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# Using ChatGPT: The Experience of Higher-Education Students

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## **Using ChatGPT: Understanding the Attitudes of Business School Students**

In November 2022 ChatGPT was launched, and with it came the possibility to take a quantum leap beyond established search functions for a multitude of applications. The potential benefits of ChatGPT are attractive in higher education, where complex questions and lengthy assignments are commonplace, and where the uptake of ChatGPT amongst students would be expected to be rapid and widespread. Higher education students could provide an insight into how the rest of the population might adopt ChatGPT and other AI chatbots as a genuinely disruptive technology which could transform work processes. However, the benefits of ChatGPT and other AI chatbots run parallel with concerns as to the accuracy and reliability of information which AI chatbots provide, and ethical concerns as to the originality of the outputs and the potential over-reliance on AI chatbots that result.

In April 2023, when awareness of ChatGPT was at an early take-up stage, we surveyed 536 undergraduate business school students in five countries, USA, Cambodia, Finland, Ghana and Nigeria, focusing on questions of awareness and early usage of ChatGPT. In April 2024 we surveyed 466 business school students in the same countries, incorporating the results of surveys which had been undertaken and published during the year, and which primarily focused on how students used ChatGPT and how they saw the benefits and potential risks of using AI chatbots. Both these surveys were published in the Finnish Business Review.

## **Benefits and Risks of ChatGPT: Building on Research**

Research on ChatGPT has identified benefits in many areas of technical, academic, and personal development, much of which applies directly to the higher-education

sector. Researchers have recognized the potential for ChatGPT to promote new ways to learn and teach, particularly by offering students choices as to how they learn, opportunities to improve writing, understanding of concepts and applications of technology. The benefits of ChatGPT can include personalized and self-directed learning, improved efficiency of learning, the ability to generate reports and process both quantitative and qualitative information.

Benefits of ChatGPT for teachers include preparing presentations, grading papers, building teaching aids, and quizzes. Other important benefits include AI's human-like responses, summary creation, and technical capabilities, including coding and writing and using formulas. The views of students published in various studies internationally indicated a keenness to use AI as a supplementary resource for aiding assignments, combined with some specific "workhorse" tasks such as report writing.

However, the use of ChatGPT has raised doubts over accuracy, potential bias, lack of transparency, implications for copyright, risks of plagiarism, lack of originality, quality, accountability, and the impact on critical thinking. Ethical concerns including bias, privacy issues, autonomy, informed consent, and accountability, and facilitating plagiarism have remained at the forefront. Research has identified changes in teaching methods to adapt to AI. These can include changing the way that assignments are administered to discourage students from simply providing an AI generated response, and the use of flipped-classrooms, where students are required to acquire a significant amount of information on the subject matter before the class, providing scope for teachers to interact with students and encourage debate in class in preference to more traditional lecture format.

Researchers have begun to put forward frameworks for responsible use of AI, focusing on productive and time saving use of AI whilst retaining originality and preserving learning and retention.

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Attitudes of students towards ChatGPT and other AI chatbots have generally been enthusiastic, albeit with concerns for the ethical and accountability issues. However, the number of student surveys undertaken is still low. Hence, our survey, with the target group of undergraduate business school students in five countries covering four continents, whilst exploratory, is aimed at contributing to empirical work on students' use of and attitudes towards AI, and in particular ChatGPT, through gaining an insight into the students' own experience as they incorporate such a powerful and disruptive technology into their studying.

### The 2023 and 2024 Survey Results

The 2023 and 2024 surveys provided insight into students' awareness, understanding, and frequency of use of ChatGPT and the purposes for which students were using ChatGPT and other AI chatbots. The surveys also asked students whether and how ChatGPT was helping them achieve learning outcomes, and how they perceived and dealt with the potential risks associated with using AI chatbots such as potential plagiarism, reliability of information and potential negative aspects on their learning.

The proportion of students reporting familiarity with ChatGPT well or somewhat well rose from 43% in the 2023 survey to 83% in the 2024 survey, as ChatGPT became more widely established. The highest awareness in both years was in Finland at close to 70%, followed by the USA at 64%, Ghana and Nigeria at 57% and Cambodia, where the level of awareness rose from 22% in 2023 to 43% in 2024. In 2023, 27% of students reported using ChatGPT daily, weekly or monthly, but over 70% of the students reported either not to have used ChatGPT or used it only rarely. By 2024, around 70% of students reported that they were using ChatGPT regularly.

### Purposes for which ChatGPT is Used

In 2023, the most commonly reported uses for ChatGPT amongst students were:

- research (61.6%)
- studying (53.7%)
- general knowledge (50.1%)
- homework help (36.2%)
- entertainment (24.2%)

In the 2024 survey more categories were added to incorporate the findings of the most recent research, and the most widely reported purposes were:

- general knowledge (70.8%)
- searching for information and ideas (70.4%)
- brainstorming (69.7%)
- research (69.3%)
- answering questions (68.2%)
- homework help (65.9%)
- studying (65%)
- giving a second opinion (62.4%).

