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The Impact of Scite as an Emerging Generative AI Technology in Academic Writing

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The increasing use of artificial intelligence (AI) in higher education has prompted the development of tools designed to enhance literature evaluation and academic writing. This study critically examines Scite, an emerging AI-enabled citation analysis platform that contextualizes citations by classifying them as supporting, contrasting, or mentioning. Drawing on existing literature, reported use cases, and feature analysis, the study evaluates Scite's relevance for learning, instruction, and assessment.

Methods: The report highlights how Scite supports students in navigating complex literature, assists instructors in teaching critical source evaluation, and aids researchers and editors in ensuring citation integrity through tools such as Smart Citations and Reference Check. At the same time, the paper identifies significant challenges, including overreliance on automated metrics, misinterpretation of citation context, coverage gaps across disciplines, ethical concerns related to AI-assisted writing, and issues of access and equity arising from subscription-based models.

Results: By synthesizing emerging evidence and pedagogical considerations, the report argues that Scite is best understood as an augmentative tool that enhances, but does not replace, critical scholarly judgment.

Conclusion: The paper concludes with recommendations for responsible integration, emphasizing the importance of training, institutional policy development, and ethical oversight to ensure that Scite supports rigorous and transparent academic practices.

Keywords: academic writing; artificial intelligence; Scite; smart citations

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1. Introduction

The advent of artificial intelligence (AI) has significantly transformed the educational landscape, particularly by personalizing learning experiences and enhancing access to academic resources (Hosseini & Ebadi, 2025; Wang & Huang, 2025). Within academic writing and research, this transformation presents a critical need for new methods to evaluate literature and sources. Regular citation indexes (e.g., Scopus, Web of Science) provide only a quantitative measure of influence, treating all citations with the same weight, regardless of their purpose, whether for contextual background, methodological credit, support, or critical refutation (Tahamtan & Bornmann, 2019). This lack of contextual differentiation can mislead both novice and advanced researchers who often struggle to identify and synthesize the complex distinctions within the scholarly dialogue. For students involved in thesis review, the sheer volume of available literature further compounds the difficulty in critiquing and synthesizing information effectively.

To address these critical challenges in scholarly engagement, the AI-enabled tool Scite has emerged as a novel interactive medium (Srivastava & Agarwal, 2024). Utilizing natural language processing (NLP) on a vast database of academic publications, Scite extracts the precise context of citations from full-text articles (Brody, 2021). Scite moves beyond simple citation counts by classifying each citation as supporting, contrasting, or merely mentioning the cited work, thereby providing an immediate sense of the paper's reception and its role in the intellectual ecosystem. These smart citations make the citation landscape interpretable, allowing researchers to quickly discern established consensus from active debate and identify instances where core claims have been directly challenged in subsequent literature, a crucial detail often obscured by simple metrics.

Beyond contextual citation analysis, Scite offers a suite of interactive features that directly support the research workflow, including advanced search filters for literature discovery, dashboards for research monitoring, and an AI assistant that synthesizes evidence-based replies (Pritting et al., 2025). Notably, the platform features a reference check tool that automatically flags unreliable or retracted sources, thereby reinforcing academic integrity and ensuring quality assurance.

Despite these innovative capabilities, the integration of Scite into educational practice introduces significant pedagogical and ethical challenges. Concerns exist regarding the potential overreliance on AI tools, which may lead to superficial engagement with sources and the possible degradation of fundamental research and writing skills (Silva, 2025). Consequently, institutions face a dual responsibility: to leverage this technology to improve learning while simultaneously safeguarding the academic values of critical thinking, originality, and intellectual integrity.

This technology report critically examines the role of Scite in academic writing and scholarly practice. We first analyze how Scite's features align with the requirements of learning, instruction,

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and assessment. Next, we review existing use cases and available empirical data on the platform's adoption. Finally, we discuss the significant challenges, including overdependence and ethical issues, and offer recommendations for the responsible integration of this within universities. The study concludes by proposing strategies to achieve an essential balance between the innovative potential of this new interactive medium and the maintenance of rigorous, honest scholarly standards.

