



Navigating the AI Frontiers in Academic Publishing: Responding with Openness



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Editorial

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ABSTRACT

This editorial reflects on the seismic shifts brought by generative AI in academic publishing, coinciding with the journal's 30th anniversary. It explores both the promising advancements and ethical dilemmas presented by AI tools, specifically the generative applications built on Large Language Models (LLMs).

AI offers opportunities to streamline editorial processes, enhance discoverability, assist with manuscript screening, basic editing, and identify peer reviewers, thereby accelerating publishing. However, the rise of AI-generated content poses significant challenges, including concerns over accuracy, originality, and misinformation. Ethical dilemmas surround authorship, ownership, and academic integrity, with AI tools explicitly not considered authors due to a lack of accountability; human authors must take full responsibility for AI-generated output. Journals are developing robust policies emphasising transparency and disclosure, requiring authors to specify the AI tool used, its purpose, and its location within the manuscript.

The editorial advocates for open access as a crucial countermeasure to potential AI misuse, promoting transparency, scrutiny, and equitable knowledge dissemination to amplify ethical AI applications. Ultimately, the journal calls for responsible AI integration as an "augmented intelligence" tool, enhancing human intellect while upholding academic integrity in scholarly communication.

KEYWORDS

generative ai, academic publishing, ethical dilemmas, open access, scholarly communication, ai policies, peer review

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INTRODUCTION: THE SHIFTING SANDS OF SCHOLARLY COMMUNICATION

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The Journal of Open, Flexible and Distance Learning is celebrating its 30th anniversary this year. Its forerunner, the Journal of Distance Learning, made its first appearance in 1995, and the pattern of publication since has stabilised around two quality collections each year. An anniversary year is always a time for celebration, but it is often a time for reflection and change. This issue, Volume 29, Issue 1, reflects some of those changes.

As we reflect on the ever-evolving landscape of scholarly communication, it is impossible to ignore the seismic shifts brought about by generative artificial intelligence (AI). These powerful tools, now pervasive in the form of large language models (LLMs), capable of generating text, code, and even extensive and in-depth research summaries, present both exhilarating opportunities and profound challenges for academic journals like ours (Bowman, 2024). The advent of generative AI heralds a new era for academic publishing, demanding critical reflection on our established practices. AI offers immense potential to streamline workflows, enhance discoverability, and even improve the quality of scholarly output. AI-powered tools can assist with literature reviews, identify suitable peer reviewers, and flag potential ethical issues such as plagiarism or data manipulation. AI can accelerate the publishing process, making research more readily available to a global audience.

In this editorial, we will explore the critical tensions arising from the prevalence of AI in academic publishing within the OFDL landscape, focusing on both the promising advancements and the ethical dilemmas that demand our collective attention.

THE PROMISE: AI AS AN ENABLER AND ENHANCER

Generative artificial intelligence is already proving itself to be an enabler of increased efficiency and, potentially, accessibility. It can support the journal's editorial processes through manuscript screening and basic editing functions. These tools are embedded in most mainstream word processing applications, making it difficult to avoid using them to support grammar, structure, or readability in one's writing. Inevitably, authors are likely to be using some form of AI-assisted writing tool. They may be choosing to use it to brainstorm and plan a manuscript or assist with the drafting and rewriting of elements of their text.

A journal editor can support authors by cross-checking a submission against a set of criteria and reporting back immediately where their manuscript might be improved or conform to writing guidelines, even before it goes out for external peer review. Since June 2025, we have been using Gemini Pro (2.5) at JOFDL to provide initial evaluations and identify the alignment of submissions with journal sections, categories, and suggest keywords. All of which is designed to ensure that we leverage the full power of the publishing platform the journal operates on (OJS 3.2) and build a complete set of Dublin Core metadata for each article. All in the aim of making articles as discoverable as possible.

A second positive aspect for journals is AI's enabling capabilities related to the peer review process. Tools could be used to identify potential reviewers and, as

identified above, provide a clearer and more suitable submission for external reviewers based on that specific journal's criteria. Gemini Pro, for example, can, in principle, provide a third, ostensibly neutral, review. It cannot be without some bias, as these are inherent in any Large Language Model (LLM), depending on the data it has been trained on, but a review can at least be seen as free of a unique individual bias. AI tools can be used to identify similarities with existing works, detect inconsistencies within data sets, and assess the validity of the conclusions authors draw. However, there is ample evidence to suggest that these tools are far from infallible.

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Journal management boards and publishers can utilise AI tools to identify research trends and gaps, enabling journals to seek out special issues and academic authors to explore less trodden research paths.

