Issues in Information Systems
Volume 26, Issue 2, pp. 373-386, 2025

DOI: https://doi.org/10.48009/2_iis_129

Generative AI in higher education: student and faculty perspectives on use, ethics, and impact

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Abstract

This study investigates how generative AI tools are shaping the academic experiences of college students and faculty. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research draws on survey data from 114 students and interviews with 18 professors to explore perceptions, usage patterns, and perceived academic impacts of generative AI in coursework. Findings indicate that students generally view generative AI positively, particularly as a tool for managing academic stress and enhancing learning, with usage most common among those juggling multiple responsibilities. In contrast, faculty opinions were more cautious, emphasizing ethical concerns and inconsistent policy enforcement. Cultural background significantly influenced student attitudes; Asian-raised students reported more favorable views than North American-raised peers, while factors like gender and academic performance showed minimal effect. Faculty interviews revealed that most instructors permit AI use under certain conditions but lack formalized policies. The study highlights a growing disconnect between student behavior and institutional readiness, calling for clear, adaptable AI guidelines that balance academic integrity with practical student needs. These findings offer timely insights to help universities create effective and equitable AI integration strategies.

Keywords: Generative AI, student perception, faculty perspective, higher education, ethical AI use, AI policy

Introduction

Generative AI tools such as ChatGPT have reached classrooms faster than most universities can set rules (Dwivedi, Hughes, Ismagilova, Aarts, & Rana, 2023). Instructors praise the technology's potential for feedback and brainstorming yet worry about authorship, assessment, and integrity (Cotton, Cotton, & Shipway, 2023). Evidence on what students actually do with GenAI, and how faculty respond on the same campus, remains scarce.

This gap matters because campus decisions about generative AI are happening now. As institutions scramble to update policies, they are doing so with limited empirical understanding of how students and faculty experience the technology day to day. Without that perspective, schools risk designing policies that are out of sync with actual classroom practices or undermine academic trust. Our study aims to provide

timely, grounded insight from both groups, using a mixed-methods approach to capture the complexity of this moment in higher education.

While previous studies have explored either student behaviors or faculty attitudes toward generative AI separately, few have examined both perspectives within the same institutional setting. Additionally, limited attention has been given to how cultural background influences student adoption or how students themselves perceive the impact of AI use on their academic performance, especially in cases where AI use may be discouraged or restricted. Our study addresses these gaps by asking the following research questions:

1. How do college students and professors view generative AI in coursework?
2. How and why do students use generative AI? Will they do so even when professors forbid it?
3. What effect do students believe generative AI has on their academic performance?

We collected quantitative survey data from college students and qualitative interview data from faculty to address these questions.

We believe our study makes several contributions. First, it provides empirical data on student behavior and faculty responses at a moment when universities urgently need evidence-based guidance. Second, it captures student perspectives that are often missing from policy discussions, including how academic stress, employment, and cultural background shape AI use. Third, it sheds light on the mismatch between faculty preferences for decentralized policies and student desires for institutional clarity. As both students and researchers, we hope this study helps institutions move from reactive rulemaking toward thoughtful, inclusive AI integration strategies.

Literature Review

Generative AI tools have precipitated a paradigm shift in higher education, creating both transformative opportunities and unprecedented challenges. Recent surveys indicate that "89% of college students have used ChatGPT to assist with homework" (Lohitha & Sumathi, 2024), demonstrating rapid adoption that has outpaced institutional policy development. Generative AI is now regularly used for tasks such as summarizing content, drafting responses, and checking grammar, which are functions that were once handled manually by students or tutors. This rise in convenience has shifted how students approach academic work on a structural level. (Acosta-Enriquez et al., 2024; Velastegui-Hernandez et al., 2023).

Cultural dimensions significantly influence technology acceptance in academic contexts. Comparative studies reveal that Asian educational systems often exhibit greater openness to AI integration, viewing it as a legitimate learning aid, while Western institutions tend toward more cautious approaches (Baidoo-Anu & Owusu Ansah, 2023). These divergences suggest that cultural norms may mediate perceptions of academic integrity in the AI era.

