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POLICY ON THE USE OF MACHINE TRANSLATION (MT): A GOOD MODEL FOR WIDER POLICIES ON GENERATIVE AI (GENAI)?

Sara Cotelli Kureth [1] **Elana Summers** [2]
[1] **Université de Neuchâtel (Switzerland)**
sara.cotelli@unine.ch
[2] **Zurich University of Applied Sciences (Switzerland)**
elana.summers@zhaw.ch

Abstract: Since the advent of ChatGPT and other automatic text generators, educators from many disciplines, including language learning and teaching, have published numerous articles exploring this technology's "pitfalls and potentials" (Barrot, 2023) and offering recommendations based on their own practice to teachers, users, and institutional decision-makers. But it is early days yet, and, while recognising the need to offer guidance, there is not enough scientific data to create evidence-based policies. Having been working on machine translation (MT) literacy (Bowker & Buitrago Ciro, 2019; Cotelli Kureth & Summers, 2023) for several years, we have developed guidelines for the use of machine translation (MT) tools in higher education, which have been implemented in a Swiss university. Given that MT tools share technical features with generative AI (GenAI) tools like ChatGPT, we believe that applied knowledge of the former could facilitate understanding of the latter. This article will draw on both our own experience and a thorough literature review of recommendations for the use of GenAI for higher education institutions (HEI) to map what guidelines on the use of GenAI should include and how they should be presented to teachers and users.

***Keywords**:* Generative AI, guidelines, higher education institutions, machine translation, policies

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[1] **Corresponding authors:** Sara Cotelli Kureth **ORCID:** https://orcid.org/0000-002-5213-2801
Elana Summers **ORCID:** https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3565-6870

1. Introduction

Since 2022, the availability and quickly developing massive use of GenAI chatbots like ChatGPT have caused widespread disruption in higher education institutions (HEI) (Barrot, 2023; Kohnke et al., 2023). In response, instructors and administrators alike have felt the need to guide the use of these tools, thus creating policies and guidelines at different levels, from the entire institution down to individual departments or courses. What most stakeholders frequently forget, however, is that ChatGPT was not the first AI tool to have had a deep impact on education. For some departments, namely those specialising in language and/or translation, the advent of Google Translate in 2016 had already forced teaching staff and administrators to take measures given that neural machine translation (MT) tools can produce text in a foreign language that is better than learners at least below B2-level (Delorme Benites & Lehr, 2021). As mentioned by Paterson (2023, p. 10), "[h]uman–machine relationships, like those facilitated by MT, have the potential to destabilize traditional pedagogies and transform how we teach and learn". Teachers and learners had to quickly develop MT literacy (Bowker & Buitrago Ciro, 2019; see below 3.2), and classroom activities were developed to incorporate these tools.

While the impact of MT on learning and teaching is well studied (Jolley & Maimone, 2022; Klimova et al., 2023), we currently do not have access to many research results on the impact of GenAI. As such, current AI policies are not evidence-based (McDonald et al., 2025). However, MT and GenAI tools share many technical features (Benites et al., 2023) that impact their output and the way humans interact with it and with the machine, which means that pedagogical experiences with the former can be extended to the latter. For example, both technologies use deep learning artificial neural networks (known as transformer models) to analyse and process data, thus enabling them to undertake natural language processing (NLP) tasks, for example by extracting word frequencies from large amounts of data to produce highly fluent and idiomatic output (Benites et al, 2023; Sui, 2025). The potential offered by this fluent output, the challenges users face in assessing its accuracy or suitability, as well as the complexity of understanding and explaining how these systems work therefore makes it interesting to rely on data gathered for MT to guide us towards best practices that could inform our use and approach of GenAI in HEI.

This article therefore takes an innovative angle towards GenAI policies in HEI by drawing on our experience creating MT guidelines for HEI and the main recommendations that are found in the current literature about MT and GenAI policies/guidelines in HEI. We will endeavour to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What common features are found in the current literature on GenAI policies to help establish a list of important recommendations for future guidelines?

RQ2: What are the similarities and differences between recommendations found in MT guidelines and those in GenAI policies?

RQ3: What specific features of MT guidelines could enhance GenAI policies?

In order to answer those questions, we will analyse the main common features of these policies and highlight their specificities, comparing the results of the literature review on MT and GenAI policies and our own guidelines on MT to provide HEI administrators and teaching staff with important insight when devising guidelines and policies on the use of GenAI.