Journal managers can also explore large datasets in their field to inform editorial decisions and reduce or expand the scope of the journal.

These benefits, however, come with significant caveats.

THE PERIL: ETHICAL QUANDARIES AND CHALLENGES

The rise of AI-generated content raises serious concerns regarding accuracy, reliability, and the potential for misinformation. How do we ensure the originality and intellectual integrity of submissions when AI can mimic human writing with startling proficiency? Ethical dilemmas surrounding authorship, ownership of AI-generated text, and academic integrity are becoming increasingly complex (Guo et al., 2024). Predatory journals may exploit AI to produce low-quality articles, further eroding trust in scholarly communication. The inherent biases within AI models, if unchecked, could perpetuate existing inequalities in research and representation. Academic journals must develop robust policies and advanced detection mechanisms to uphold the standards of rigour and trust that underpin our mission (Asia Pacific Insights, 2024).

Journals are actively writing and rewriting policies to articulate issues around authorship and accountability. Collectively, there is a clear direction of travel concerning the definition of authorship. The Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) (<https://publicationethics.org/>) declares that AI Tools cannot be identified as 'authors', which means they cannot be directly cited or referenced as other authors' texts are. They cannot assume responsibility for the veracity of their output. The onus is therefore on a submission's human authors to check, validate and concur with any AI output, and to take the full weight of any reputational harm that may result from its improper use (COPE Council, 2024). Going beyond simply improving some phrasology, policies also require authors to ensure that the AI programme itself is not plagiarising. There is an argument to be made that by their very nature, AI text generators are inherently plagiarism machines. The information must by definition already exist, and current systems do not create anything 'original'. One could argue that they are essentially sophisticated plagiarism and data manipulation instruments.

Journals have approached the need for transparency in AI use differently, but there is an explicit agreement that authors must disclose their AI tool usage, the 'what, how and why'. Transparency matters because, although these tools are good at massaging text, and they have been improving with each iteration, they are not infallible. AI-generated text is subject to "hallucinations" and is known

to invent citations and references. The system does not ask its prompter if they can delay turning in a task to ensure it is accurate; they will deliver on time, usually in a matter of minutes, regardless of the quality.

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Journals are on the lookout for AI-generated 'papermills' that invent research based on already published works and submit it to different journals on behalf of less scrupulous academics. A technological battle is currently being fought between the systems used to generate text and images and those used for AI detection. There is a pervasive lack of transparency in how the majority of AI algorithms arrive at their conclusions, referred to as the 'black box' problem, which further impacts trust and accountability.

The vast majority of current mainstream AI text generators have been trained on publicly available data. Open-source journals will undoubtedly provide their fair share of data. There is the potential for an algorithmic bias, perpetuating or amplifying existing inequalities in research representation and outcomes. As a journal that provides a platform for authors from Oceania and the Pacific, with submissions welcome from around the world, we also acknowledge that there is already evidence of a widening gap between those with and without access to advanced AI for academic purposes.

Teachers in K-12 and those in tertiary contexts are increasingly expressing concerns about the potential dangers of diminished critical thinking and originality that could result from over-reliance on AI (Lin, 2024). A fear that extends to article authors, too. Having a large portion of a submission written by an AI begins to undermine the validity of any given piece of work, and ultimately the credibility of any journal that publishes such works. Journals are collectively concerned about the erosion of trust. Journals only have value if their authors can assure the authenticity and credibility of their scholarly content.

As journals, we also need to refine the role of peer reviewers in an AI-augmented review process. Setting criteria for review and asking an AI tool to write a review (essentially repeating the initial editorial review) adds no value to either the author or the journal. Reviewers are asked to provide their human instinct, or affective and emotional reaction, to an article (Irfanullah, 2025), rather than focusing on spelling mistakes and referencing issues, which are now addressed in a pre-review process. Reviewers are required not to upload submissions to public AI assistance programmes.

TOWARDS A BALANCED FUTURE

As the landscape of scholarly publishing rapidly evolves, there is a need to develop and regularly update robust guidelines for authors, reviewers, and editors regarding the use of AI. Emphasising transparency and disclosure as a foundational principle, and aligning with internationally recognised industry standards (e.g., COPE guidelines) is essential. While a single, universally adopted "comprehensive" policy may not exist, the leading academic journals and publishers are converging on clear guidelines that emphasise human accountability, comprehensive disclosure, and the understanding that AI tools are aids to authorship, not authors themselves.

