A Comparative Study Between the Department of Government and Department of Management Students' Attitudes to the Use of Generative AI and Academic Integrity

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Executive Summary

This study builds on the Eden Centre report to explore student perspectives on generative AI and academic integrity within LSE. It focuses on comparing attitudes between the Department of Government, which strictly prohibits AI use in assessments, and the Department of Management, which allows AI use with acknowledgement. The research aims to understand if and how the permissiveness of departmental policies on generative AI affects student perceptions of academic integrity. Data were collected through surveys and focus group discussions, revealing that students from the Department of Management use AI more frequently and perceive it more favourably than those from the Department of Government. However, both groups generally utilise AI as a supportive tool rather than a replacement for original thinking. The study also highlights a misalignment between student and teacher perceptions of AI's usefulness and fairness in assessment. Recommendations include permitting AI use with acknowledgement, providing subsidised access to AI tools, and offering training on effective AI integration and academic integrity. The study suggests that assessments should focus on critical thinking skills that AI cannot replicate, rather than relying on restrictive policies or in-person exams.

Introduction and Context

Building upon the Eden Centre report written by Litvinaite (2023), this paper seeks to compare students' perspectives on the use of generative AI and academic integrity coming from departments with different attitudes towards the use of generative AI. As this study extends the foundation of Litvinaite's paper and is a part of LSE's internal research projects, this paper would perform a case study of LSE only, specifically involving undergraduate students from the Department of Government and the Department of Management respectively. Both departments have different policies on the use of generative AI in their assessments: the Department of Government strictly prohibits the use of AI tools in any part of a student's assessment while the Department of Management holds a more permissive attitude and allows the use of AI when the usage is clearly acknowledged. A comparative analysis of students' attitudes towards the use of AI between the two departments could provide insights into the relationship between AI policy and students' perceptions of assessments and academic integrity.

Our research questions are as follows: Does the use of generative AI influence students' perceptions of academic integrity? How do students' perceptions of generative AI differ between departments with a more permissive and restrictive attitude?

Although this study is framed in the context of LSE's two departments, the research could still shed light on how the broader higher education community can address the challenges posed by generative AI tools and better cater to students' overall development. Given higher education's strong concern about generative AI and its rapid spread across countries, this study provides timely and evidence-based research to offer a foundation for this topic to be further assessed.

Methodology

We designed a survey that covers questions including demographics, assessments that students have and will undertake in current and previous academic years, interest in using generative AI, frequency and experience of applying generative AI in their learning, opinions on the fairness of such applications, views on whether adjustment of assessment design and school policy on generative AI is needed, advantages and limitations of generative AI. As the survey was conducted on Qualtrics, we publicised our survey via departmental newsletters, email blasts and posters around campus.

Following the survey, focus groups were conducted to obtain deeper insights into students' views on generative AI and academic integrity. Regarding the format, the discussions are semi-structured with open-ended and alternatively worded questions to reduce acquiescence and habituation biases. To avoid confirmation bias, all the data obtained were analysed clearly while striving to keep an unbiased mind. The acquired data was continually reevaluated, and effort was made to ensure that pre-existing assumptions were kept at bay. All questions posed were worded in such a way that they were not leading questions.

Analysis

For brevity, a comprehensive analysis of the survey responses and focus group discussion will be covered in the full report.

Implications

1. Students from the Department of Government use generative AI less frequently than those from the Department of Management. A possible speculation is that the Department of Management provides more courses involving the application of generative AI tools.
2. Students from the Government Department observe a divergent attitude towards the strictness of departmental policies on generative AI compared to their counterparts from the Department of Management. It appears that the differences in the permissiveness of departmental policies have led to divergent attitudes towards the strictness of LSE policies as well.
3. There appears to be a misalignment between students' perceptions of the usefulness of generative AI and teachers'. Many students expect a low grade (2nd lower class or below) if the assignment is completed by generative AI tools solely.

4. While students have reflected that generative AI has limited usefulness, most students support the idea that LSE should provide premium access to generative AI tools (notably ChatGPT 4.0) given its high cost which makes these tools inaccessible for students from a lower socio-economic background.
5. Students generally think that generative AI remains a tool for supporting the elaboration of ideas, while students remain responsible for developing their own ideas.
6. In-person exam as a solution to the rise of generative AI is an unpopular suggestion among students. Instead, students believe that the teaching staff should promote academic integrity, and in particular, they should design cheating-proof assessments and focus on skills and knowledge that generative AI cannot replace. The school should also provide support on raising awareness of rules regarding the use of generative AI and academic integrity.
7. Most students prefer allowing the use of generative AI with acknowledgement, but many reflected concerns about potential unfair marking by teaching staff who hold a negative attitude towards generative AI and its users. Moreover, many students prefer not to acknowledge or hesitate in doing so.

Recommendations

1. Departments should embrace generative AI and permit its use in assessments. Complete bans are not helpful for students to adapt to the technological era and students have an incentive to deviate, which implies the low feasibility of such measures. Moreover, requiring students to acknowledge the use of generative AI is not likely to be effective as students are worried that their assessments would be penalised by examiners. However, the use of generative AI in developing ideas should remain banned. The use of generative AI should be permitted only when it is used to help elaborate on ideas, check language, organise arguments, etc, i.e. playing a supporting role.
2. LSE should provide subsidised versions of ChatGPT 4.0 or similar tools, so as to promote equal access among students.[1]
3. Training should be provided to both teaching staff and students to help them understand the benefits and limits of generative AI as well as academic integrity. Equally importantly, this helps the teaching staff understand that generative AI cannot fully replace human brains in writing critically, thereby ensuring fairness in marking when students acknowledge their use of generative AI and encouraging such acknowledgement.
4. LSE should organize training to help students understand how to integrate generative AI into their learning effectively.
5. Departments should not solely rely on moving all exams to an in-person setting or increasing the difficulty of the assessments to address the risk posed by generative AI. Instead, departments should design assessments testing one's critical thinking ability that cannot be replaced by generative AI. Moreover, departments should not arbitrarily

[1] Admittedly, while survey respondents supported the provision of ChatGPT 4.0 for free, participants in the focus group discussion were apprehensive about its necessity. They noted that unequal access to resources will always exist and thus providing ChatGPT 4.0 for free would be insufficient to foster equal access among students.

grade more harshly or manipulate the average score because of the widespread use of generative AI.

Limitations and Next Steps

1. The sample size is small and it is difficult to draw conclusion about the statistical significance from the data. While we have provided incentives (vouchers) to students and used a diverse range of promotional channels (e.g. newsletters, departmental mass emails, physical posters), the response rate remains low.
2. Our research only covers undergraduate students and does not interview or survey teaching staff. A further comparison between the perception of teaching staff and students towards generative AI could benefit the examination of the misalignment of opinions between them.