2. Relevance for Learning, Instruction, and Assessment

Scite continues to support a wide range of users, from students to professionals across the global higher education landscape. This section examines how Scite facilitates learning (by enabling students and researchers to deepen their understanding of scholarly literature), instruction (by assisting educators in teaching research and academic writing skills), and assessment (by providing tools for evaluating the quality of academic work and its sources). The primary purpose of Scite is to help users develop a more informed understanding of scholarly publications, engage critically with academic texts, improve their writing and citation practices, and verify their references to uphold academic integrity.

2.1 Enhancing Literature Comprehension and Discovery

A fundamental challenge for learners is managing complex and lengthy academic texts (Kim et al., 2025). Scite addresses this issue by transforming reading from a passive process into an interactive, participatory experience. Its smart citation interface enables users to remain within the platform while examining how an article has been cited in context. Specifically, Scite displays citation statements, direct excerpts from papers that reference a given study, categorized as supporting, mentioning, or contrasting. By reviewing these excerpts, students can quickly gain insight into how the scholarly community has interpreted and evaluated the work. This feature serves as a valuable learning aid, as it distills the broader discourse surrounding a paper into manageable, evidence-based segments.

Scite also allows users to determine at a glance whether a study's findings have been replicated or challenged, thereby reducing the need to review numerous articles. For example, when searching for a landmark psychology paper, Scite can indicate that its findings have been supported in fifteen studies and contrasted in three, accompanied by relevant citation statements. This functionality not only saves time but also helps students focus on citation context, thereby strengthening their critical reading skills. Students learn to ask essential questions, such as, "What have subsequent studies concluded about this finding?" Such awareness is integral to developing a rigorous literature review.

Additionally, Scite includes advanced search and filtering options that enhance comprehension and discovery. Users can search for a topic and then sort the results according to the number of

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supporting or contrasting citations each source has received. In instructional settings, educators may design assignments in which students use Scite to identify the most strongly endorsed study on a controversial topic and then articulate why that study has garnered substantial evidence. Such activities align with learning outcomes related to evaluating evidence and understanding research context.

2.2 Supporting Critical Thinking and Discussion in Instruction

From a pedagogical perspective, Scite is a valuable tool for teaching higher-order thinking skills in research (Nicholson et al., 2021). It enables instructors to demonstrate how scholarly claims accumulate support or encounter dispute over time. The ability to filter literature by highly supported studies, contested findings, or potential research gaps provides a powerful instructional resource. For example, in a research methods course, an instructor can contrast a well-supported finding with a contentious one, illustrating how scholarly debates evolve as subsequent studies offer confirmations, rebuttals, or extensions.

Scite's visual and textual mapping of citation relationships helps students trace the development of academic arguments. By observing how studies cite one another, whether in support or contradiction, students learn to engage critically with research rather than accept findings at face value. Visualizations of citation networks, including colour-coded nodes and edges that represent citation types, further enhance their ability to identify influential, foundational, or controversial works within a field.

Integrating Scite into coursework, such as assigning a brief literature review in which students must identify at least one supporting and one contrasting source for each claim, promotes critical evaluation skills. Students become more adept not only at locating sources but also at interpreting what each citation conveys. In doing so, they shift from focusing on the quantity of references to understanding their quality and contextual significance.

2.3 Aiding Writing and Citation Practices

Academic writing requires not only reading research but also integrating it effectively into one's own work. Scite offers several tools that support this process, benefiting both learners who are developing source-based writing skills and instructors who teach them. One such tool is the Scite Assistant, which helps users identify relevant literature by responding to natural-language questions or incomplete drafts. For example, a student drafting an introduction might ask, "What are the graduate employability models?" or provide a claim such as "Socio-economic factors positively influence graduate employability." The assistant then generates a concise, evidence-based response that cites verifiable publications. In one instance, it referenced Chen (2017), who found that social networks contribute positively to graduate employability, giving students a reliable source to investigate further.

