

CONSEQUENCES OF USING CHATGPT IN ACCOMPLISHING ACADEMIC TASKS^{C*}

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Abstract

Our article focuses on the main challenges associated with the use of ChatGPT in higher education. This technology has both positive and negative impacts on the process of independent academic work completion when the complex procedures meant to ensure the authenticity of each author's own intellectual work are not applied.

The empirical research conducted was based on the analysis of the work products of undergraduate and graduate students from a university in the south west of Romania. The results of this qualitative exploration of how they solved their seminar exercises or how they developed papers such as case studies, micro-research projects or extracurricular activity projects indicated that ChatGPT contributes to their academic productivity, but respect for the ethics regarding the honesty of documentation, by assuming only one's own efforts and formulating personal, creative ideas is also important.

The findings we have reached refer to the opportunities and limits related to the integration of ChatGPT in learning, but clearly plead for its reflexive-responsible use. Due to the innovative nature of the current technologies, they are becoming more accessed by young people, precisely through the ease and convenience of their use, which requires an awareness of the disadvantages associated with superficial learning, on the part of the students, as well as a constructivist understanding of their role, on the part of the educators or decision-makers in educational institutions.

Key words: ChatGPT, Students, Plagiarism, Ethical requirements, Superficial learning.

1. How ChatGPT works, in essence

Chatbots are considered computer programs that use Artificial Intelligence (AI). A chatbot is an electronic system or software that simulates conversations by

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responding to keywords or phrases, expressions, questions that it recognizes and that can be integrated into various platforms, such as websites, mobile applications and messaging platforms. We have only focused on ChatGPT, because it is the most well-known variant that students use to accomplish their academic tasks, but we add the fact that generating new content is not limited to texts in the case of Generative Artificial Intelligence, but also includes videos, images, computer programs, product designs, etc., which creates fertile ground for the development of user creativity.

ChatGPT is based on GPT technology: Generative Pre-trained Transformer. By understanding its language and how it is generated, conversations can be carried out, responses can be issued, texts can be written while it can also be useful in solving tasks or processing existing data on the internet.

GPT technology was created to simulate conversations with human users and it works through algorithms programmed to understand natural language inputs and give appropriate responses, either pre-written or generated by AI (Shahriar & Hayawi, 2023). The specificity of ChatGPT is the fact that it is trained to understand and generate human-like ideational content, in very large quantities.

It is clear that ChatGPT is continuously improved with reinforcement, natural language processing and machine learning techniques, in order to increase, in turn, its ability to understand and respond, in detail, to the needs of the users. Therefore, it can be used to: write texts on a specific topic; obtain information on topics of interest; compose an intended or specifically structured message; correct the form of a text or its formulation/ ideational content; solve precise problems.

Although they are fast, intelligent, high-performance, due to the fact that linguistic modeling is such a complex process, programs guess when they are uncertain, to the detriment of admitting uncertainty, producing erroneous, bizarre or hallucinatory answers (Xu, Jain & Kankanhalli, 2024).

2. Plagiarism by students in the era of information technologies

The use of unverified information and plagiarism find an explanation in the convenience of users, in the effect they have on human perceptions. The risk of misinformation is sometimes associated with an implicit (unclarified) curriculum or with: school absenteeism, lack of concentration, information overload.

Non-compliance with copyright is manifested by the tacit borrowing of ideas. Especially under the conditions of the information explosion and the use of NICT (New Information and Communication Technologies), plagiarism is tempting, and its rejection, as intellectual theft, is unanimously pursued, being considered "the biggest moral problem of the university environment" (Socaciu *et al.*, 2018, p. 109).

Whether intentional or not, caused by bad intent, ignorance of conventions, carelessness, superficial approach, enthusiasm, overzealousness, plagiarism is: the exact reproduction of another author's words, paraphrasing, reformulating or translating ideas, without specifying the reference/source.

Consequently, citing and correctly attributing ChatGPT's contribution is essential in recognizing its role, in preventing plagiarism and in upholding the principles of academic writing (Jarrah, Wardat & Fidalgo, 2023).