Authors must stay informed about the specific policies of the journal to which they intend to submit. The first core principle widely adopted is that AI tools cannot be listed as authors. Stemming from the fundamental understanding

that authorship requires human accountability, responsibility, and the capacity for intellectual contribution, none of which AI currently possesses, makes this foundational. Human authors must take full responsibility for all content, ensuring its accuracy, originality, and adherence to ethical guidelines.

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A second common principle is the requirement for transparency and disclosure. Journals consistently expect authors to declare their use of AI tools. While the specifics of disclosure vary, the aim is to inform readers about:

- What tool was used: The name and, if applicable, version of the AI (e.g., ChatGPT 4.0, Midjourney V7).
- How it was used: The specific purpose of the AI's application (e.g., grammar checking, drafting text, data analysis).
- Where it was used: The section(s) of the manuscript where AI assistance was employed.

Journals are not looking to try to put the 'toothpaste back in the tube'. Instead, they are looking to establish sensible guidelines to ensure validity and veracity. Most journals permit AI tools for improving grammar, spelling, and overall readability. These are generally viewed as advanced proofreading tools. Indeed, it is preferred to the extent that it makes the text easier to peer review and copyedit. JOFDL currently uses Grammarly to assist a human in performing these functions. Some journals suggest that content can also be created, usually within boundaries, suggesting that authors must verify the output and that disclosure is always required.

AI is a powerful tool that is increasingly being integrated into data analysis and manipulation tools such as SPSS, NVIVO, and Excel. Journals cannot and do not want to make unnecessarily burdensome work for academics. Therefore, if AI assists in data collection, analysis, or drawing insights, that is acceptable, but it must be disclosed in the Methods section (or equivalent).

There are some divergent practices across the world of academic publishing. Many of these relate to AI-generated images and the level of disclosure detail required. For full disclosure, the cover images used in recent volumes of JOFDL were generated using Stable Diffusion XL. AI for Figure/Image Generation is actively debated with different responses based mainly on the subject and discipline of the journal. Some journals (such as Nature) prohibit the use of generative AI in the creation of factual or evidential images, such as research results or data visualisations that support scientific claims. The reasons for this are concerns around copyright, verifiability, and research integrity. Some journal publishers (Wiley being a prime example) do permit AI-generated images for explanatory or conceptual images, but not for factual or evidential images. The overwhelming majority of academic journals require some specificity in the disclosures around images. These vary from precise declarations of the LLM name, version, and the exact prompts used, as seen in the cases of the Lancet and AAAS journals, through to merely requiring disclosure in acknowledgements, as is the current practice of IEEE and Elsevier.

This journal follows the Style Guide of the APA (American Psychological Association) and, as such, requires authors to declare any use of generated content. This involves describing the tool's usage, specifying the prompt used, and providing any relevant text generated in response. It also consists of documenting (most likely in the form of an appendix) the exact text created.

Because tools like Gemini or ChatGPT generate unique responses in each session, even if given the same prompt (<https://apastyle.apa.org/blog/how-to-cite-chatgpt>), knowing the details serves as an essential dimension of transparency. In no way does this negate the earlier guidance that AI tools should not be seen as authors; instead, the APA template requires them to be treated as software.

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JOFDL's Policies are kept up to date [here](#).

Many journals, including JOFDL, are seeking to educate authors and reviewers with the knowledge and skills to use AI responsibly and critically, all to foster a culture of ethical AI engagement. This means emphasising AI as a tool to augment, not to replace, human intellect and judgment. If I might be allowed a moment of personal observation, I believe Luc Julia provides a better conceptualisation of current AI as *Augmented Intelligence* (Julia & Khayat, 2019) rather than artificial intelligence, but given the ubiquity of the term (as misused as it is), I will persist with it.

The most immediate challenge for many journals is the use of AI in peer review processes. JOFDL is seeking to educate its reviewers towards a hybrid model for peer review that leverages AI's strengths while retaining human oversight. JOFDL will be producing guidance videos over the next few months to be shared on our YouTube channel.

RESPONDING WITH OPENNESS

AI can serve to promote accessibility and inclusivity in OFDL publishing. Large commercial publishers and academic cooperatives can support the quality deliberations of all journals by creating AI ethics advisory boards that could include academics, ethicists, and technologists, and not just journal managers. Being as transparent in their advice and guidance to their member journals can only be of benefit to everyone.

Making articles as open as possible increases visibility, accelerating knowledge dissemination, and fostering collaboration. In the age of AI, these advantages are amplified.