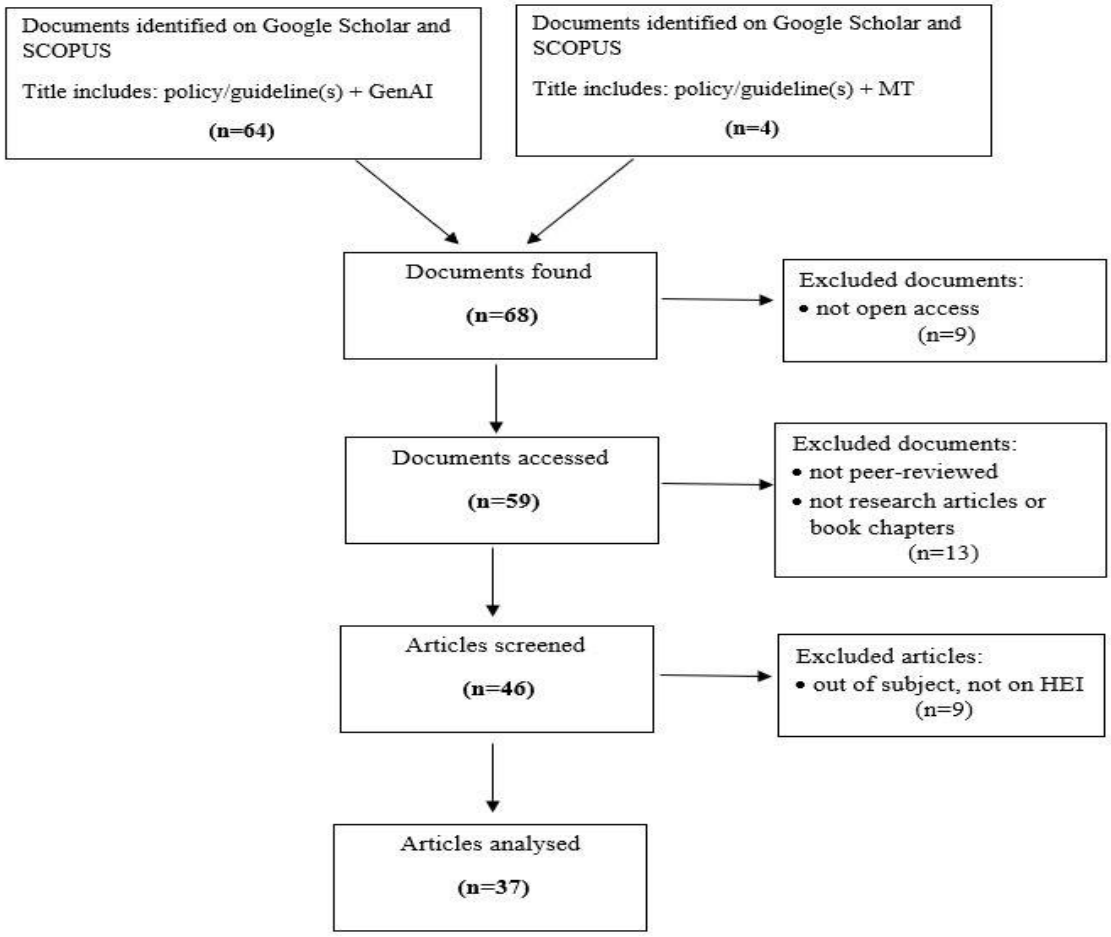
2. Literature Review on MT and GenAI Guidelines

2.1 Methodology

To establish a thorough base on which to draw conclusions on the main recommendations found in current MT and GenAI policies in HEI, we conducted a broad literature review of studies published in the last two years. We consulted Google Scholar and SCOPUS to find as many articles as we could. On Google Scholar, we used the keywords 'Generative AI' + 'guidelines' + 'higher education', as well as 'Generative AI' + 'policies' + 'higher education'. In SCOPUS, we searched 'polic*', 'guidelin*' 'Generative IA OR AI' in the titles + 'higher education' in all fields. There were so many entries that we decided to exclude all items published before 2023, as we were interested in documenting the change of policies following the rise of ChatGPT and other GenAI tools. The same search was repeated on Google Scholar and SCOPUS using 'machine translation' instead of 'Generative AI', without the time constraint as results were less numerous. This resulted in 68 documents. One point was immediately striking: 64 had GenAI as a subject, whereas only 4 dealt with MT guidelines (Bowker, 2023; Dusza, 2024; Mundt & Groves, 2016; Paterson, 2023). We then refined the list and excluded documents that were not open access, peer-reviewed, or research articles, books or book chapters (one PPT presentation, three MA thesis, one article written for a students' magazine, one poster presentation) or that dealt with GenAI policies outside of HEI (see Fig. 1). After this process, we worked with 37 documents on GenAI and 2 on MT (see list in the appendix).

Figure 1.