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This tool can streamline the early stages of writing by directing students to pertinent literature they may otherwise overlook. However, its instructional use requires caution. While it can help students overcome writer's block and identify relevant citations, instructors must ensure that students use it responsibly, as a guide rather than a substitute for reading and evaluating sources. Because the assistant provides verifiable citations, it encourages students to consult the original studies, unlike generic AI tools that produce unsupported claims. Instructors might therefore permit its use for source discovery while requiring students to critically assess any referenced material before citing it in their own work.

Although Scite does not provide grammar or style feedback, it indirectly improves writing by strengthening the evidentiary foundation of an essay. It helps students locate credible literature to support their arguments and alerts them to issues such as retracted or heavily contradicted studies. In this way, Scite promotes sound citation practices, helping writers verify the status and scholarly reception of the works they reference.

2.4 Facilitating Assessment and Quality Assurance

In assessment contexts, Scite enables instructors and evaluators to examine the quality and reliability of citations in academic work. Its Reference Check tool allows users, such as teachers, journal editors, or authors, to upload a manuscript and automatically detect issues within the reference list. Scite identifies citations associated with editorial notices (e.g., retractions, corrections, expressions of concern) and highlights them in a generated report. For example, if a supervisor analyzes a graduate student's thesis and discovers that a foundational source has been retracted for fraudulent data, Scite will flag the problematic reference and display the exact sentence in which it was cited. This rapid feedback helps ensure academic rigour and supports what might be considered a triple check, allowing students and researchers to verify the reliability of their sources before submitting their final work.

Scite also assists journal editors and peer reviewers by expediting the vetting of references. Editors can quickly assess how frequently cited works have been supported or contradicted in the literature, helping them judge the relevance and impact of the sources used in a submission. Articles heavily reliant on studies with numerous contrasting citations may warrant additional scrutiny. The Scite browser extension further streamlines evaluation by displaying a badge next to article titles that indicates the number of supporting, mentioning, and contrasting citations. For instance, when grading an assignment, an instructor can hover over these badges to compare sources, noting that one has ten supporting and zero contrasting citations, while another has two supporting and five contrasting citations. While such metrics offer useful heuristics, they must complement, not replace, careful reading and scholarly judgment.

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In sum, Scite enhances learning by making academic literature more transparent and easier to evaluate. It provides students with tools for critically assessing sources and constructing evidence-based arguments, while offering educators and editors an added layer of quality control in citation assessment. Integrating Scite into academic practice supports the development of information literacy, not only recognizing relevant literature but also understanding how it is engaged through scholarly dialogue. Ultimately, Scite contributes to cultivating thoughtful, critical, and ethical researchers.

3. Emerging Technology in Practice

Although Scite is a relatively recent tool, it has begun to gain traction among researchers, educators, librarians, and publishing professionals, even if widespread adoption has not yet been achieved. This section examines early evidence of Scite's practical use in academic workflows, drawing on available data, reported practices, and illustrative examples from research, education, and scholarly publishing.

One indicator of Scite's impact is the scale of its database and the level of user engagement. As of 2025, Scite has indexed over 100 million scholarly publications and extracted more than 1.3 billion citation statements. This extensive coverage across disciplines, including both open-access and subscription-based literature, suggests that Scite offers a comprehensive representation of contemporary research. Its ability to contextualize citations across fields has been further validated through integrations with established scholarly infrastructures. Notably, the collaboration with arXiv enables Smart Citation badges to appear directly on preprint records, allowing readers to assess whether subsequent literature supports or contradicts a given study. Such partnerships signal growing institutional trust and embed Scite into existing research workflows.

