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Teaching Ethical GenAI Use through Student-Led Discussions in EAP

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Abstract

This paper explores a student-led discussion activity on GenAI use within an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) module, designed to foster critical thinking and ethical reasoning with regard to GenAI. Students analyse realistic scenarios illustrating appropriate and inappropriate GenAI use, aligning their decisions with academic integrity principles. Teachers' observations showed strong student engagement, with students reflecting on their own GenAI use. Nuanced scenarios prompted the most meaningful debate, although balancing complexity and clarity proved a challenge. Although its impact on misconduct is difficult to measure, the activity shows potential for promoting responsible and ethical GenAI use in academic settings.

Keywords

1. Generative AI
2. English for Academic Purposes (EAP)
3. Academic integrity
4. AI literacy

AI Declaration

We, the authors, declare that we used AI tools in the production of this manuscript. The specific tools we used were ChatGPT (https://chat.openai.com/) and Grammarly (https://www.grammarly.com/). We used ChatGPT to suggest a possible outline for a practice-based piece based on information about our teaching activity. We wanted to compare our own outline with an AI-generated one. The impact of this could be seen in the inclusion of a Preparation section in our draft which was a suggested heading from ChatGPT. The paper's organisation was significantly changed after peer review. In addition, Grammarly was used for proofreading. We affirm that the manuscript itself was authored by us and not by AI, meeting all the submission criteria of SAJILE.

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Introduction

The emergence of Generative AI (GenAI) tools such as ChatGPT has significantly impacted higher education. These tools have several academic applications; they facilitate ideation and gathering of sources (Chan & Zhou, 2023), provide personalised feedback (Chan & Zhou, 2023), and can act as additional tutors for students (Barret & Pack, 2023). However, the rise of Generative AI also poses significant threats to academic integrity (Chan, 2023b). GenAI tools can easily generate essays, solve problems, and create content, leading to increased risks of academic misconduct. Furthermore, GenAI detection software is often unreliable and can be biased against students who are non-native English speakers (Liang et al., 2023), rendering the banning of GenAI infeasible. Additionally, punitive or prohibitive approaches might neglect the potential opportunities and range of educational affordances these tools may offer students (Celik et al., 2024). Explicit teaching of appropriate use of GenAI has therefore been suggested to mitigate GenAI's threats to academic integrity while ensuring students can access the benefits (Chan, 2023a). One potential context for this type of instruction is English for Academic Purposes (EAP) teaching (Ngo & Hastie, 2025). This practice-based piece will focus on how student-led discussions on academic AI use scenarios can serve as an effective teaching strategy for promoting appropriate GenAI use in an EAP context. We will start by explaining our context and outlining the rationale behind this teaching innovation, followed by its implementation, before reflecting on its effectiveness.

Background and Rationale

Our Context

We worked as EAP tutors at a pathway college in Scotland. The college offers alternative routes for international students who do not meet the admission criteria of our host university. As part of their International Foundation Year, our students are required to complete EAP modules to develop academic and language skills, alongside modules related to their chosen subjects. The assessments for several modules, including EAP and subject modules, are extended writing coursework in the forms of essays, reports and literature reviews.

In the summer of 2023, we observed a noticeable rise in potential cases of GenAI misuse among our students. However, the lack of reliable GenAI detection tools as shown in the literature (e.g., Liang et al., 2023; Lim et al., 2023) made it extremely challenging to definitively confirm whether students had used AI to complete their writing assignments. While discussions arose about modifying assessment methods, extended writing assessments remained an essential component of summative assessment. These assessments are critical for preparing students for the demands of academic writing at the university level and therefore cannot be replaced by more 'AI-proof' writing assessments such as exams. This, along with concerns about the impact of GenAI misuse on student learning, as well as the general consensus that AI cannot be effectively banned (Lim et al.,

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2023), prompted us to consider how to teach students to use GenAI appropriately and ethically.

Discussion of Ethical Considerations in Students' AI Use

Addressing how to teach students to use GenAI ethically and effectively requires a clear understanding of the ethical landscape surrounding its use. While the broader ethical considerations of AI - including environmental impact, algorithmic bias, misinformation, and the opacity of AI models (von Essenbach, 2021) - are important, there is also a pressing need to foster an ethical and appropriate approach towards using GenAI for academic purposes among students (Chan, 2023b). Recent research has found a lack of understanding among university students as to what constitutes appropriate use, and what may be considered inappropriate or even regarded as academic misconduct (Chan, 2023b). This can be attributed to the lack of institutional guidance on students' GenAI use (Barret & Pack, 2023; Jisc, 2024) which can also cause some students to feel scared of using GenAI for fear of negative academic consequences (Ngo & Hastie, 2025).