Elimination Process for the Literature Review



The corpus presented different types of data. Some of the articles on MT guidelines (Mundt & Groves, 2016; Paterson, 2023) and GenAI policies (Allen et al., 2024; Aquino et al., 2024a, 2024b; Michalak, 2023; Sarin & Kimkong, 2024) offer conclusions based on personal experiences and academic literature. A few others base their recommendations on survey results and/or qualitative data from interviews or focus group discussions (Cacho, 2024; Chan, 2023; Hamerman et al., 2025; Irfan et al., 2023; Perera & Lankathilake, 2023). Two elicited their results from literature reviews (Evangelista, 2025; Plata et al., 2023). The majority (19 articles), however, compared and analysed existing HEI guidelines. A few compared HEI policies worldwide (Dabis & Csáki, 2024; Jin et al., 2025; McDonald et al., 2025; Moorhouse et al., 2023; Ullah et al., 2024), while others focused on a continent like Asia (Dai et al., 2024; Kam & Kim, 2024) or specific countries: USA (Azevedo et al., 2024; Campbell et al., 2025; Niraula, 2024; Wang et al., 2024), Canada (Marcel & Kang, 2024), South Africa (Chaka et al., 2024), Nigeria (Omeh et al., 2025), Germany (Christ-Brendemühl, 2025), Denmark (Driessens & Pischetola, 2024), Malaysia (Mehar Singh & Phan Kar Jun, 2024), and Australia (De Maio, 2024). Their focus is sometimes quite different, with many showing particular interest in academic integrity (De Maio, 2024; Luo, 2024; Moorhouse et al., 2023; Piedad et al., 2024), academic writing (Marcel & Kang, 2024), course policies (Moore & Lookadoo, 2024), academic publishing (Rana, 2025), or exam design and assessment strategies (Evangelista, 2025).

All these documents share more or less explicit recommendations, best practices, and suggestions for guideline creation. We thus focused our thematic reading on specific parts of the articles, namely those titled ‘recommendation(s)’, ‘conclusion and recommendations’, and ‘implication(s)’. But we scanned the whole articles as recommendations were sometimes found in the discussion section or in the conclusion. While reading, we took particular note of words such as ‘recommend’, ‘suggest’, ‘should’, etc. We thus gathered 121 quotes from the literature review (117 for GenAI and 4 for MT) that represent one to several suggestions, pieces of advice, and recommendations.

We analysed the quotes and created clusters of similar recommendations from different sources. These clusters were then gathered into four main themes: content of the policy, audience of the policy, form of the policy, and further institutional changes.

2.2 Results

2.2.1 Content of the policy

Many authors offer suggestions on the content of a good AI policy. A main point is to emphasise the “double-edged nature” of these tools (Dai et al., 2024; Mundt & Groves, 2016) and make users aware of their benefits but also of their limitations. Several authors advocate that GenAI guidelines should give clear examples of beneficial uses, as well as highlight hallucinations, biases, and lack of referencing (Cacho, 2024, p. 17). It is interesting to note that recommendations to include warnings about the tools’ limitations outnumber the calls to mention their benefit.

It is not surprising that the second most important type of information is about GenAI and academic integrity, though Driessens & Pischetola (2024, p. 45) have criticised such “mainstream approaches” for their focus on “rethinking assessment and creating rules on cheating and plagiarism”. Recommendation for MT guidelines also tackle the issue of plagiarism and academic integrity (Mundt & Groves, 2016; Paterson, 2023), which the authors believe should be rethought to include acceptable help from AI tools. This is linked to the issue of transparency and accountability – key components of GenAI literacy for

communication (Cardon et al., 2023), which entails acceptable ways of granting academic integrity while using AI tools for part of the work. Rana (2025) shares practices advocated by big scientific editors and suggests that HEI policies include precise lists of what is and is not allowed and how to reference any help (direct or indirect) of AI.

Finally, two articles mention the broader social and environmental context and advocate that policies mention issues of sustainability and the environmental impact of AI technologies on water and power use (Driessens & Pischetola, 2024), as well as the power imbalance intrinsic to AI tools with ableist (Aquino et al., 2024a, 2024b) and Western biases (Chaka et al., 2024; Driessens & Pischetola, 2024).

Table 1.

Recommendations and Advice Regarding Policy Content

MAIN THEME 1: POLICY CONTENT	
cluster	**recommendation / advice**
Included information	- double-edged nature of GenAI* (**3:** AI12; MT1) - academic integrity* - broad ethical issues* (**2:** AI9, AI29) - transparency and accountability* - privacy and security (**4**: AI7, AI9, AI17, AI35) - definitions (**2**: AI7, AI23) - best practices (**1**: AI1)
Double-edged nature of AI	- tool limitations (**5**: AI1, AI12, AI18, AI27, AI29) - benefits of AI tools (**3**: AI1, AI12, A127)
Academic integrity	- redefine concept (**7**: AI12, AI13, AI20, AI33, AI34, MT1, MT2) - communicate sanctions to misbehaviour (**2**: AI8, AI31)
Broad ethical issues	- power inequalities (**2**: AI8, AI14) - sustainability (**1**: AI14)
Transparency and accountability	- mention all GenAI use (**4**: AI2, A111, AI22, AI32)

Note: Advice that appears with an asterisk represents both a general recommendation found in the 'included information' cluster and are a separate cluster by themselves. See the appendix for the abbreviated references.