A noteworthy proportion of the students reported using ChatGPT for:

- obtaining formulas (45.9%)
- searching literature resources (45.9%)
- writing essays and reports (43%)
- entertainment (38.8%).

Comments from students in the 2023 survey reinforced the focus on search related questions and generating ideas, reporting using ChatGPT to:

- act as an alternative search engine
- undertake technical applications such as coding
- create Excel formulas
- assist in problem solving
- build coding algorithms.

Wider tasks including job applications, administration, personal growth, interests, investing, improving communications and writing skills were uses which students reported. Comments by students in the 2024 survey also referred to brainstorming, requesting help from ChatGPT in a variety of ways, with one student referring to "chatting to ChatGPT as they might another person".

Both the 2023 and 2024 surveys indicated that students tend to use ChatGPT as an assistant. This identifies a role for ChatGPT to be a friendly co-pilot, to generate ideas, summarize difficult content, help with grammar, and draft difficult and time-consuming documents such as a business plan. The high reported usage of ChatGPT for research related applications indicated that students were using AI to quickly acquire knowledge. A smaller but significant proportion were using ChatGPT to write essays and reports.

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## Perceived Benefits of Using ChatGPT

There is an obvious link between the perceived benefits of ChatGPT and its actual uses. In the 2023 survey, students reported the benefits of ChatGPT as:

- quick access to information (73%)
- improved understanding for complex subjects (60.5%)
- improved critical thinking (36.8%)
- provided increased motivation for learning (34.9%).

Students reported that ChatGPT provided a source of inspiration, was helpful for kickstarting research projects, acting as a tool to utilize, and a working companion.

In the 2024 survey students reported the benefits of ChatGPT as:

- helping to generate ideas (51.3%)
- brainstorming (51.3%)
- a personal assistant (41%)
- providing increased motivation for learning (31.1%)
- improved critical thinking (28.8%).

A total of 56.7% of students considered that ChatGPT helped them attain better learning outcomes. Opinions on the potential usefulness of ChatGPT were very consistent between the regions. In 2024, 51% of total respondents considered ChatGPT beneficial for achieving better learning outcomes, with responses in Nigeria and Ghana being 63%, USA 62%, Finland 53% and Cambodia 41% respectively.

### Perceived Risks of ChatGPT

In the 2023 survey, the perceived risks of ChatGPT were seen as:

- dependence on technology (66.5%)
- lack of personal interaction with peers and professors (40.2%)
- risk of plagiarism (56.1%).

Further downsides cited in student comments included a perceived lack of accuracy, the possibility of generating fake information, encouraging confirmation bias, restricting learning and critical thinking, and over-reliance on ChatGPT. In 2024, with the survey incorporating the wider body of literature which had been published, the drawbacks were seen as risk of:

- plagiarism (60%)
- dependence on technology (51.5%)

- reductions in critical thinking (50.6%)
- lack of peer review (48.7%)
- lack of personal interaction with instructors and peers (44.8%)
- possible biased responses (43.3%)
- the inability to assess accurately (37.3%)
- lack of access to up-to-date research (35.4%).

Students reported unreliability issues, including the inability of ChatGPT and AI chatbots to identify sources of information, the lack of consistency between answers, and the incidence of receiving completely nonsensical answers. Unreliability emerged as a major concern, alongside ethical issues.

## Conclusion: Attitudes Towards ChatGPT and Other AI Chatbots

We found students to be open-minded but wary, recognizing both the potential benefits and the downsides and risks. Students were skeptical of rushing headlong into ChatGPT, and were in the process of finding ways where AI can be genuinely useful without incurring ethical issues. The purposes for which ChatGPT was used by higher education students and the potential benefits remained broadly the same in both the 2023 and 2024 surveys, with brainstorming, idea generation, and help with complex answers which are popular uses, indicating that ChatGPT is seen by many students as a general assistant, extending to helping with homework, writing essays, and reports. Some students evidently use ChatGPT more than others, and will use ChatGPT for more complex tasks such as report generation. Some see ChatGPT as primarily an assistant, whilst others will see it as a workhorse.

Using ChatGPT to maximize the benefits of personalized learning and brainstorming without the risks of over-reliance, and compromising both critical thinking and academic integrity represent an ongoing journey, which is still in the early stages. However, the views of business school students provide insight into how ChatGPT and other emerging AI chatbots may integrate into future learning process.

As AI continues to evolve, the role of tools like ChatGPT in higher education will likely expand. While the benefits, such as personalized learning, increased efficiency, and

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enhanced access to knowledge, are clear, educators and students alike must remain vigilant about the potential risks. Striking the right balance between leveraging ChatGPT for academic advancement and maintaining ethical standards, such as critical thinking and originality, will be crucial. As we continue to explore and refine its use in educational settings, ongoing dialogue between institutions, educators, and students will help shape the responsible integration of AI technologies like ChatGPT into future learning experiences.