In response to these problems, Rowland (2023) and Walter (2024) recommend providing scenarios of GenAI use as a tool to foster discussion, dialogue, and understanding among students. This approach can promote a positive learning environment where the use of GenAI is embraced within well-defined guidelines. In line with this, several institutions such as the Ohio State University have suggested strategies to encourage open and transparent conversations with students on GenAI use (Ohio State University, 2024). This paper describes how we implemented such conversations in our own EAP context.

Discussions on Appropriate AI Use and EAP Classes

English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses are designed to equip international students at English-speaking higher education institutions with the academic language and skills required to succeed in academic settings. There are several reasons why student discussions on appropriate AI use should be included in EAP courses. First, these courses typically include content on avoiding academic misconduct and have been shown to reduce instances of plagiarism (Perkins et al., 2020). Second, EAP classes are usually small with a strong emphasis on communication, creating an ideal environment for open and transparent discussions on AI usage. Finally, developing students' critical thinking is usually one of the key aims of EAP courses and by presenting students with a range of hypothetical situations of AI usage, educators can encourage critical thinking and stimulate in-depth dialogue around the appropriate and inappropriate use of AI.

Student-Led Discussions on Academic AI Use Scenarios

Building on the challenges discussed in the previous section and the call for fostering transparent discussions with students on AI use (Walter, 2024), this section outlines a response tailored to our context. This involves engaging students in analysing both appropriate and inappropriate scenarios of AI use. The activity aims at fostering a deep understanding of the ethical and practical implications of AI use in academic settings as well as developing students' critical thinking and ethical reasoning.

Preparation

To design academic AI use scenarios, the first step is for the teaching team to agree on the criteria. It should be noted that when we first implemented this innovation, the literature on GenAI was only emerging. Hence, we developed the criteria mainly by drawing on our pedagogical knowledge and experience as EAP practitioners. Following extensive discussion, we decided that the scenarios should:

- reflect realistic and plausible situations international foundation year students might encounter in their academic work, making the discussions more relatable and impactful.
- include a variety of AI applications in several academic aspects such as research, writing, proofreading and exam revision aid.
- highlight ethical dilemmas and challenges associated with GenAI use, prompting students to critically evaluate the scenarios and then make a decision.

In addition, we considered that a solid understanding of academic integrity and how to avoid non-AI-related academic misconduct is a prerequisite for students to grasp the complexities of AI-related ethical issues and engage in the scenarios. Therefore, this activity was used after students had taken lessons on avoiding plagiarism and had submitted their writing through Turnitin, a plagiarism detection tool (see more in Section 4, Integration with Existing Curriculum).

After careful consideration, the teaching team agreed on a set of hypothetical situations that represented different uses of AI tools in academic contexts. These scenarios were designed to present a range of complexities, prompting students to consider both clear-cut and ambiguous cases of AI use. Some examples are below (Notes: Perplexity and Microsoft Co-pilot are GenAI tools that work similarly to ChatGPT).

a. *Jake has a philosophy essay due tomorrow, which he hasn't started. He provides ChatGPT with the essay question and asks the AI to write the entire paper for him, intending to submit it as his own work.*
b. *Arjun needs to write an essay about climate change but he is not sure which aspect of climate change to focus on. He asks Perplexity to give him some possible essay questions about climate change. He chooses one of the questions from the list Perplexity generates and writes his essay.*
c. *Susan is struggling with the conclusion of her report on personalised medical devices. She provides ChatGPT with her analysis, asking it to write a fitting conclusion. She then adds this conclusion to her report and submits it as her own work.*
d. *Jane is preparing a presentation about the impact of immigration. She asks Perplexity to explain the impact of immigration on the global economy and uses Perplexity's ideas in her presentation. She cites and references Perplexity.*
e. *Otis is preparing for his maths exam. He puts a maths exercise that his teacher gave him in the class into ChatGPT and asks it to generate similar exercises. He does these exercises and then asks ChatGPT to give him feedback.*
f. *Maria, an international student in the UK, occasionally struggles with English grammar in her essays. She inputs problematic sentences into ChatGPT for corrections. For example, from "She had less books than him," ChatGPT suggests "She had fewer books than him," and explains the difference. Using ChatGPT, Maria quickly refines her essay and submits it.*

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g. *Yoko is an international student in Australia. Her tutor notices that she is struggling with academic reading and gives her some exercises as homework to practise reading skills. These exercises require Yoko to read some texts and answer comprehension questions. Yoko does not read the texts but puts them in Microsoft Co-Pilot and asks it to answer the questions for her.*
h. *Sam finds a research paper closely aligned with his assignment topic. Instead of citing it, he feeds it into ChatGPT and asks the AI to paraphrase the entire content. He then presents this altered content as his original work.*

