Am I cheating if I use ChatGpt in my academic work?

Does AI bridge the gap? A Study on How AI Supports Disadvantaged Students in Achieving Academic Excellence

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Context

My project explores whether using AI in academic work, particularly by students from low socio-economic backgrounds, should be considered cheating or a legitimate support tool. Coming from a disadvantaged background, I struggled with imposter syndrome attending a Russell Group university, where I felt a gap between myself and peers from more privileged backgrounds. However, when AI tools like ChatGPT was introduced, it offered a way to bridge this gap, and many students took advantage of this opportunity; for example, Warwick University saw over 850,000 visits to ChatGPT in 2023 (Smith, 2024). While studies like Hlosta et al. (2021) show AI can improve pass rates for disadvantaged students, there is still a need to explore its broader impact on academic success and whether its use should be seen as a form of academic dishonesty. By addressing these points, this project aims to provide a clearer understanding of the role of AI in education and its potential to level the playing field for all students.

Methodology

The survey, created through Qualtrics, targeted students from various socio-economic backgrounds, focusing on Warwick Business School students. It was distributed via the widening participation network, WIISP students in Venice, and societies like Prosper Warwick. Participants accessed the survey through a link in the invitation email, which first confirmed their consent. Respondents were assured of anonymity, and all data were kept confidential.

The survey began with closed questions to confirm eligibility, followed by inquiries about academic background, AI tool usage, and Likert scale ratings on AI's impact. It concluded with open-ended questions about their experiences with AI. Out of 16 responses, 10 were valid and analysed.

We used Qualtrics for initial review and exported data to Excel for further organization. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative responses were coded and thematically analysed to identify key insights into students' experiences with AI.

RESEARCH QUESTION 1.

How frequently do students use AI tools in their academic work, and which specific AI tools are commonly utilized?

Findings

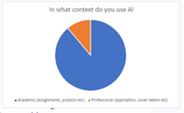
The survey revealed that 30% of students use AI tools like ChatGPT and Grammarly regularly ("always" or "most of the time") for assignments and projects. Disadvantaged students tend to rely on these tools more frequently to compensate for a lack of access to other academic support resources, whereas non-disadvantaged students use them as supplemental aids to enhance already-existing academic advantages.

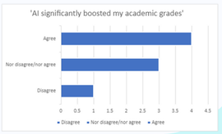
RESEARCH QUESTION 2.

What are the primary reasons students use AI tools, in what academic contexts are they used, and how do students perceive the contribution of AI to their academic performance before and after its implementation?

Findings

Students use AI tools primarily for proofreading, content organization, and improving professionalism in their assignments. Disadvantaged students reported that AI tools help streamline their study process and boost confidence, especially in writing and research. In contrast, non-disadvantaged students use AI tools to refine their work and improve efficiency, leveraging these tools in addition to other academic resources they already have access to.



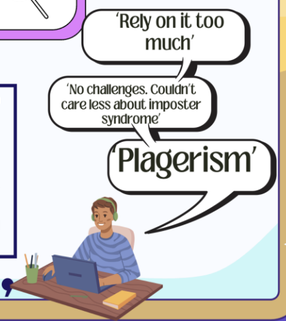


RESEARCH QUESTION 3.

What challenges do students encounter when using AI tools in their academic work, and what recommendations do they have for effectively and ethically integrating AI into higher education?

Findings

Students identified challenges such as over-reliance on AI, potential plagiarism, and academic integrity concerns. Disadvantaged students are more likely to experience issues related to over-reliance due to their greater dependence on these tools, while non-disadvantaged students can balance AI use with other forms of support. Both groups recommended clear ethical guidelines to prevent misuse and ensure that AI complements, rather than replaces, academic efforts.



Recommendations

- It is essential to establish clear ethical guidelines around the use of AI in academic work, emphasizing its role as a supplementary tool rather than a substitute for personal academic effort.
- Warwick Business School should provide structured support for students using AI tools, including resources that highlight both the benefits and potential risks associated with these technologies.
- Implement workshops and training sessions to help students balance AI usage with critical thinking and traditional research methods, thereby minimizing the risk of over-reliance and maintaining academic integrity.
- Future studies should involve a larger and more diverse sample, including students from various departments and universities, to gain a broader understanding of AI's impact on academic performance across different contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that AI tools like ChatGPT and Grammarly are widely used by both disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students, primarily for tasks such as proofreading, content organization, and improving the quality of their assignments. Disadvantaged students often rely heavily on these tools to fill gaps in academic support, which improves their confidence and efficiency. On the other hand, non-disadvantaged students use AI as an additional resource to complement the support they already have. While AI tools help disadvantaged students improve their academic performance, they may not fully close the gap between them and non-disadvantaged students. Non-disadvantaged students, who already have more academic resources, can use AI alongside those advantages. This may result in the educational gap staying the same or even becoming wider. Overall, these findings highlight the need for further research with a larger, more diverse sample to better understand AI's role in addressing academic inequalities. Educational institutions should also establish clear ethical guidelines to ensure AI is used responsibly and equitably, helping to reduce rather than reinforce educational differences.

REFERENCES

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