Researchers are increasingly reporting the use of Scite in routine literature searches to identify key debates and assess the credibility of sources. Early adopters note that the platform reduces time spent on literature reviews by clarifying which studies are widely supported and which are contested. University libraries and information professionals have also responded positively, incorporating Scite into research workshops and toolkits due to its intuitive interface and seamless integration with familiar features such as Digital Object Identifier (DOI) lookup and browser extensions.

In educational contexts, instructors have begun incorporating Scite into coursework, particularly in academic writing and research methods courses. Assignments that require students to identify supporting and contrasting citations for a given study encourage deeper engagement with scholarly discourse. Preliminary observations suggest that such practices foster improved critical evaluation skills, as students become more attentive to how sources are positioned and debated within the literature.

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Scite is also emerging as a supplementary tool in scholarly publishing and peer review. Some reviewers and editors use it informally to assess the relevance, currency, and reliability of cited sources, including identifying retracted or contradicted studies. This capability aligns with broader efforts in academic publishing to enhance transparency, reproducibility, and citation integrity, and it facilitates compliance with emerging editorial standards.

While formal empirical evaluations of Scite's impact remain limited, this is unsurprising given its recent introduction. Nevertheless, related studies on AI-assisted research tools indicate that systems grounded in verified scholarly databases produce fewer erroneous or fabricated citations (Salvagno et al., 2024). Scite's design, which links AI-generated outputs directly to a validated corpus with traceable references, addresses a critical concern associated with earlier generative tools. Another relevant study is that by Aljamaan et al. (2024), which investigated reference hallucinations in AI chatbots used for medical literature. While Scite itself was not a chatbot tested in that study, since their focus was on ChatGPT and SciSpace's assistant, they nonetheless found that models grounded in real literature databases (as Scite's assistant is) produced far fewer false references than those that weren't. This highlights a significant benefit of Scite's design. Since the AI-generated answers are tied to a verified corpus and come with actual citations, they prevent the false citations that plagued early large language models.

Overall, although comprehensive assessments of Scite's long-term impact are still forthcoming, current evidence suggests that it fills an essential gap in the research ecosystem by making citation context visible and actionable. Its growing integration into library services, educational practice, and scholarly communication indicates that Scite is increasingly viewed as a core research support tool. As adoption expands, more systematic evaluations are likely to emerge, but existing trends already suggest that Scite is influencing how literature reviews and evidence-based writing are conducted in the digital age.

4. Significant Challenges

While there are many advantages to integrating Scite into academic writing and research, there are also considerable disadvantages. Just like any powerful tool, Scite can also be misused or introduce new problems if you do not understand its limitations. In this report, we discuss the key issues and risks associated with Scite, including over-reliance and superficial learning, misinterpretation of citation metrics, gaps and biases in coverage, ethical challenges related to AI use, and concerns regarding access and equity.

4.1 Over-reliance and Superficial Engagement

A key concern among educators is that learners may rely excessively on Scite's analytical features, thereby reducing critical engagement with primary sources. When users treat supporting or contrasting citation classifications as substitutes for reading the literature, their understanding risks

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becoming superficial. For example, a student may assume a finding is robust solely because it has numerous supporting citations, without examining the methodological quality or limitations of those studies. Conversely, research with several contrasting citations may be prematurely dismissed, even when disagreements concern only specific aspects or are based on weak evidence. While Scite's signals are informative, they do not provide a complete interpretive framework, and uncritical reliance may discourage independent evaluation. This concern mirrors broader educational critiques of AI-assisted tools, which suggest that easy access to synthesized information can undermine the development of information-seeking and evaluative skills (Nikolic et al., 2024). Without appropriate guidance, Scite could foster researchers who know what to cite but not why. To mitigate this risk, instructors should emphasize that Scite is a starting point rather than an authoritative interpretation and require users to consult and critically analyze the original sources underlying any citation.

