity in the age of Generative AI does not inevitably deteriorate; rather, it can be reconstructed through deliberate pedagogical design. Within the bounded case of one Indonesian high school classroom, the Thinking Partner model facilitated a measurable shift from output-oriented AI use toward dialogic engagement characterized by questioning, counter-argument testing, and reflective revision. The findings demonstrate that when AI interaction is framed as a cognitive partnership rather than a shortcut mechanism, students retain intellectual ownership while deepening argumentative reasoning. By articulating the Thinking Partner Dialogic Cycle derived from classroom implementation, this study advances a practice-grounded framework for integrating AI into secondary education without compromising ethical standards.

Nevertheless, the conclusions are constrained by the single-case design and the specific transitional learning context in which the intervention was implemented. The study does not claim generalizability but offers a situated demonstration of pedagogical possibility. Future research should examine the scalability of dialogic AI integration across diverse institutional contexts, disciplines, and educational levels, as well as investigate longitudinal effects on students' ethical development and critical reasoning trajectories. Mixed-method and comparative designs may further illuminate how structured AI use influences integrity cultures over time. Practically, the findings suggest that educational institutions should move beyond reactive restriction policies and instead develop transparent, dialogic frameworks that align technological mediation with sustained intellectual responsibility.

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