Faculty responses remain polarized. While some educators champion AI's potential to "promote teaching and learning" through personalized support (Baidoo-Anu & Owusu Ansah, 2023), others warn of "human loss in decision making" and diminished critical thinking (Ahmad et al., 2023). This tension reflects broader debates about whether AI serves as a collaborator or crutch in the learning process (Kazley et al., 2024). In many cases, faculty members struggle to determine clear boundaries: should AI be seen as an extension of learning, or a threat to traditional notions of authorship and effort? In the absence of adopted institutional

standards and principles, faculty are left to independently address the integration of AI tools, navigating their potential benefits for learning against concerns related to academic integrity (Milicevic et al., 2024).

The pedagogical impacts of generative AI present a complex landscape. In programming education, tools like ChatGPT have demonstrated measurable improvements in students' computational thinking skills (Yilmaz & Karaoglan Yilmaz, 2023). However, concerns persist about the technology's potential to "undermine academic integrity if used without proper guidance" (Kazley et al., 2024), particularly regarding authentic skill development.

Recent studies emphasize the nuanced attitudes students hold toward AI tools depending on their perceived utility and ethical alignment. Acosta-Enriquez et al. (2024) found that while students acknowledge the convenience and efficiency offered by tools like ChatGPT, their willingness to use these technologies responsibly is significantly shaped by their intent and ability to verify AI-generated content. The research highlights a crucial distinction: students who intend to use ChatGPT as a supplementary resource, rather than a substitute, demonstrate more ethical behavior and stronger information literacy. Furthermore, students reported higher satisfaction when AI usage was paired with active verification practices, reinforcing the role of digital discernment in academic integrity. This suggests that fostering a culture of responsible AI use may be more impactful than blanket restrictions.

Prior research has overlooked three critical dimensions that our study uniquely examines. First, while existing studies document general student AI usage patterns, they fail to analyze how cultural background shapes adoption. Secondly, current literature lacks empirical studies that simultaneously examine both student and faculty perspectives. Third, previous work focused on either ethical concerns or usage benefits in isolation, without considering aspects like balancing academic workloads with employment.

Methodology

This study utilized a mixed-method research design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to data collection on the use and perceptions of generative AI in higher education. The quantitative component consisted of a student survey distributed to both undergraduate and graduate students via email, QR-code posters, and social media. The survey was created using Microsoft Forms and included demographic questions, scaled items, and open-ended responses to assess students' AI usage, perceived benefits, ethical concerns, and impact on academic performance. Participants gave informed consent before beginning. Responses were collected anonymously, and the data was analyzed using IBM SPSS software to identify usage patterns, group differences, and correlations across key variables.

For the qualitative component, faculty members were invited to participate in semi-structured interviews to gain deeper insight into their perspectives on the academic impact of generative AI. These interviews focused on faculty experiences with AI in the classroom, concerns about academic integrity, and expectations for future integration. Interviews were conducted in private settings, and information from the interviews were noted down on paper with consent and anonymized for analysis. Thematic analysis was used to identify key ideas and recurring concerns across participants.

The thematic analysis was conducted manually. After reviewing the interview notes, our team looked for common patterns of agreement and disagreement. We worked together to group responses and develop themes through open discussion and shared understanding. While we didn't use formal coding software or calculate intercoder reliability, we kept clear records of our coding decisions to ensure the process was transparent and consistent.

All procedures followed ethical standards approved by the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB), and participation was entirely voluntary.

The interview and survey questions can be found in Appendix A. All survey items were constructed by the authors based on themes identified in literature and the research questions posed in this study.

Results

We received 114 complete responses from college students and Table 1 below shows the demographics of the survey respondents. In terms of upbringing, about two-thirds of students were raised in North America, roughly one-third in Asia (East or South), and a small remainder in South America, Europe, or the Middle East. Employment data showed that 25% of students did not work during the semester, about 50% worked 1–20 hours per week, and the remaining 25% worked more than 20 hours, including 9.5% who worked 40 or more hours weekly.