A related challenge arises from the polished summaries generated by the Scite Assistant. As with other AI tools, users may be tempted to incorporate generated text directly into their writing. However, despite the inclusion of verifiable citations, AI-generated content should not be treated as authoritative prose for submission. Clear instructional policies are therefore essential, for example, limiting the assistant's use to note-taking or literature exploration rather than manuscript drafting. Although Scite's grounding in curated scholarly databases reduces hallucinations compared to generic AI systems, its outputs may still be incomplete or inaccurate when queries are ambiguous or relevant literature is limited. Consequently, users must critically assess the assistant's responses rather than accept them uncritically (Mhlanga, 2023). For instance, the absence of identified contrasting studies may reflect limitations in database coverage or query formulation rather than a scholarly consensus.

4.2 Misinterpretation of Metrics and Context

Scite's supporting and contrasting citation metrics offer useful summaries but should not be interpreted as definitive indicators of scholarly consensus. These labels are generated through automated text analysis, and while generally accurate, they may overlook contextual nuances. For example, a citation classified as contrasting may reflect only a minor methodological difference or a finding that is complementary under specific conditions. Treating such labels as categorical judgments risks misrepresenting the underlying research.

Moreover, Scite's filtering features may reinforce confirmation bias, as users can easily focus on citations that align with their existing views while disregarding opposing evidence. This can encourage cherry-picking, particularly when authors rely on citation counts (e.g., "most studies support X") without evaluating the methodological quality or relevance of the cited work. Scite does not weight citations by evidentiary strength; thus, a supporting citation from a small-scale study is counted equivalently to one from a large meta-analysis. Consequently, Scite's metrics

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should be used to identify relevant literature rather than to quantify truth. Educators can mitigate misinterpretation by emphasizing that badge counts serve as entry points for deeper analysis, directing users to examine the full citation statements and underlying studies rather than relying solely on numerical summaries.

4.3 Coverage Gaps and Biases

Although Scite covers a substantial portion of the scholarly literature, its database is not exhaustive. Coverage gaps are particularly evident in the social sciences and humanities, where influential scholarship is often published in books or non-article formats that Scite does not currently index. Similarly, recently published studies may be underrepresented due to indexing delays or limited citation accumulation, reducing Scite's utility for emerging research areas.

These limitations may create a false sense of completeness. Novice users, in particular, may interpret sparse citation data as an absence of prior research or scholarly debate, when relevant work may exist outside Scite's coverage; for example, in books or publications not yet available for text mining. Additionally, disciplinary differences in citation practices may introduce bias into support and contrast classifications. Fields that employ more cautious or critical citation language may appear to generate more contrasting citations, regardless of the underlying robustness of the research. Automated classification may also misinterpret nuanced critique, irony, or sarcasm, leading to occasional mislabeling.

These constraints indicate that Scite should not be used in isolation to evaluate research. Citation context analysis should be complemented with other sources of scholarly judgment, such as reviews, meta-analyses, and expert commentary. Although Scite continues to expand its coverage and improve classification accuracy, users must recognize that limited visibility within the platform does not equate to limited presence in the broader literature.

4.4 Ethical Considerations and Academic Integrity

The adoption of Scite raises several ethical considerations within academic practice. On the one hand, Scite can strengthen research integrity by identifying problematic references and discouraging the uncritical citation of retracted or discredited studies. On the other hand, its AI-assisted features occupy a contested space similar to that of other generative tools used in academic writing. Ongoing scholarly debate centers on the extent to which AI-assisted drafting constitutes original work or academic misconduct (Alexander et al., 2023). Scite may be viewed primarily as an augmentative rather than a deceptive tool, as it emphasizes source verification; however, misuse could encourage superficial engagement, with users assembling text and citations without conducting independent analysis.

Equity also presents a concern. Access to Scite's premium features may advantage some students in producing well-referenced work, potentially widening disparities in access. In response,

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instructors may need to establish clear usage policies, such as permitting Scite for source discovery but not for text generation, or requiring disclosure of its use, approaches consistent with emerging guidance on generative AI in education (Sok & Heng, 2024). Clear institutional guidelines are therefore essential to ensure that Scite supports learning rather than circumventing it.