2.2.2 Audience of the policy

Some recommendations mention the main audience of the guidelines. Mostly, these address teaching staff and urge them to educate students on AI. Teaching staff need to be educated first thanks to new training sessions (2.2.4) and develop GenAI literacy.

Another important point that is often mentioned with respect to the inclusion of GenAI in education is the importance of re-evaluating current assessment methods (Evangelista, 2025; Foung et al., 2024), a task that is usually delegated by administrators to teaching staff. As mentioned by Wang et al. (2024), this should actually be "a joint effort" between instructors and administrators given how hard this is for teaching staff (Alm & Ohashi, 2024; Barrett & Pack, 2023), especially as they are already suffering from technostress (Kohnke et al., 2024). This is all the more important given that teaching staff cannot trust AI-detection tools with their false positive and false negative results (Giray, 2024; Perkins et al., 2024), as mentioned by two articles in our sample (Alqahtani & Wafula, 2025; Dai et al., 2024).

Three articles mention that guidelines should be addressed to all stakeholders, including academic support staff and administrators. Furthermore, two ask that "the responsibility of each stakeholder affected by the policy should be clearly articulated" (Mehar Singh & Phan Kar Jun, 2024, p. 276).

Table 2.

Recommendations and Advice Regarding Policy Audiences

MAIN THEME 2: POLICY PUBLICS	
cluster	**recommendation / advice**
Teaching staff	- should educate students on GenAI (**5**: AI1, AI6, AI10, AI22, AI29) - should innovate with assessment methods (**4**: AI11, AI15, AI26, AI29) - should be cautious with AI-detection tools (**2**: AI2, AI12)
All members of the HEI community	- not only teaching staff and students, but also academic-support staff (**3**: AI5, AI8, AI12) - clearly define role and responsibility of all stakeholders (**2**: AI18, AI23)

Note: See the appendix for the abbreviated references.

2.2.3 The form of guidelines

These recommendations are quite logical and straightforward: Guidelines should be easily accessed, clearly drafted, and concise. As we currently do not have enough studies on the use of GenAI in HEI, some authors suggest creating surveys to understand how the tools are used in a particular institution. As we are only now seeing the first publications on experiences with GenAI, one of the most recent articles suggests using their conclusions to create evidence-based guidelines (McDonald et al. 2025). As we argue in this article, the technical similarities between MT and GenAI (Benites et al., 2023) means that a lot of the data that has been gathered about the use of MT is likely applicable to GenAI tools.

Because so many policies were triggered by the widespread use of ChatGPT since November 2022, many guidelines cite this tool explicitly and sometimes also solely. Researchers in our literature list mention that guidelines should not cater only to one tool but be more comprehensive about all GenAI tools. This will also ensure the adaptability of the policy as technology is bound to change, in great leaps at the moment, and numerous tools are being launched regularly.

Finally, a few articles mention that policies should always have human beings and not technology at their core. As an example, we quote Campbell and colleagues (2025, p. 8) who explain that:

> When creating policies about plagiarism, thoughtfulness regarding the words in the policy, the tone and the authenticity of the message are critical components for […] acceptance.

According to the authors, this helps create a "sense of community and belonging" (Campbell et al., 2025, p. 8).

Table 3. *Recommendations and Advice Regarding the Form of Guidelines*

MAIN THEME 3: FORM OF GUIDELINES	
cluster	**recommendation / advice**
Accessibility	- easy retrieval (**5**: AI8, AI12, AI18, AI23, AI27) - clarity of language (**2**: AI7, AI27) - conciseness (**1**: AI7)
Evidence-based	- base guidelines on surveys of all stakeholders (**3**: AI12, AI22, AI31) - base guidelines on available scientific data (**1**: AI21)
Generalisation	- should not focus only on ChatGPT (**3**: AI11, AI14, AI26)
Human-centredness	- human and not technology should be at the centre (**2**: AI9, AI11) - wording should convey a sense of community and belonging (**1**: AI7)
Adaptability	- because of the sudden change in technological development (**2**: AI5, AI16)

Note: See the appendix for the abbreviated references.

2.2.4 Further institutional changes

The last theme underlies the general disruption faced by HEI in the wake of the introduction of GenAI, for example the creation of new structures within the institution like task forces or committees devoted to AI. Another big change is the need for new training programmes for staff and students to develop GenAI literacy. Many models of AI literacy have been devised and many definitions exist, but most state that AI literacy is a set of skills, knowledge, and experiences on different aspects of AI (e.g. technology, ethics, etc.) that enable GenAI literate users to interact with the tool sustainably and meaningfully (Pinski & Benlian, 2024, p. 9). This is closely related to the notion of MT literacy discussed below (3.2). Kam & Kim (2024) further argue that teaching staff and administrators should foster a transparent environment at all levels of the institution that will motivate students to show academic integrity.