Table 1: Participant Demographics

Demographic	Categories (count, %)
Gender	Man (51, 44.7%); Woman (61, 53.5%); Non-binary (1, 0.9%); Prefer not to say (1, 0.9%)
Major Field	STEM Majors [Science, Technology, Engineering, Math, Computer Science, Health & Medicine] (54, 47.4%); Non-STEM Majors [Social Sciences, Arts & Humanities, Business, Media, Law, English or Foreign Languages, Other] (60, 52.6%)
Academic Performance	Low GPA <2.5 (7, 6.0%); Medium GPA 2.5–3.49 (72, 62.9%); High GPA ≥3.5 (35, 31.0%)
College Year	Freshman (43, 37.1%); Sophomore (29, 25.9%); Junior (20, 18.1%); Senior (19, 16.4%); Graduate (3, 2.6%)
Age Range	18–21 years (75, 66.4%); 22–24 years (27, 23.3%); 25–35 years (12, 10.3%)
Place Raised	North America (75, 65.8%); East Asia (17, 14.9%); South Asia (19, 16.7%); Other (3, 2.6%)
Work Hours/Week	0 hours (29, 25.4%); 1–10 hours (22, 19.3%); 11–20 hours (34, 29.8%); 21–39 hours (18, 15.8%); 40+ hours (11, 9.6%)

Table 2 is a summary of students' perceptions of generative AI in coursework. Students generally held positive views about generative AI in coursework, with several key insights standing out. The highest agreement was seen with the statement that AI should be cited when used academically (r1q6, $\mu = 5.44$), and students also felt that professors can detect AI use (r1q2, $\mu = 5.20$) and should have clear policies on AI (r1q10, $\mu = 5.15$). They agreed that AI is a helpful tool (r1q1, $\mu = 5.07$) and that professors should adapt their teaching methods accordingly (r1q8, $\mu = 5.00$).

Interestingly, students were less likely to agree that paraphrased AI content avoids plagiarism (r1q5, $\mu = 3.85$) or that they feel comfortable seeking AI guidance from professors (r1q12, $\mu = 4.29$). Overall, the data shows a strong inclination toward embracing AI in academics, but with a desire for clearer guidance and institutional policy.

Table 2: Perceptions on Generative AI

Questions	Mean (SE)	Questions	Mean (SE)	Questions	Mean (SE)
r1q1	5.07 (.174)	**r1q5**	3.85 (.169)	**r1q9**	4.68 (.164)
r1q2	5.20 (.148)	**r1q6**	5.44 (.140)	**r1q10**	5.15 (.153)
r1q3	4.68 (.163)	**r1q7**	4.68 (.157)	**r1q11**	5.35 (.143)
r1q4	4.47 (.187)	**r1q8**	5.00 (.150)	**r1q12**	4.29 (.185)

We used independent sample t-tests to compare group differences. One notable difference emerged along cultural lines. The questions with significant differences (p-value <= 0.05) are highlighted in table 3. Asian students showed significantly more favorable views toward generative AI in academics, rating it more useful for coursework (r1q1: 6.13 vs. 4.56, $p < .001$), more acceptable in academic settings (r1q9: 5.66 vs. 4.18, $p < .001$), and supporting that professors should adapt their teaching to account for AI use (r1q8: 5.84 vs. 4.53, $p < .001$). North American students, on the other hand, were more likely to view using AI as inherently cheating (r1q3: 4.94 vs. 4.16, $p = .032$), revealing a more cautious stance on AI's ethical implications. We did not find significant differences regarding age, gender, class standing, academic performance, or majors.

Table 3: American vs Asian raised

Q	Mean (N. American)	Mean (Asian)	Mean Diff.	p-Value	Q	Mean (N. American)	Mean (Asian)	Mean Diff.	p-Value
r1q1	4.56	6.13	1.57	<0.001	**r1q7**	4.41	5.21	0.80	0.013
r1q2	5.05	5.45	0.40	0.211	**r1q8**	4.53	5.84	1.31	<0.001
r1q3	4.94	4.16	-0.78	0.032	**r1q9**	4.18	5.66	1.48	<0.001
r1q4	4.12	5.16	1.04	0.005	**r1q10**	5.29	4.87	-0.42	0.202
r1q5	3.53	4.45	0.92	0.011	**r1q11**	5.55	5.00	-0.55	0.084
r1q6	5.50	5.34	-0.16	0.612	**r1q12**	3.96	4.87	0.91	0.018