Finally, Scite's reference-checking functionality introduces an additional ethical complexity. While it promotes citation integrity, it may inadvertently discourage the citation of retracted or controversial studies, even when such citations are contextually justified (e.g., in methodological critique or historical analysis). Avoiding valid but problematic sources to obtain a "clean" report risks distorting scholarly discourse. Ethical use of Scite thus requires recognizing that problematic sources may be cited appropriately when clearly contextualized and critically discussed.

4.5 Cost and Accessibility

Scite's full functionality requires a paid subscription, raising concerns about equitable access. While a limited free version is available, core features, such as unrestricted searches, extended dashboard use, and the AI assistant beyond trial access, are restricted to subscribers. This model risks creating disparities between users at well-resourced institutions and those without institutional support, potentially widening gaps in research efficiency and academic performance. If instructors expect students to use Scite, institutional provision (e.g., via library subscriptions) becomes essential. Access barriers may also affect global adoption, particularly for researchers in under-resourced settings, thereby inadvertently biasing scholarly participation and visibility.

These disparities may influence publication outcomes. Authors using Scite may produce manuscripts with more nuanced citation context, while equally capable researchers without access may be less able to identify conflicting or qualifying studies. Although partnerships with open infrastructures such as arXiv partially mitigate these concerns, broader institutional support will be necessary to ensure more equitable access.

Data privacy constitutes an additional consideration. By submitting manuscripts for reference checking or entering queries into the AI assistant, users entrust the platform with unpublished material. Although Scite maintains explicit data protection policies, researchers working in sensitive or proprietary areas may remain cautious about using such tools.

Overall, Scite offers innovative capabilities that can enhance academic writing and research practices, but its effective adoption requires informed and responsible use. Addressing access inequities, clarifying ethical guidelines, and enhancing user education are crucial to preventing misuse and misinterpretation. Ultimately, Scite's value depends less on its technical sophistication than on how thoughtfully it is integrated into scholarly practice. When used critically, it can strengthen research rigour; when used unreflectively, it risks becoming a methodological shortcut.

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Ensuring ethical and responsible use is therefore a shared responsibility of both developers and the academic community.

5. Conclusion

Scite is reshaping how researchers locate, interpret, and evaluate academic literature by contextualizing citations beyond traditional count-based metrics. By revealing how knowledge claims are supported or contested, Scite helps students navigate complex literature, enables instructors to teach critical source evaluation, and supports researchers and evaluators in maintaining citation credibility and scholarly integrity. Its evidence-centered approach promotes a more transparent and analytically grounded engagement with research.

However, the effective use of Scite requires caution. While the tool can deepen understanding and strengthen academic writing, an uncritical reliance on it may lead to dependence or misinterpretation. Maximizing its value, therefore, requires balance: Scite should support, not replace, the critical judgment and analytical rigour that define scholarly work. It is best understood as an aid for identifying relevant evidence and alternative perspectives rather than an authoritative arbiter of truth.

To support responsible adoption, training and institutional guidance are essential. Universities and libraries should provide instruction on the effective use of resources, emphasizing the need to consult original sources and critically interpret citation indicators. Clear policies on AI-assisted research, such as permitting AI support for literature discovery while restricting the use of AI-generated prose, can further safeguard academic integrity. Ongoing feedback from users and educators will also be important in improving coverage, classification accuracy, and accessibility, particularly through partnerships that expand access for under-resourced institutions.

In conclusion, Scite exemplifies how AI can enhance research workflows and evidence-based writing when used judiciously. It offers a glimpse into the future of literature review practices while underscoring a central principle of scholarship: tools augment, but do not replace, human intellectual labour. With thoughtful integration and ethical oversight, Scite can make meaningful contributions to learning, teaching, and research without compromising academic values.

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