A key element of policies in the wider context of the institution is its inclusivity. Many researchers advocate that regulations should not only be top-down but also include the specific point of view of all stakeholders, including students and academic support staff, as for example librarians who are uniquely trained to deal with some of the challenges brought by AI (Michalak, 2023). In addition, the university should ensure access to GenAI tools for all its members, including those with disabilities. As not all staff and students will embrace GenAI spontaneously, those who are left behind should be identified and helped (Kam & Kim, 2024).

The articles do not present the same view on how general the HEI policies should be. Some maintain the importance of creating broad, comprehensive, and standardised policies at the institutional level. These should however be broad enough to allow teachers to choose their own AI policy, depending on the learning outcomes of the course. For particular programmes, like counsellor education (Campbell et al., 2025), it might be useful to develop more specialised guidelines.

Finally, authors suggest that as all HEI and all staff are now facing the same challenges, it could be very useful to share best practices both within the institution and with other HEI nationally and internationally. This could also foster a better understanding that some concepts, such as academic integrity or what is considered acceptable help from AI, differ depending on our academic culture, as shown by Chaka et al. (2024) and Luo (2024).

Table 4.

Recommendations and Advice Regarding Further Institutional Changes in HEI, Alongside GenAI Policies

MAIN THEME 4: FURTHER INSTITUTIONAL CHANGES	
cluster	**recommendation/ advice**
Transformation to institutional structure	- develop AI literacy training for all staff (**11**: AI5, AI6, AI9, AI11, AI12, AI16, AI18, AI19, AI29, AI31, AI33) - create a new structure (task force, etc.): (**3**: AI8, AI18, AI33) - foster transparent environment (**1**: AI9)
Inclusivity	- all stakeholders should be included in the policy creation process (**7**: AI5, AI14, AI17, AI23, AI24, AI27, AI29) - ensure equal access to tools (**5**: AI3, AI4, AI10, AI11, AI14) - those who are left behind should be identified and helped (**1**: AI19)
Generality	- comprehensive and standardised policies (**5**: AI2, AI8, AI12, AI17, AI27) - teachers should be able to choose their GenAI course policy (**3**: AI11, AI27, AI29) - specific policies for particular programmes (**2**:AI7, AI35)
Sharing best practices	- nationally and internationally (**3**: AI12, AI19, AI33) - being aware of cultural differences in the definition of academic integrity (**2**: A8, AI20) - within the institution (**1**: AI1)

Note: See the appendix for the abbreviated references

2.3 Concluding remarks

In response to RQ1, our analysis of the literature on GenAI policies in HEI has allowed us to gather a substantial number of recommendations that will be useful to administrators who are looking to create their own guidelines.

RQ2 was more difficult to answer because of the discrepancy in the number of studies that were available. We can conclude that recommendations on MT and AI guidelines found in the literature review are quite similar, except when considering the sheer volume of studies devoted to GenAI policies. The only recommendation specifically linked to MT is the call to reassess language requirements, especially in terms of L2 knowledge, as AI can now help students produce acceptable academic texts (Paterson, 2023), which aligns with the call to review which tool and writing help is acceptable and add it to a new definition of academic integrity. However, due to the scarcity of information on MT guidelines in the literature, it is necessary to review our experience creating MT guidelines to see if we can add other suggestions to answer RQ3 more thoroughly.

3. Creating MT Guidelines

3.1 Need for MT Guidelines

The MT guidelines (BFH, 2023a, 2023b) described in this article were developed in the context of the DigLit project, a four-year project that ran from 2021 to 2024 to explore how AI-related technology can support language learning and academic writing in Swiss universities. Supported by swissuniversities, the umbrella organisation of universities and colleges in Switzerland, and four partner HEI, one major track of the project was to develop MT literacy (Bowker & Buitrago Ciro, 2019) among university staff and students across Switzerland.

The project was conducted in two main stages. The first stage involved developing an understanding of how students and staff use and perceive machine translation in higher education. A preliminary survey was conducted in English, German, and French in spring 2021 to establish the level of MT literacy in the four partner universities. This was followed

by a second, larger-scale survey in the same languages as well as in Italian with universities throughout Switzerland in the fall and winter of 2021/2022. In total, some 6,500 responses were received from students, teaching staff, researchers, and academic support staff (to learn more about the survey and results, see Delorme Benites et al., 2021). Although our survey was conducted in a Swiss HEI context only, other surveys and studies in France (Loock et al. 2022; Nassau et al. 2022) and the USA (Hellmich 2021; O'Neill 2019) all found very similar results.