Our survey included questions examining students' motivations and patterns of generative AI use. Overall, students reported turning to generative AI primarily when facing academic challenges, such as heavy workloads (r2q3) or while struggling in classes (r2q2). They found it especially useful for handling routine tasks (r2q7), allowing them to focus on higher-order thinking and deepen their understanding of complex topics (r2q8), as indicated by high average agreement scores. In contrast, students expressed reluctance to use AI without verifying its accuracy (r2q5), did not use it due to peer influence (r2q6), generally refrained from using it when its use was explicitly prohibited by instructors (r2q1), and showed a lower preference for using AI over seeking help from peers or instructors (r2q4)—each reflected in lower average agreement ratings. These findings are summarized in the table below.

Table 4: Responsible AI usage

Questions	Mean (SE)	Questions	Mean (SE)
r2q1	2.98 (.174)	**r2q5**	2.98 (.169)
r2q2	4.50 (.193)	**r2q6**	3.02 (.183)
r2q3	4.19 (.196)	**r2q7**	4.17 (.195)
r2q4	3.75 (.203)	**r2q8**	4.84 (.185)

These motivational patterns were consistent across demographic groups. No significant gender differences emerged in the reasons for AI use. Academic performance level did not significantly affect those motivation items either. Students with lower self-reported GPAs were just as likely as higher-GPA students.

Interestingly, there was a slight trend where average-performing students reported the highest reliance on AI when struggling in class (mean agreement ~4.8 for medium-GPA students vs. ~4.1 for low-GPA and ~3.9 for high-GPA), but this trend was not statistically significant.

The responses to the perceived effects of generative AI questions indicated a modestly positive academic impact, accompanied by some concerns, as shown in Table 5. Students generally agreed that AI improves their ability to learn course material (r3q1: $\mu = 4.75$) and helps them feel more confident in their assignments (r3q3: $\mu = 4.18$). They also believed that AI helps meet deadlines (r3q4: $\mu = 4.30$) and gives users an advantage over others (r3q5: $\mu = 4.32$). Interestingly, students rated AI's negative impact on critical thinking equally high (r3q7: $\mu = 4.75$), suggesting a recognition of trade-offs.

Table 5: Perceived Effects of Generative AI

Questions	Mean (SE)	Questions	Mean (SE)	Questions	Mean (SE)
r3q1	4.75 (.188)	**r3q4**	4.30 (.198)	**r3q7**	4.75 (.159)
r3q2	4.45 (.190)	**r3q5**	4.32 (.179)	**r3q8**	3.66 (.183)
r3q3	4.18 (.191)	**r3q6**	4.04 (.182)	**r3q9**	3.77 (.187)

Analyzing perceived effects by subgroups revealed few significant differences. There were no notable differences by gender. Age was also not a factor. But place of upbringing showed a clear pattern in perceived benefits; Asian-raised students showed greater agreement, with a comparatively higher mean score across all items in R3 with significant differences ($p < 0.01$), except for one — the belief that AI will negatively impact students' ability to think critically (r3q7), where no significant difference was found ($p = 0.723$). Students with excellent grades had a lower mean score compared to those with average and above-average grades; however, the difference between them was not statistically significant—except for item r3q6 ($p = 0.019$), where students with excellent grades disagreed that AI has made them a better student overall. Students who worked more than 40 hours per week had a higher mean score compared to those who did not work at all; however, the differences were not statistically significant, except for items r3q1, r3q2, and r3q3, which showed significant differences, ($p <= 0.30$) and are highlighted as shown in table 6 below.