Open access maximises the training data for ethical and beneficial AI applications. While some journals are choosing to restrict access to their data by LLMs, JOFDL is choosing to lower its barriers to access by moving to a Creative Commons CC BY licence, in line with [Diamond Open Access](#) guidelines. We remain aware that as AI models become increasingly sophisticated, they continue to rely on vast datasets of high-quality, verified information. By making research openly available, we contribute to a more prosperous and more diverse pool of knowledge that AI can ethically leverage for advancements in research, education, and beyond.

Open access also promotes transparency and scrutiny, which are crucial countermeasures to the potential misuse of generative AI. When research is openly available, it is subject to broader scrutiny from the global academic community. Collective oversight can help identify AI-generated inaccuracies or ethical breaches more rapidly, fostering accountability and reinforcing the integrity of the scholarly record. Open science principles, including the sharing of data and methodologies, further enhance this transparency, allowing for

verification and replication – practices essential in an AI-assisted research landscape. We are delighted that our authors share their research instruments with our readership.

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Conscious of the issues around the digital divide, mentioned earlier, there is also some promise that equitable access to knowledge in an era where AI tools could otherwise exacerbate existing digital divides. If research remains behind paywalls, only those with institutional subscriptions or the means to pay can access it. The ability of researchers in under-resourced regions or independent scholars to engage with the latest findings and utilise AI tools effectively remains a concern. Open access democratizes knowledge, enabling a wider range of individuals and communities to participate in and benefit from the advancements spurred by AI.

NEXT STEPS: A CALL TO ACTION

As an academic community of editors, reviewers, and authors, JOFDL must collectively embrace the challenges and opportunities presented by generative AI to include developing clear guidelines for AI use in research and publishing, and fostering a culture of transparency and ethical engagement. Crucially, we must redouble our commitment to open access. By making our articles as open as possible, we not only enhance the reach and impact of our scholarship but also contribute to building a more robust, equitable, and trustworthy ecosystem for knowledge creation in the age of artificial intelligence.

In addition to moving to a Creative Commons CC-BY 4.0 License, JOFDL will now include Crossmark verification within its articles to ensure that readers can identify changes or retractions. We also trust the more contemporary styling of individual articles, including comprehensive 'back matter', increases the openness of the journal's outputs. The recent visual rebranding of the journal to include a distinctive logo is more than just an attempt to brighten up the homepage. The four-leaf design reflects a move towards accepting and publishing articles under sections aligned to Ernest Boyer's Categories of Scholarship (Boyer, 1997).

There are complex challenges ahead for academic journals in the face of the complexity, rapid development and the dual nature of AI. JOFDL is committed to fostering responsible use of AI as writers and reviewers' assistance and innovating where appropriate, while upholding the highest standards of academic integrity. The journal will continue to engage with the OFDL community (authors, reviewers, readers) in ongoing dialogue and contribute to shaping the ethical landscape of AI in scholarly communication.

The prevailing notion that "AI won't take away the role of a professional, but a professional using AI effectively will take away the role of a professional that doesn't use AI" underscores the urgency for educators to engage with AI, not as a threat, but as a transformative tool. The future of academic publishing, in the fields of OFDL as elsewhere, will be defined by our ability to responsibly harness AI's power while safeguarding the core values of scholarship.

IN THIS ISSUE

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As we present this latest issue, a compelling narrative emerges from the scholarly contributions, reflecting the dynamic and often challenging landscape of contemporary education. The articles in this issue collectively illuminate two significant, interconnected themes: the imperative for systemic adaptation and resilience in open, flexible and distance learning (OFDL) and the reimagining of the educational experience: towards learner-centric, flexible, and purpose-driven approaches.

Following on from this editorial's focus on the impact of AI on scholarly communication, two other articles directly address different facets of the theme of systemic adaptation and resilience in OFDL. Barbour & Wenmoth's invited analysis of Aotearoa New Zealand's experience details how their reimagined educational ecosystem prioritises a "more adaptable education system" through "synchronised changes in regulations, teaching, and resources". Their article entitled 'Reimagining Learning for Aotearoa New Zealand's Future Education Ecosystem' It boldly confronts infrastructure gaps and advocates for cohesive and coordinated approaches across providers in the K-12 sector. Their vision of an "ideal educational ecosystem" that fundamentally prioritises "student agency and choice," enabling tailored, flexible, and "unrationed learning" that transcends physical boundaries, includes rethinking teacher roles towards facilitation and independent evaluation. Olcott Jr.'s discussion 'Open University Futures' explains that online delivery is no longer a competitive advantage but a "normative" expectation in higher education, provokes us to consider how best to categorise or evaluate these unique institutions". Olcott Jr. posits that OUs face "mission ambiguity" and "unprecedented competition," necessitating a "strategic reset" to remain relevant and sustainable in this transformed landscape. His call for Open Universities to "reframe the institutional credentialing continuum" by blending traditional degrees with "new skill-based micro-credentials" and "fast-track pathways from school or university to work" challenges long-held assumptions about learning progression and aligns education more closely with lifelong learning and workforce needs.