The findings revealed that the vast majority of students (97%) and staff (95%) had already used MT systems. However, only 20% of students (n= 395 out of 1972) had been informed by their teachers or other members of staff about MT, including how it works, its potential, and its risks, and only 8% of all respondents (n= 334 out of 4407) had ever received any explicit instruction on using MT. Moreover, when asked if their institution has guidelines about the use of MT, 96% of respondents (n= 4221 out of 4398) answered either "no", "I don't know", or "I don't remember".

In a second stage, the DigLit project used these and other results from the survey to offer MT literacy – and eventually GenAI literacy – training to language teachers, students, researchers, and administrative and support staff at universities across Switzerland. Over 50 training sessions were held between 2022 and 2024. In addition, the project team decided in autumn 2022 to develop a policy on the use of MT in university contexts given the lack of university-wide policies on MT use at the four partner universities at that time. As with the training sessions, the intent of the policy was to enhance MT literacy among users.

3.2 MT literacy

Before proceeding to explain the development and content of the guidelines, it is important to define the term "machine translation literacy". First coined by Bowker and Buitrago Ciro (2019) in the context of academic research and writing, the term describes the core skills needed by non-specialised users of MT systems to work effectively with these tools (Cotelli Kureth & Summers, 2023). These include the ability to understand how MT systems are trained and how they process texts, how to prepare a text for automatic translation to improve the quality of the MT output ("pre-editing"), and how to modify or adapt the MT output to remove errors and improve its readability ("post-editing") (Bowker & Buitrago Ciro, 2019, p. 88). MT literacy also includes appreciating the wider implications associated with the use of MT, such as the need for transparency around MT use and the ability to identify potential risks involved in using MT systems (Bowker, 2021), for example concerns related to entering sensitive data or intellectual property into free online MT systems (Bowker & Buitrago Ciro, 2019 p. 90).

Although MT systems are easy to deploy, MT literacy focuses on enabling users to develop the critical thinking skills needed to determine whether, when, why, and how to use these powerful tools (Bowker, 2021). For this reason, MT literacy is more of a cognitive question than a techno-procedural one, thus situating it as part of a broader approach to information and digital literacy (Bowker, 2021).

The concept of MT literacy has been applied to other use-case settings: language learning and teaching (Cotelli Kureth & Summers, 2023), translator training (González Pastor, 2021; Krüger, 2022), crisis communication (O'Brien & Ehrensberger-Dow, 2020), and patent publishing (Nurminen, 2019). However, as the definition provided by Bowker and Buitrago Ciro (2019) was developed for lay users, it is theirs that guided the development of our policy on MT use in university contexts in autumn 2022.

3.3 Policy on machine translation use in university contexts

The policy was developed over a four-month period commencing in September 2022. In an initial brainstorming session, the project team decided against modelling the policy on any existing guidelines or policies at the four partner universities because any that we had come across at that time were mostly concerned with plagiarism or academic integrity or were implemented by individual instructors to prevent interference with language learning or assessments. In line with our project's focus on enhancing MT literacy, we decided that our policy should be prescriptive rather than proscriptive and empower MT users to critically evaluate when and how to use MT systems to facilitate effective and responsible communication.

Initially, the project team worked in two groups. One group put together an outline based on research on existing policies and guidelines at universities and other large multilingual institutions as well as academic literature, and the other group developed an outline from scratch based on their own expertise in MT literacy as well as their extensive experience translating a range of academic guidelines and university policies for one of the partner universities. The results were then compared and merged, and a final template was agreed upon. The policy was then written by three group members in English.

The policy begins with a short introduction that justifies the need for guidelines on the use of MT by outlining the strengths and limitations of MT systems. It explains how the grammatical fluency of MT output lulls users into trusting it (Martindale & Carpuat, 2018), thus making it difficult to identify and correct errors related to accuracy, adequacy, or appropriateness (Loock & Léchauguette, 2021), a phenomenon known as false fluency. It also covers linguistic forms that are particularly challenging for MT systems, such as infrequently used words, complex sentences, specialised terminology, and hedging (Sánchez-Gijón & Kenny, 2022), as well as the risks associated with linguistic (Vanmassenhove et al., 2019) and gender bias (Vanmassenhove et al., 2018) in MT output.

Next, the policy provides a one-page list of key definitions of terms and concepts associated with machine translation and which are used later in the policy, including pre-editing, light and full post-editing (Massardo et al, 2016), gist translation (the use of machine translation to obtain a general though potentially imprecise understanding of a text), and raw MT output (MT output that has not been modified by the user). It also explains the difference between low-risk communication (texts that have a low visibility or are consulted for information purposes only) and high-risk communication (texts that have a high visibility are meant to elicit a specific reaction from the reader or whose misunderstanding could lead to financial, legal or reputational damage).