Table 6: Not Working vs. Working More Than 40 Hours per week

Q	Mean (Not Working)	Mean (40+ hrs)	Mean Diff.	p-Value	Q	Mean (Not Working)	Mean (40+ hrs)	Mean Diff	p-Value
r3q1	3.86	6.00	2.14	.002	**r3q6**	3.48	4.55	1.07	.094
r3q2	3.76	5.18	1.42	.030	**r3q7**	4.66	4.64	-0.02	.970
r3q3	3.48	5.27	1.79	.010	**r3q8**	3.55	3.64	0.09	.901
r3q4	3.66	4.82	1.16	.100	**r3q9**	3.97	3.73	-0.24	.729
r3q5	4.31	4.00	-0.31	.648					

The most common uses of AI were to summarize complex materials (oft3: $\mu = 2.69$), act as a tutor when struggling with concepts (oft9: $\mu = 2.78$), generate ideas (oft4: $\mu = 2.61$), and check for mistakes (oft1: $\mu = 2.54$). These tasks had more balanced distributions across "Occasionally," "Often," and "Very Often," showing that students regularly rely on AI for support in comprehension, revision, and brainstorming. In contrast, the least frequent uses included using AI to complete assignments they don't want to do (oft7: $\mu = 1.75$) and generating full sections of writing (oft6: $\mu = 1.95$). The frequencies more than 50% and less than 5% are shaded. A large majority reported "never" for these tasks, suggesting reluctance to fully

outsource academic responsibilities to AI. Table 7 displays the distribution of responses for each described use case.

Table 7. Frequency of Generative AI Use by Task.

Q.	Mean	1 Never (0 times)	2 Rarely (1 time)	3 Occasionally (2-3 times)	4 Often (4-5 times)	5 Very Often (>6 times)
oft1	2.54	34 (29.8%)	19 (16.7%)	35 (30.7%)	17 (14.9%)	9 (7.9%)
oft2	2.51	40 (35.1%)	23 (20.2%)	20 (17.5%)	15 (13.2%)	16 (14%)
oft3	2.69	35 (30.7%)	14 (12.3%)	27 (23.7%)	27 (23.7%)	11 (9.6%)
oft4	2.61	32 (28.1%)	26 (22.8%)	26 (22.8%)	14 (12.3%)	16 (14%)
oft5	1.92	71 (62.3%)	8 (7%)	18 (15.8%)	7 (6.1%)	10 (8.8%)
oft6	1.95	66 (57.9%)	16 (14%)	14 (12.3%)	8 (7%)	10 (8.8%)
oft7	1.75	69 (60.5%)	22 (19.3%)	10 (8.8%)	9 (7.9%)	4 (3.5%)
oft8	2.08	52 (45.6%)	24 (21.5%)	19 (16.7%)	15 (13.2%)	4 (3.5%)
oft9	2.78	31 (27.2%)	23 (20.2%)	20 (17.5%)	20 (17.5%)	20 (17.5%)
oft10	2.39	46 (40.4%)	20 (17.5%)	17 (14.9%)	19 (16.7%)	12 (10.5%)
oft11	2.40	44 (38.6%)	20 (17.5%)	22 (19.3%)	16 (14%)	12 (10.5%)

Group comparison analysis suggests gender and age are not significant factors in AI usage or perception. But there was a clear difference between students who work more than 40 hours per week and those who do not work at all, with students working more using AI more frequently ($p < 0.01$) for items oft1, oft3, oft8, oft9, and oft10. On average, Asian students reported higher use of generative AI for all listed tasks, with statistically significant differences ($p < 0.001$). They also used AI more often as a tutor to understand concepts, but this difference was not statistically significant ($p = 0.08$).

Students who reported the highest GPAs in our sample used AI assistance less frequently on average compared to students with lower GPAs. However, statistically significant differences were observed only for items oft1 ($p = 0.01$), oft6 ($p = 0.04$), oft7 ($p = 0.03$), and oft10 ($p = 0.03$). Mean AI usage among STEM majors was higher than that of non-STEM majors across most categories. Notable exceptions included AI use for generating citations and formatting references (oft8: STEM = 2.03, non-STEM = 2.10) and summarizing complex textbook material (oft3: STEM = 2.61, non-STEM = 2.73); however, these differences were not statistically significant. In contrast, STEM majors reported significantly higher AI usage for specific academic tasks such as assisting with coding or debugging (oft5, $p = 0.004$) and completing assignments they preferred not to do themselves (oft7, $p = 0.036$).