When carrying out applied works and academic assignments, those who plagiarize resort to: actual copying, introducing small changes or partial paraphrasing to fit, combining correct-incorrect elements; using a mix of ideas, without citations; using correct citations, but without a personal contribution, etc.

Therefore, plagiarism techniques can be diverse, prevention being important, through explaining the rigors of intellectual work, through guidance and feedback. The actual activities of documentation, finding solutions, creating products of educational interest are not void of difficulties (Livingstone & Helsper, 2010), because, although it is more convenient to use the Internet as the first source of identifying information, according to the study of these authors, the first step in identifying ideas, does not certify the fact that they will be processed and evaluated correctly.

A preliminary aspect, which is of overwhelming importance and which we emphasize is that non-intervention on the content identified by the ChatGPT system, taking over ideas without modification is undesirable behaviour; even the company that founded ChatGPT–Open AI, in San Francisco, United States of America–has developed programs to detect the language or texts thus created.

3. The need to apply ethical norms in the use of ChatGPT

Ethics studies desirable human behaviours, according to a model crystallized over time, and the use of digital technologies in education, including ChatGPT, which requires knowledge and compliance with certain conditions. Because university studies promote, in addition to many transversal skills, the ability to work independently, responsibly, honestly, in verifiable ways, we believe that the results of their evaluation must truly reflect the learning and personal performance of the students, master's students, and doctoral students.

The causes or explanations for why the use of ChatGPT–launched in 2022–is still incorrectly understood in the academic environment as a substitute, not as an aid in preparation, worthy of mention, are various: too low demands, which overlook the phenomenon; too high demands, through a large number of tasks or a too high level of difficulty; competition between the activity of studying and the performance of other professional activities; the manifestation of the instinct of conservation; the existence of unethical attitudes, correlated with insufficient motivation.

In order to prepare young people for the use of the ever-increasing potential of Artificial Intelligence, not just any way, but adapted specifically for the field of education, learning must be conceived from a constructivist perspective, through a reconsidered design and with an emphasis on creative thinking (Ali *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, the positive use of ChatGPT's contribution involves improving users' digital skills and understanding that, regardless of technological advances, data falsification, lying, fraud, intellectual theft and other incorrect behaviours are unacceptable.

To mobilize productivity, even if ChatGPT is used, another recommendation is that the information identified in documentary sources avoid confirmation bias, be verified for reliability, and be accurate (Firaina & Sulisworo, 2023).

Similar recommendations in the ethics of using digital technology with addressability for learners belong to Kizza (2019), who drew attention to respecting intellectual property rights, and Tavani (2020), who insisted on increasing responsibility.

Without exhausting this aspect, for an ethical valorization of technologies, cautious use is necessary, through safety and cybersecurity (Tick *et al.*, 2023).

4. The Impact of ChatGPT

Designed to engage in conversational interactions with its users and to provide rapid responses, ChatGPT can synthesize information, suggest article structures and titles, generate bibliographies, and even develop scientific content (Salvagno, Taccone & Gerli, 2023), so it has a facilitating role in learning, being a generous resource.

The same point of view regarding the contribution to improving academic performance is supported from the perspective of benefits attributed to involvement, exploration of complex concepts by the students, and practical application of knowledge (Al Shloul *et al.*, 2024).

The collaborative nature of the exchange of ideas driven by ChatGPT is appreciated for its generative value on one's own understanding: such interaction makes students communicate different perspectives and meanings, which gives learning a constructivist character (Efgivia *et al.*, 2021 and Kim & Adolf, 2024, as cited in Youssef *et al.*, 2024).

From an instructional point of view, of the impact on academic learning, digital technologies allow simultaneous, automatic communication, without physical limits, with possibilities of translation into various languages, through written, visual, auditory, combined forms. For academic learning, this very role of supporting the learning of a foreign language by ChatGPT is interesting (Stan, Dumitru & Bucuroiu, 2025).

Course contents can be offered quickly, can be processed or incorporated in several ways, which means that other value can be added to some contents offered by the teachers. Studies conducted in the Romanian university environment, such as the one applied by Constantin and Iacob (2025), present positive perceptions from the students regarding the contribution of ChatGPT in the development of their academic skills, perceptions that depend on the level of digital competence they possess.