The policy then describes the importance of data protection and transparency when working with MT systems. With respect to the former, it explains that personal data or confidential information (including original research) should not be entered into free online MT systems because any data supplied to these may be re-used as training data or sold to other companies. In addition, it emphasises that users must be aware of the privacy policies associated with fee-based MT systems and always comply with the General Data Protection Regulations, particularly with respect to personal data and any obligations of confidentiality or secrecy. As regards transparency, the policy encourages users of MT systems to insert a disclaimer stating if the text is raw MT output or post-edited MT output to help readers assess the quality of the translation.

Finally, the policy provides detailed information on how to use MT in learning and teaching, as well as in research and administrative work. As regards learning and teaching, it explains how running a text not authored by the student through an MT system and using the

MT output without citing the original source constitutes plagiarism and that students must follow any guidelines set by their instructors as regards using MT for assignments and assessments. In terms of research and administrative work, users are advised to conduct a risk assessment to determine if a potential error or misunderstanding resulting from MT use could offend the reader or result in reputational loss or legal or financial damage. If that is the case, users should work with a professional translator. Examples are provided of low-risk communication, such as emails and internal presentations, and high-risk communication, including official transcripts, research publications, website content, and marketing materials.

As an annex (BFH, 2023b) to the policy, users are provided with a one-page checklist of steps to follow from assessing a text to determine if it is low-risk or high-risk communication through to pre-editing (for example, using the active voice, simplifying complex sentences, and deleting identifying features such as names), post-editing (assuming the user has adequate knowledge of the target language) and working with a professional translator (by providing them with the source text and consulting with them to determine whether the text should be post-edited or translated). The checklist was designed to empower lay MT users to work effectively and responsibly with MT systems.

The policy was finalised in January 2023 and approved by the entire project team. In February 2023, it was translated into German and French and disseminated to the three partner universities (Bern University of Applied Sciences, University of Neuchatel and the Zurich University of Applied Sciences) whose members comprised the MT literacy track of the DigLit project. At this point, however, ChatGPT had recently burst onto the scene. As a result, only the Bern University of Applied Sciences adopted and published our policy on MT use in university contexts. To date, neither of the two other universities have published university-wide guidelines or policies on MT use; however, all three introduced guidelines or policies on GenAI in spring 2023.

4. Discussion

4.1 Similarities

A striking similarity between our experience and the results of the literature review is the importance of AI literacy. However, whereas our MT guidelines are anchored in a widely accepted definition of MT literacy for lay users, there is no single or clear definition of AI literacy in higher education (Laupichler et al., 2022). While the discussion of establishing a universally valid definition of AI literacy is beyond the scope of this article, we encourage those drafting AI literacy policies in HEI to be both explicit in their chosen definition of AI literacy and to allow that definition to guide the content of the policy, thus turning it into an opportunity to educate GenAI users of the potential, limitations, and risks of these tools.

Another similarity is the need to include all members of the HEI community in the policy. This encompasses not only teaching staff and students, but also academic support staff and researchers. In addition, each role and responsibility should be clearly defined (Mehar Singh & Phan Kar Jun, 2024) and their individual needs and use-cases addressed, as was done with our MT guidelines. For example, while issues like academic integrity and plagiarism are highly relevant to teaching staff and students, matters relating to data protection, communicative effect, or intellectual property are of particular concern to academic support staff and researchers. As is recognized in our MT guidelines and the results of the literature review (Alqahtani & Wafula, 2025; Dabis & Csáki, 2024; Marcel & Kang, 2024), transparency is a key issue that affects all GenAI users in HEI and should be clearly addressed to encourage responsible use of GenAI.

Finally, ethical use of these powerful tools comes up both in our MT guidelines and in the results of the literature review. On the one hand, ethics encompasses many practical aspects of using GenAI tools such as plagiarism, academic integrity, transparency, data protection, etc. On the other hand, there are ethical considerations that users should consider before even deciding to use these tools. In the case of our MT guidelines, this relates to the importance of consulting language professionals such as translators when contemplating the use of MT for texts where deficiencies in the translation could have severe consequences, such as reputational damage, as well as the concern that uninformed MT use can perpetuate cultural, racial, and gender bias (Vanmassenhove et al., 2018). Ethical concerns are even more pronounced when talking about GenAI: not only can it produce biased and discriminatory output (Driessens & Pischetola, 2024), but the massive environmental cost and accusations of exploitative labour conditions associated with training the data (Hua et al., 2024) belong in every GenAI policy if users are to make informed decisions about using these tools.