Inappropriate use of AI scenarios (e.g. a, c, g and h) are derived from real instances of AI-related misconduct observed amongst students at our college (students' names and assignments' topics have been changed). As the scenarios are based on actual misconduct, the discussion is likely to be authentic and relevant and hopefully can prevent similar instances. Appropriate use of AI scenarios (e.g. b, e and f) cover not only situations which are relevant to our students but also some of the affordances offered by GenAI such as ideation, aid for exam revision, and proofreading, all of which can be particularly beneficial for international students (Barret & Pack, 2023). Scenario d is a more nuanced situation which can highlight an ethical challenge of using GenAI.

Below are suggested answers which were developed in discussion with the teaching team.

a. *Jake and ChatGPT: Inappropriate*
Jake's action is a clear case of plagiarism, as he is not producing his own original content and is instead passing off the AI-generated work as his own.
b. *Arjun and Perplexity: Appropriate*
This is an appropriate use of AI because Arjun is using the tool for brainstorming and idea generation but is ultimately producing his own original work.
c. *Susan and ChatGPT: Inappropriate*
This is considered plagiarism because she is presenting AI-generated content as her own.
d. *Jane and Perplexity: Appropriate but…*
This is an appropriate use of AI, as Jane is using it as a research tool and properly attributing the information to its source. However, using AI as a source of information can make academic work less reliable due to AI's problems with inaccuracy and hallucination. Jane should use peer-reviewed academic sources to support her presentation.
e. *Otis and ChatGPT: Appropriate*
This is an appropriate use of AI because Otis is actively engaging with the material, practising his skills, and using AI to enhance his learning process.
f. *Maria and ChatGPT: Appropriate*
This is an appropriate use of AI because Maria is using the tool to improve her language skills and ensure grammatical accuracy in her writing.
g. *Yoko and Microsoft Co-Pilot: Inappropriate*
Yoko uses Microsoft Co-Pilot to answer comprehension questions without actually reading the texts. This is an inappropriate use of AI because she is circumventing the learning process and submitting work that she did not do herself, which undermines the purpose of the exercise and constitutes academic dishonesty.

h. *Sam and ChatGPT: Inappropriate*
This is considered plagiarism because Sam is not creating original content and is presenting the paraphrased work of others as his own without attribution.

Process

The activity began with the tutor providing students with the above scenarios. After that, students were divided into small groups of 3-4 members. Within these groups, students were tasked with carefully analysing each scenario and collectively deciding whether the student was using GenAI appropriately or not. After students finished their discussions, the tutor asked each group to share their evaluation in whole-class feedback. Subsequently, students returned to their initial small groups and were then tasked with making a list of appropriate and inappropriate uses of GenAI for students. These lists were then shared and discussed with the whole class and finally compared with the university's guidance on GenAI use.

Facilitation

In this activity, the tutor acted as the facilitator. At the beginning, the tutor clearly outlined the objectives and expected outcomes of the activity. If necessary, the tutor could elicit the discussion language from students for scaffolding. During the group discussion, the tutor encouraged all students to participate, ensuring that each group member contributed to the discussion. This could be achieved by assigning roles within groups, such as a discussion leader, note-taker, and presenter as happens in Academic Reading Circles (Seburn, 2015), with a similar aim to improve engagement and foster collaborative understanding. When organising whole class feedback, the tutor facilitated respectful and open dialogue, allowing students to express their views and respond to others. The tutor was encouraged to use the suggested answers in Preparation to set clear expectations for the students and guide the discussion towards meaningful and relevant points. In the end, by asking students to compare their lists with the university's guidelines, the tutor could reinforce institutional policies and clarify any discrepancies between student perceptions and university standards.

Integration within Existing Curriculum

This activity was used in a module called EAP2. This was part of three EAP modules (EAP1, EAP2 and EAP3) which our students must complete as part of their International Foundation Year (IFY). Each module spanned 10 weeks and involved 5 hours of weekly classes.
In EAP1, students had developed an understanding of the concepts of academic integrity and misconduct, as well as skills to avoid non-AI-related plagiarism such as paraphrasing and referencing, alongside other academic skills such as critical reading, discussion and paragraph writing. Because these foundational skills had been covered previously, this was, in our view, the most logical place within our IFY program to integrate foundational AI literacy in the curriculum. EAP2 primarily emphasised extended writing. It also incorporates training in AI literacy alongside instruction in academic language and skills.