Aithal and Aithal (2023) analysed the role of ChatGPT as a virtual tutor for a student through online meditations, promptly answering questions and helping with solving tasks. The previously mentioned authors specify the function of personalizing learning, according to the rhythms, preferences, and interests of the person accessing it, but for the field that interested us, social sciences and education, we note that it is necessary to develop the students' own critical thinking skills.

Even though the opportunities for capitalization are multiple, the risks of use should not be neglected: reduced human interactions, insecurity, dependency, inequality of access, plagiarism, Aithal and Aithal concluding that "ethical caution and a dedication to the lasting principles of knowledge growth and discovery" are needed (2023, p. 192).

In addition to the possible advantages of providing support to students, potential negative effects have been discussed: privacy issues, misuse, misinformation (Dempere *et al.*, 2023).

According to: Fiialka, Kornieva and Honcharuk (2023), Chiu (2024), Mogavi *et al.* (2024), students end up having a preference for superficial learning, expecting quick answers and wanting to perform tasks such as creating content with an imitative character, which, in our opinion, is detrimental to the assertion of personal opinions and arguments, and reflexivity, as useful skills in academic and professional terms.

In a study on the perceptions of students in the economic field regarding the use of generative intelligences, conducted in Romania, Țală *et al.* (2024) drew attention to the fact that being at the beginning, many questions arise about the limits of using these technologies, from issues related to the correctness of the generated content to ethical aspects, such as taking someone else's materials and presenting them as personal creations.

Some systematizations of the specialized literature, such as those carried out by Montenegro-Rueda *et al.* (2023), Naznin *et al.* (2025) conclude on the positive role that ChatGPT has for student activity, while Currie (2023) brings to the fore everything that was previously analysed: the association with some ethical, professional and integrity risks.

5. Exploratory methodology

5.1. Organization and conduct of micro-research

In order to organize and conduct this research, applied to a sample of 83 undergraduate and master's students, we aimed to find out whether they used ChatGPT in solving academic tasks, applied works and what effects this tool has on the quality of their results.

The research methods used were: the formative experiment, the analysis of the subjects' activity products and the interview selectively applied to the subjects who used ChatGPT.

The working hypothesis was that the effective integration of ChatGPT into independent intellectual work activities requires reflective and responsible behaviour on the part of the learners.

If the use of this tool is understood as a substitute for the intellectual efforts (of thinking, expression through language, problem solving, imagination or creation) of the people who use it, violations of ethical norms occur and, at the same time, it leads to the generation of laconic, unargued, impersonal answers, which will be forgotten.

The most frequent indicator of the violation of the norms of presumed academic ethics was the occurrence of plagiarism, in the sense of taking over ideas, without indicating and properly consulting the sources of documentation.

The design of the undertaken micro-research was conceived so that:

a) in the constative stage, so as to see to what extent a control sample uses ChatGPT or whether it properly solves the academic requirements of the discipline Class Management, from the third year, bachelor's level, without the participants being warned about the limits and conditions of a good use of this resource;

b) in the experimental or test stage, to verify what effects are associated with the use of ChatGPT for master's students who were informed about the ethical requirements of their own activity and about the criteria for evaluating the originality of the activity products in the discipline Educational Research Methodology, from the first year, master's level;

c) in the post-test stage, to monitor whether, in the same experimental group, which was made aware, about a year ago, of the negative effects of the simplistic, superficial use of ChatGPT, the inappropriate behaviours are maintained, given that the disadvantages of this tool were not reminded, in the discipline Design and Management of Educational Programs, in the second year, master's level.

5.2. Results and discussions

5.2.1. In the ascertaining stage, out of 34 students from the Faculty of Letters, 4 students used ChatGPT in solving tasks and 7 students used it in developing applied papers.

For users, the qualitative level of solving seminar tasks was average, while the level of developing applied papers – Case Studies – was minimal.

The solutions of the 4 tasks where we identified the use of ChatGPT and not personal contributions, was expressed through excessively structured language, with some contradictions in the ideas supported, without clear reporting to the indicators included in the task statement and in the communicated verification scale.