Interview Results

We interviewed 18 university professors from a diverse set of backgrounds and disciplines at a midwestern American university. The faculty largely agreed that generative AI can support learning when used carefully. While all professors acknowledged its potential, they stressed that it must not replace genuine student effort. One professor compared it to Wikipedia: “don’t believe it 100% of the time”—while another described it as “a shortcut if used wrong.” Fourteen professors allowed AI in their coursework, but always with caveats. Most felt it could help with grammar, idea generation, or organization, but “don’t use it to just do your assignment” was a consistent boundary. Despite these strong views, only six professors had a formal policy in their syllabus, and five had none at all (The remaining seven discussed their expectations only verbally). Most preferred department- or instructor-level rules over a university-wide approach, contrasting sharply with student survey data (r1q10), where over 70% of students supported a university-wide policy.

When asked whether most students use AI, 14 professors said yes or probably yes, often citing an "exponential curve"—those who use it tend to use it a lot. Professors generally believed that higher-achieving students use AI to improve their work, while others may use it as a shortcut. Some faculty observed changes in student work—better grammar, cleaner writing, but also "work without personality," plagiarism, and hallucinated facts. Five professors hadn't noticed any changes.

When asked if generative AI helps develop students' critical thinking skills, faculty were split: four said AI helps, five said it hurts, six said it depends, and three of our interviewees said it has no impact at all on critical thinking. One warned that over-policing AI can create "an adversarial environment," which ultimately undermines learning—adding a layer of complexity to how schools should respond. Looking forward, faculty agreed AI is here to stay. Several likened it to calculators or Google and stressed the importance of teaching responsible use rather than banning it outright. Table 8 is a summary of the responses gathered from the interviews.

Table 8. Faculty Interviews

Topic	Majority Views	Alternative Views	Notable Remarks
Is AI acceptable in principle?	All Yes, if used carefully	None opposed outright	Should support, not replace learning; like Wikipedia, "don't believe it 100%"
Allowed in their course?	14 Yes (with conditions)	4 said No—disruptive or unnecessary	Acceptable for grammar, ideas, organization
Instructor Policy	Mixed	6 syllabus, 7 verbal, 5 no policy	Split preferences on university / department level policy
Do students use AI?	14 said Yes or Probably Yes	1 No, 3 Unsure	"Exponential curve," smart students use it to improve work
Changes in student work	Mixed	5 noticed no change	Signs: polished grammar, less emotion, hallucinations
Effect on critical thinking	Split	4 Helps, 5 Hurts, 6 Depends, 3 Unsure/No Effect	Over-reliance can erode students' ability to think critically on their own.
Outlook on AI	"Here to stay"	Some fear rapid change, suggest policy reform; One professor warned that strict policies can create an "adversarial environment" that undermines learning	Like Google or calculators; focus on education, not prohibition

Discussion

We raised three research questions and collected quantitative and qualitative data to answer those questions. Our survey and interview results reveal a generational and institutional tension at the heart of higher education's encounter with generative AI. Students are rapidly integrating AI into their academic lives, using it to manage workloads, refine ideas, and clarify complex concepts, while faculty and institutional policies are still adapting. What emerges could be a broader misalignment in norms, expectations, and readiness across the academic community.

Our results show that students largely perceive generative AI as a helpful support tool, especially when facing academic pressure. This perspective helps address research question 1: How do college students and

professors perceive the use of generative AI in coursework? Students, particularly those raised in Asia, consistently reported more positive attitudes toward AI's usefulness, educational value, and fairness. In contrast, faculty perceptions were more cautious. Many acknowledged AI's potential for aiding grammar, structure, or ideation but expressed concern about its impact on critical thinking, student autonomy, and authentic learning. Some worried that overregulation could create adversarial classroom dynamics, suggesting that institutional response strategies may influence the culture of learning as much as the technology itself.

These student-faculty contrasts are further complicated by differences in policy preference. While most faculty resist top-down mandates in favor of instructor-level autonomy, over 70% of students expressed a desire for formal institutional guidance on AI. At the same time, many students agreed that their professors do clearly communicate AI policies, indicating that the core issue may not be lack of communication but inconsistent expectations across courses. This inconsistency can confuse students and erode the clarity needed for ethical decision-making. Prior research has highlighted this same disconnect between student use and policy clarity but has not directly measured support for institutional-level policy (Kazley et al., 2024). Our finding that over 70% of undergraduate students support formal university AI guidelines offers quantifiable evidence to support this gap in demand for coherent regulation.