4.2 Additional Recommendations for GenAI Guidelines

One striking difference between our guidelines and the literature on GenAI is their silence on the impact of these tools on communication. We know from studies about MT that output produced by the machine is less lexically and syntactically rich than text produced by humans (Vanmassenhove et al., 2019), a phenomenon known as machine translationese. It is early days yet, but emerging studies tend to show a similar loss of complexity in GenAI output (Kurokawa & Salingre, 2025, in Press). Moreover, new systems cannot learn from texts produced by GenAI tools as this leads to model collapse (Shumailov et al., 2024). This threat needs to be mentioned alongside hallucinations and biases, especially as studies on MT have established that exposure to machine-generated output can "prime" or influence our own language production (Resende & Way, 2021).

An important feature in our MT guidelines is the need to differentiate between different types of communication, mainly low-risk and high-risk. We believe that GenAI guidelines would benefit from including similar use-cases. For example, ChatGPT could easily be used to quickly create an email to a colleague with few consequences if a sentence is somewhat vague, but more important texts – a university website, for example – would need to be thoroughly proofread by a language professional who is highly GenAI literate.

Finally, the critical thinking strategies that are highlighted in the MT and GenAI literature review focus only on the tools' limitations but not on our own limitations as human proofreaders. Our extensive experience with MT literacy means that we are familiar with some of the problems and therefore highlighted them in our own guidelines. The most important one is that people tend to only proofread output very superficially, focusing on the form rather than the meaning, because of their (misplaced) trust in fluent output (Martindale & Carpuat, 2018). We also know that users require training in these tools. Just as people tend to incorrectly use MT systems for single words (Cotelli Kureth et al., 2023), so, too, is it possible that they are writing ineffective prompts. Akin to the checklist that we provided for pre- and post-editing, we believe that GenAI users need to be equipped with prompt engineering skills by providing them with specific examples of how to write effective prompts for a wide range of tasks, as was suggested by some authors (Chan, 2023; Dai et al., 2024; Hamerman et al., 2025; Kam & Kim, 2024; McDonald et al., 2025), as well as risk assessment frameworks to assist them in understanding how to use GenAI purposefully and responsibly.

In response to RQ3, we therefore believe that GenAI policies would benefit from evidence-based information on how these tools impact communication, which types of communication they are suitable for, when GenAI-literate language professionals should be consulted, and concrete, step-by-step instructions on how to write effective prompts.

5. Conclusion

A common feature in all the sources that we reviewed is the absolute necessity of developing GenAI literacy for all members of the HEI community. While this should be included in the content of GenAI policies and guidelines, it is crucial that HEI also provide GenAI literacy training programs that integrate prompt engineering strategies and critical thinking skills and strategies for evaluating GenAI output. In our opinion, all HEI must implement such policies and programs, as "there is danger in silence" (Moore & Lookadoo, 2024, p. 620): burying our heads in the sand will not make the problems disappear. Even students themselves have expressed a need for guidance (Suonpää et al., 2024). In addition, we urge all involved in drafting GenAI policies or developing GenAI literacy training programs to embrace the dynamic nature of this work. While the recommendations that we have gathered from the literature review and our own MT guidelines should empower administrators and teachers, some of these recommendations might change as we gather more empirical data on the way humans interact with GenAI tools and as the definition of academic integrity is reassessed and perhaps even modified. It is therefore important to understand this as a work in progress, iteratively update any work based on emerging research and recognise this as an opportunity for all members of HEI to learn and grow.

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Appendix

List of the 38 articles used in the literature review with their allotted number:

AI1: Allen et al. 2024

AI2: Alqahtani & Wafula 2025

AI3: Aquino et al. 2024a
AI4: Aquino et al. 2024b
AI5: Azvedo et al. 2024
AI6: Cacho 2024
AI7: Campbell et al. 2024
AI8: Chaka et al. 2024
AI9: Chan 2023
AI10: Christ-Brendemühl 2024
AI11: Dabis & Csáki 2024
AI12: Dai et al. 2024
AI13: De Maio 2024
AI14: Driessens & Pischetola 2024
AI15: Evangelista 2025
AI16: Hamerman et al. 2025
AI17: Irfan et al. 2023
AI18: Jin et al. 2024
AI19: Kam & Kim 2024
AI20: Luo 2024
AI21: McDonald et al. 2025
AI22: Marcel & Kang 2024
AI23: Mehar Singh & Kar Jun 2024
AI24: Michalak 2023
AI25: Moore & Lookadoo 2024
AI26: Moorehouse et al. 2023
AI27: Niraula 2024
AI28: Omeh et al. 2025
AI29: Perera & Lankathilake 2023
AI30: Piedad et al. 2024
AI31: Plata et al. 2023
AI32: Rana 2025
AI33: Sarin & Kimkong 2024
AI34: Ullah et al. 2024
AI35: Wang et al. 2024
MT1: Mundt & Groves 2016
MT2: Paterson 2023