Of the 7 instances of inefficient use of ChatGPT, in two instances, the capitalization of most of the words in the content, not specific to the Romanian language, indicated a superficial treatment, in the sense that the work was not edited or checked personally. In two other works, the students' ideas were very laconic. Even though they were structured and consistent, in terms of the problem-solution relationship, they were rather made up of generalizations. Also, another case was the one in which the work represented a compilation of other works, because we found it partially on the internet (in sources without scientific credibility). Two students had inaccuracies in mentioning the resources used: they did not mention the bibliographical sources at the end (although they were announced in the corpus of the work) or the sources were incompletely specified, with fictitious attributions.

From the discussion we initiated on the consistency of using the tool, the responses we received confirmed that 4 out of 7 students used ChatGPT for both assignments and for the applied work, because, in their opinion, they considered that the way in which they obtain academic writing and solving productions is not important.

5.2.2. In the formative stage, 49 master's students from the Faculty of Sciences, including those with specializations that enhance the Artificial Intelligence Methods, were familiarized with the ethical requirements of scientific and academic research activity. Also, given the specifics of the course and seminar topics in which they participated, they were encouraged to debate the consequences, advantages and disadvantages of using ChatGPT, to reflect on personal responsibilities.

This formative stage took place over the course of an academic semester, and the description of the principles necessary in scientific research at the novice level, the analyses, exercises, and experimental simulations had an explicit character,

including through references to examples of good practices, through product verifications, and through individual or collective feedback.

The ethics topics addressed analysed what is desirable in the case of students, but, of course, first of all, from their teachers, as models of professionalism. The fundamental ethical principles that guide the activity of people involved in a research endeavour were established: the principle of respecting quality, the principle of intellectual property, the principle of confidentiality, the principle of consent and privacy, the principle of voluntary participation, the principle of responsible participation, the principle of freedom of expression, the principle of impartiality of researchers. Based on these desiderata, a series of directions of action were synthesized for the implementation of applied works—Ameliorative pedagogical research projects. The most frequent questions referred to: how to do rigorous documentation; how to stimulate creativity, in order to obtain innovations; how is it possible to update and develop the skills in the vocational area of each person; how will information technology be integrated, in an appropriate manner?

In the evaluation stage, we were able to find that, out of the 49 subjects, only two used ChatGPT without mentioning and without personally exploiting its potential in carrying out their tasks, and another 6 used it as the sole generator of their applied works. From the interview conducted for the subjects who used ChatGPT, it emerged that, although they did not initially intend to resort to unapproved methods, due to the fact that they were studying in a rush, during the last days of the session, they no longer had the time and effort to carry out the assigned activities alone and with improvements. Also, two subjects admitted that this practice was influenced by contagion with other students, but also because there are no clear regulations to sanction them. We consider these learning behaviours to be characteristic of superficial learning because they do not reveal connections between the experiences invoked and do not include personal reflections, working in variants, self-evaluation strategies, or long-term achievement motivations.

In the opinion of the subjects in question, the use of ChatGPT, but with the incorrect assumption of authorship, was determined by a series of factors, including time pressure, lack of understanding and the convenience of substituting with another resource that can carry out activities of study/ research.

By analysing the way the tasks were solved using ChatGPT, because they were intentionally formulated in such a way as to provide personalized, practical answers, by constructing applicative situations, we were able to notice that this criterion was eluded.

In the case of applied works, ameliorative pedagogical research projects, the indicators that showed us that ChatGPT was inappropriately used were the fact that the products did not fit into the agreed structure for constructing these works, including many logical-scientific errors (for example, simple phrases considered hypotheses or wrong research methods, presented in the case of the objective formulation stage). Out of the 6 papers, 5 were written at an unsatisfactory, very laconic level, and one paper, on the contrary, was extremely detailed, but it presented incoherent ideas. From a language point of view, grammatical rules were neglected.

It is interesting that, although the applied work was complex and quite difficult in relation to the master's students' experience, due to the instruction, the advice on its factual and not fictitious nature, and the feedback along the way, of the 49 subjects in the experimental group, 87.7 % complied with the requirement to capitalize on their own proposals, rationally, to specify sources accessed in a real way, respecting the main academic ethical requirements, focused on anti-plagiarism, so that the results of the evaluation could be in relation to the personal skills.