Regarding research question 2: How and why do students use generative AI, and will they use it even if their professors tell them not to? Our data reveals that students turn to AI primarily under stress: when they are juggling deadlines, complex readings, or multiple assignments. Usage was especially high among students who work more than 40 hours per week. For these students, AI seemed to offer a practical way to manage workload, suggesting that necessity, rather than disregard for rules, often drives engagement. One ethically complex finding was that 26% of students reported they would use AI even if explicitly prohibited by their professor. This figure is striking, especially when compared to traditional academic dishonesty rates: only 1.5% of students in Awosoga et al. (2021) admitted to submitting work completed by someone else. Part of this discrepancy may be explained by how our question was phrased. We asked students if they would use AI when prohibited, not whether they would submit fully AI-generated content. Many students may have interpreted "use" to include activities like brainstorming, grammar checking, or outlining, forms of assistance they may not associate with cheating. Nevertheless, the response reflects a shift in ethical perception, highlighting the urgent need for clearer definitions of acceptable AI use.

For research question 3: What are the perceived effects of generative AI on student academic performance? Students reported modest positive outcomes: greater confidence, improved time management, and better comprehension, particularly among those under heavier time and work pressure. High-GPA students, however, were more skeptical. They were less likely to use AI frequently and significantly less likely to agree that AI had made them better students (r3q6). This suggests that AI's value is highly contextual: those under greater external strain may benefit more, while those already excelling may view it as unnecessary or even detrimental. Prior literature has described ethical ambiguity around generative AI use, but our results show how that ambiguity varies by academic pressure, policy enforcement, and cultural framing, offering a multidimensional view missing from prior studies.

These layered results reflect a broader pattern in how educational institutions adapt to new technologies. Just as Wikipedia evolved from being widely banned to broadly accepted, attitudes toward AI are likely to shift. However, the stakes are higher with generative AI. Unlike Wikipedia, which aggregates information, AI can simulate reasoning and generate complete outputs in a student's voice. This elevates the urgency around authorship, originality, and academic integrity.

Recommendations

Based on our research findings, we recommend two institutional actions. First, encourage every instructor to include a generative AI policy in the syllabus by updating the faculty handbook to support this practice and provide flexible templates or sample language to promote consistency across departments while respecting faculty autonomy. Second, create and distribute student guidelines on ethical AI use by revising the student handbook to include clear, accessible guidance on appropriate vs. inappropriate AI use (e.g., grammar assistance vs. ghostwriting), incorporating these guidelines into first-year orientation or seminar courses, and introducing an AI literacy curriculum that is accessible to students outside of computer science. We believe these steps would bridge the current disconnect between student behavior and faculty expectations, reinforce academic integrity, and establish a shared framework for navigating AI's evolving role in higher education. Institutions that move proactively, rather than reactively, will be better positioned to respond to this transformation.

Limitations & Future Research Directions

This study explored generative AI adoption in higher education through student surveys and faculty interviews, mainly at a single institution. Using a mixed-methods approach, we examined three key areas: how students and instructors perceive AI's academic role, actual usage patterns across different tasks, and perceived impacts on learning outcomes. The research focused specifically on user experiences and institutional policy challenges rather than assessing AI's effectiveness as a teaching tool. Several important limitations affect how these findings could be generalized. The single-campus design means results may not apply to other institutions with different student populations or academic cultures. Since the data came from self-reports, students may have been hesitant to share honest opinions about sensitive topics like prohibited AI use. The study also had limited cultural diversity, with most participants coming from North American backgrounds, and did not examine how faculty themselves use AI for teaching tasks like grading. Finally, the one-time data collection could not show whether AI's impacts change over time as users gain more experience with technology.