Our second theme, that of the continuous reimagining of the educational experience across OFDL, for both learners and teachers, is well served in this issue. The COVID-19 pandemic served as a stark reminder of the need for an adaptable education system, underscoring that integrated distance and classroom learning is the most likely ongoing evolution change in education in the digital age. While we are now beyond the somewhat haphazard emergency remote learning responses offered by many institutions, researchers continue to reflect deeply on how to build resilience. We share four very different prisms on this theme: one focuses on faculty, one on individual perspectives and two on different student cohort responses.

Des Armier Jr. and Zoe Xu's 'Experienced Faculty's Online Teaching Readiness Post-Pandemic' share their insights into faculty readiness, noting that while experienced faculty may be willing to implement new practices, challenges persist in areas like "identity disruption" and "equity and tenure norms" due to systemic barriers such as "high workloads and limited compensation". Their study focused on faculty with prior ODL course design and online teaching experience, examining various aspects of their readiness: comfort with risk, identity disruption, teaching norms, equity and tenure norms, and lifestyle

readiness. They suggest that even experienced faculty did not feel fully prepared for OFDL post-pandemic. This study's holistic view of faculty OD readiness offers valuable insights for university administrators and faculty developers to better support experienced faculty in online teaching better.

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Fu's qualitative study 'Chinese Learners and Pacific Languages' starkly illustrates the challenges faced by Chinese international students learning Pacific languages online during the pandemic. The study reveals how the "lack of interactions in the online setting was the biggest challenge" to their learning, posing "practical barriers to building *vā/wā* (relational space)" and exacerbating cultural complexities. This underscores the need for OFDL environments to be culturally responsive and support genuine connection. Fu also emphasises the importance of integrating cultural awareness and "culturally immersive experiences" into online language learning, which traditional "book-based approach[es]" fail to provide. Fu's study points to a need for pedagogical innovation, potentially leveraging virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) for "experiential and hands-on learning" in OFDL.

Baliram and Henrikson utilise their Students' Perceptions on the Vital Role of Engagement in Online Learning' study to emphasise what students truly value in online learning: "high levels of student choice" in content, "clear communication with the instructor", "multimodal engagement," and "real-world application" of assignments. They advocate a move beyond passive content consumption, advocating for interactive and meaningful learning experiences facilitated by an engaged instructor.

Gilpin, Rollag Yoon and Clinton-Lisell reflect on their findings in a study of undergraduate experiences in 'Exploring Open Pedagogy Principles', which challenges "traditional instructional models by positioning students as creators and collaborators rather than passive recipients of knowledge". They emphasise the value and profound impact that assignments created for "real audiences" have on learners. The student preference for "authentic connections over prescribed collaborations" was also apparent. However, the study also highlighted students' disconnect from guidelines and frameworks, such as Creative Commons, which could empower student ownership of their creations, yet presents an ongoing challenge.

Finally, we also share a comprehensive book review of "Feminist Pedagogy for Teaching Online" (Howard et al., 2025) by Ayesha Perveen. The edited volume published by Athabasca University Press is identified by Perveen as a crucial intervention, bridging a significant gap in contemporary scholarship by exploring online learning through a feminist pedagogical lens. The edited volume challenges, in the view of Perveen, the dominant instructional design norms and technological culture, underscoring fundamental values of care, equity, reflexivity, and social justice. Adoption of some of these lessons would undoubtedly serve all learners.

CONCLUSION – A ROADMAP FOR FUTURE EDUCATION

The collection of articles in this issue paints a picture of an educational landscape in flux, demanding proactive, strategic, and collaborative efforts from all stakeholders – from institutional leaders and policymakers to faculty and instructional designers. As a journal, we are committed to publishing research that informs these critical transformations, ensuring that learning remains accessible, equitable, engaging, and relevant for all learners in the

post-pandemic, AI-augmented, digital age. There are exciting, albeit challenging, opportunities ahead for OFDL to continue to evolve and increasingly serve the diverse needs of a global society.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no competing interests.

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