5.2.3. The post-test stage. As we showed in the section on the organization and conduct of the research, the same master's students were monitored for accomplishing tasks and applied works in another discipline, at a considerable distance of time, over a year. We did not insist on ethical norms, only observing whether the experimental effect of awareness of the cost-benefit balance of using ChatGPT was naturally maintained.

We found that, out of 49 students, 7 of them solved their tasks exclusively by ChatGPT, and 10 students, on applied works. This is an increase in the number of subjects, considered, this time, the control group. The share ChatGPT was used in completing tasks, respectively, applied works is changed compared to the previous year, especially since the actual requirements, in the case of some Extracurricular Activity Projects, allowed for the adoption of theoretical, descriptive ideas.

From the discussion with the master's students who developed papers and assignments exclusively through a simple use of ChatGPT, we noticed that they did not keep in mind the ideas presented, they only fit into the subject. Related to the satisfaction of their own intellectual work, to the aspects of the consciousness of a job well done, they reasoned that the personal benefits related to the time and effort saved matter more than the perceived image, the perception of honesty or the judgment of others.

As aspects that define the sphere of moral values and behaviours, we consider that such habits are difficult to change, although encouraging students to try to solve problems independently, before requesting ChatGPT assistance (Lee *et al.*, 2024), through critical thinking skills, could be a measure that works in the future, if ethical regulations are consistently followed by all actors in the academic environment.

6. Limits

Even though our study took into consideration the activity of a small number of subjects, it focused on the extent to which students use ChatGPT in their psycho-pedagogical and methodological training, in the case of three disciplines. The registered percentage was approximately 13 % of the subjects, but there is a possibility that there are variations in their specializations or in the case of other disciplines. Moreover, from the point of view of regional comparisons, the aspects investigated could differ. Our empirical research was of a synchronous type, and a possible longitudinal research would be the one to capture the changes that occurred over time.

Aging or the gender of the students did not have any clear determining impact on the quality of the analysed products. It should also be taken into account that the very type of tasks formulated for students or the type of applied works could

influence the way in which they capitalize on the technological potential in the academic environment. The difference comes from their somewhat standardized character or, on the contrary, if there are creative requests.

Categorically, for the generalization of the research data, it would be interesting to know the perspective of teachers, in several specializations, especially, in the conditions in which the efficiency of Artificial Intelligence systems is evaluated in a transparent, partnership manner.

7. Conclusions

The quality of learning may be affected if students or master's students resort to the technological means offered by ChatGPT, as a substitute for their own efforts.

Digital copying is difficult to demonstrate in the conditions of the information explosion, and the possibilities of verification/ anti-plagiarism, sanctions regarding illicit scientific production do not solve the problem of demotivation for learning or the problem of superficial learning. However, early notification of students and careful monitoring by teachers is a strategy to prevent plagiarism.

It is possible that, in the future, ChatGPT will be used on a much wider scale, through the improvements that specialists can bring, which would thus increase the level of performance of beneficiaries in the field of education.

Constructivism in training and the reflexive approach are useful, in the sense that when common agreements on ideas are reached, taking into account a variety of conceptions and provoking cognitive conflicts, students become more demanding and rigorous in developing papers or in solving seminar tasks.

The gains for deep learning are clear: by clearly recognizing/mentioning the situations in which they used ChatGPT-type information technology, students use more resources, compare the ideas produced, critically analyse them, complete them and, above all, add their own interpretations.

Previous studies, focused on the difference between deep and superficial learning (Frăsineanu, 2012), on the implementation of various techniques for encouraging critical and creative thinking in students (Frăsineanu & Ilie, 2024) confirm the added value in learning, determined by the support offered by teachers, learning styles being greatly shaped by the influence of the environment.

When there are clear procedures respected at the institutional level, when there is a culture favourable to ethics, when the consequences on in-depth learning in students are analysed, their learning behaviours improve. Therefore, monitoring students in their academic activity, so that they benefit from autonomy, but also from constructive feedback, was a solution that worked in the case of the subjects who had tasks and papers developed correctly, completely, originally.

Specifying criteria, checks, peer cross-checks or realistic self-checks are some other measures that have proven their efficiency in the case of very good results in the formative stage described by us.

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