Future research should address these gaps through three main approaches. First, multi-institution studies could compare how different schools handle AI integration, especially across various cultural contexts. Second, long-term tracking would reveal whether AI helps or hurts learning skills over semesters or years of use. Third, more attention should focus on how instructors adopt AI for their teaching work, not just how students use it for assignments. These studies should combine numerical data with in-depth interviews to get both broad patterns and detailed personal experiences across different academic fields. Additionally, future work should examine the influence of institutional AI policies and investigate whether clearly defined ethical guidelines affect both student behavior and faculty decision-making.

Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the use of generative AI tools such as ChatGPT and Gemini in drafting survey questions, writing Python scripts for cleaning survey data, and maintaining academic language throughout the paper.

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Appendix A

Student Survey
Demographic Questions
College Year, Age Group, Gender, Major Field of Study, Region Raised, Academic Performance (Self-Reported GPA), Credit Hours Enrolled (Current Semester)

Scale (1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree)
Attitudes Toward Generative AI
r1q1. Generative AI is a useful tool for my coursework.
r1q2. My professors can detect when students use generative AI.
r1q3. Using AI for coursework is a form of cheating.
r1q4. Using AI for coursework is only cheating if the professor explicitly forbids it.
r1q5. If AI-generated content is paraphrased, it should not be considered plagiarism.
r1q6. AI should be cited when used in academic work.
r1q7. Professors should assume that most students use AI in some way.
r1q8. Professors should adapt their teaching to account for AI use.
r1q9. Generative AI should be allowed in academic settings.
r1q10. My school should have a formal policy on AI usage in coursework.
r1q11. My professors clearly communicate their policies on AI use in coursework.
r1q12. I would feel comfortable asking a professor for guidance on how to use AI.

AI Usage Behavior
r2q1. I use generative AI even if my professor explicitly prohibits it.
r2q2. I use AI tools more frequently when struggling in class.
r2q3. I rely on AI more when I have multiple assignments and a heavy workload.
r2q4. I prefer using AI over seeking help from peers or instruction.
r2q5. I use AI-generated responses without verifying their accuracy.
r2q6. I feel pressured to use AI because my peers use it.
r2q7. AI allows me to focus more on higher-level thinking by handling basic or repetitive tasks
r2q8. AI-generated answers have improved my understanding of complex topics.

Perceived Impact of AI
r3q1. Generative AI improves my ability to learn course material.
r3q2. Generative AI has helped me improve my grades.
r3q3. I am more confident in my assignments when I use generative AI.
r3q4. AI helps me meet deadlines when I am behind on coursework.
r3q5. Students who use AI have an advantage over those who don’t.
r3q6. AI has made me a better student overall.
r3q7. AI will negatively impact students' ability to think critically.
r3q8. Content generated by AI is as good as what I could write.
r3q9. Content generated by AI is better than what I could write.

Scale (1 - Never (0 times), 2 - Rarely (1 time), 3 - Occasionally (2-3 times), 4 - Often (4-5 times), 5 - Very Often (>6 times))

Frequency of AI Use
oft1. Check for mistakes in my work.
oft2. Enhance the clarity of my writing.
oft3. Summarize complex readings or textbook material.
oft4. Generate ideas.
oft5. Assist with coding or debugging.
oft6. Generate full paragraphs or sections of my assignments.
oft7. Complete assignments I do not want to do myself.
oft8. Generate citations or format references.
oft9. Act as a tutor when I struggle to understand a concept.
oft10. I use AI to generate practice questions for studying.
oft11. Help me start assignments while refining the work myself.

Faculty Interview Questions
q1. Do you think generative AI is a useful tool for students' learning? Why or why not?
q2. Do you allow students to use generative AI in your coursework? Why or why not?
q3. Have you noticed any changes in student work since AI tools became widely available?
q4. Do you believe most students use AI in some way for their coursework? Why or why not?
q5. How do you communicate your expectations and policies on AI use to students?
q6. How do you personally define the ethical use of AI in academic settings, and where do you think the line should be drawn?
q7. Some students say AI helps them learn, while others might use it as a shortcut. In your experience, does AI enhance or hinder learning?
q8. How do you think AI affects students' ability to develop critical thinking and writing skills?
q9. What challenges do you face in detecting or addressing AI use in student work, and how do you handle them?
q10. Looking ahead, how do you think generative AI will shape higher education, and what should institutions do to prepare for its impact?