The lesson with the above activity took place in Week 3 of the module, after lessons on the pre-writing process which focused on analysing writing instruction, brainstorming, searching and evaluating sources and making an outline. AI literacy instruction on how to

use tools such as ChatGPT, Perplexity and Microsoft Co-pilot to support the pre-writing process was also included in the first three weeks of the module. The discussion on AI use was included at the point of the module when students had at least a base-level familiarity with the capabilities and limitations of GenAI but had not started the writing process yet. This discussion was aimed at ensuring an understanding of appropriate AI use and deterring plagiarism before students began writing, which can be considered part of AI ethics (for a more detailed discussion, see Ngo and Hastie (2025)). Lessons in the following weeks focused on academic structure, academic style, coherence, cohesion and finally tutorials and revisions. Activities which required students' evaluation of AI-generated content were also included in some of these lessons to promote students' critical thinking and AI literacy. The complete course outline can be found in Appendix 1 of Ngo and Hastie (2025).

Reflection and Evaluation

It should be noted that the effectiveness of this activity has already been evaluated and reported systematically elsewhere (see Ngo and Hastie, 2025). In the scope of this article, we will instead draw on our own observations, student feedback and post-module interviews.

Based on our observations, our scenario-based AI discussion activity appeared to enhance student engagement, prompting independent discussion and reflection on their own GenAI practices. The initial small-group discussions also appeared conducive to facilitating open and honest reflection and debate, with active participation and genuine interest from students observed throughout the activity. Students volunteered additional scenarios, sought group clarification for particular instances of GenAI use and shared use-cases and prompt-strings with their peers at various times.

Regarding the student feedback collected at the end of the module, 44% of students reported that content on appropriate GenAI use was the most important thing they learned in the module. This number is significant, showing the importance of explicit instruction on GenAI use among several contents taught in the module (e.g. brainstorming, outlining, structuring, academic style, cohesion and coherence, etc.).

In addition, in post-module interviews, a student said that "*(teachers) showed us some appropriate uses and inappropriate uses of AI (through sample scenarios). So now it's more easy to tell and it's fun to figure out which ones are appropriate and which ones are inappropriate too"*. In these interviews, some other students also revealed that they were using GenAI for exam revision and language learning, which corresponds to scenarios e and f in III.1. These data as well as our anecdotal observations provide support for the effectiveness of the activity.

Despite the positives, there are still a few areas for improvements. First, some scenarios (such as a and g, noted in Preparation) were arguably not nuanced enough and did not result in extended discussion. Whilst some unequivocal examples of GenAI misuse were necessary to establish clear boundaries and ensure students recognise obvious breaches of academic integrity, more focus should be placed on the greyer areas of GenAI use such as in scenarios c and d as these elicited the most discussion both within groups and during the whole-class feedback session. As mentioned in Background and Rationale, at an institutional level, there remains a general lack of coherent and centralised GenAI policy (Barret & Pack, 2023; Jisc, 2024), including at our own university. Our university's AI guidelines only list

some examples of how students can use GenAI and do not address the nuanced use of these tools. This means that including more complex and ambiguous scenarios might create difficulty for students to find clear answers and for tutors to organise whole-class feedback, leading to a potential problem of balancing complexity with clarity in the teaching activity.

Additionally, all scenarios in this activity focused solely on academic integrity. Other ethical problems of GenAI such as unequal access and environmental impact were not included due to time constraints. Future iterations of the module can incorporate scenarios which explore these broader issues for a more comprehensive understanding of GenAI's ethical implications.

Meanwhile, the impact of this activity on AI-related misconduct is difficult to measure due to the absence of a reliable AI detection tool. This means a significant reliance on subjective judgment when tutors need to determine whether a piece of writing was produced by a GenAI tool or by a student. This judgement may vary among instructors and can be highly fallible.

In sum, while the activity appears to support student engagement and critical thinking around GenAI use, further refinement and systematic evaluation would be needed to fully understand its impact, particularly in relation to preventing academic misconduct.

Conclusion

This paper has introduced student-led discussions on academic AI use scenarios in EAP classes as a viable approach to address the challenges and opportunities presented by GenAI in higher education. Despite challenges in balancing between unequivocal and complex scenarios and in assessing its impact on preventing AI misuse, this student-led discussion approach shows promise as an effective method for promoting appropriate GenAI use in academic settings.

The broader implications of this activity extend beyond the immediate classroom setting. By equipping students with critical thinking skills and a nuanced understanding of AI use, this activity contributes to a culture of academic integrity and responsible technology use that can prepare students to ethically navigate AI-driven workplaces and industries.

This activity could benefit a range of stakeholders, including educators and students in various educational contexts. It is particularly well-suited for EAP courses, pathway programs, and any curriculum aimed at international or first-year students, where foundational skills such as avoiding academic misconduct and critical thinking are emphasised.

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