JAAFR INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH JOURNAL
JOURNAL OF ADVANCE AND FUTURE RESEARCH
JAAFR.ORG | ISSN : 2984-889X
An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

SOCIAL WORK INTERVENTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR ACADEMIC AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT: A STUDY ON CHATGPT DEPENDENCE AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS IN CHENNAI DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

The swift implementation of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) like ChatGPT is changing the way college students learn, write, communicate and handle the demands of college. The aim of this study is to investigate the dependence of ChatGPT in Arts and Science Colleges in Chennai District in their undergraduate and postgraduate Colleges and interpret the implications for their academic development, personal development, student wellbeing and social work practice. Descriptive research method was used and 100 students were used as data sources for the study, they were obtained by using a structured questionnaire with the following variables as their contents: Usage frequency, purpose of the use, perceived benefit, ethical awareness, independent writing, critical thinking, and effects of the academic and personal. The results show that there was a broad and widespread use of ChatGPT in assignments, project reports, summarization, exam preparation, translation, and personal writing. Many students expressed challenges with getting started with academic tasks without AI support, decreased confidence in their ability to write independently, and a disconnect between enhanced submission quality and proficiency with the material. There were significant differences between gender, academic discipline and year of study, and a significant association between usage frequency and reported academic performance. The study proposes that the issue of dependence needs to be considered not only as a technology problem, but also as an educational, psychosocial, ethical and developmental problem. It calls for social work measures like AI-literacy counseling, strengths-based academic assistance, peer groups, teaming up with faculty, referral networks, teaching digital-ethics, and adopting a culture of responsible instead of restrictive AI use in the institution.

Keywords: ChatGPT dependence, Social Work Intervention; Academic Development;

INTRODUCTION

In just a few short weeks, Generative AI has entered the lives of students. ChatGPT can give explanations, brainstorm ideas, translate text, provide feedback, summarise reading, and help draft. These functions can enhance access to learning, particularly for students who face language barriers, inadequate academic support or anxiety around writing. The ease in which this can be done, however, can lead students to delegate planning, interpretation, drafting, revision, and problem-solving to others before they learn to do it on their own. UNESCO's human-centred approach will be focused on ensuring agency, equity, privacy, cultural and linguistic diversity, and the educational use of technology. Hence, the learning question is not about the use of ChatGPT by students but why, how, and what impact students use it. Responsible uses may include brainstorming, asking for explanations, getting language feedback, making comparisons to other arguments. A problem with dependence can arise if students are unable to start or finish their own academic or personal writing without using ChatGPT, believe the information it provides without checking, work that they have used it to create is entirely their own, or are less confident in their writing without using ChatGPT. Recent research also notes efficiency and accessibility gains, as well as issues of accuracy, bias, privacy, academic honesty and the reduction of independent learning.

This study approach the problem from a social work point of view. Students of higher education are embedded in families, peer groups, classrooms, institutions, labour markets, and digital worlds. Academic stress, expectations of English language, socioeconomic disadvantage, disability, mental health, peer influences and fear of failure may all play a role in their use of ChatGPT. Thus punishment alone or detection should not be the basis of intervention. They should reinforce student skills, enhance supportive relationships, establish ethical institutional contexts, and challenge and change the institutional conditions that result in unhealthy dependence.

THE IMPACT OF GENERATIVE AI IN HIGHER EDUCATION

GenAI is transforming the student–knowledge–assessment–authoring equation. It has the following advantages: it provides immediate feedback, language support, personal explanations, idea generation, and organizational support. It has many drawbacks such as providing deceptive references, inadequate or partial responses, short contextual understanding, privacy concerns, and well-rehearsed text that may mask poor comprehension. A systematic review of higher-education research suggests that ChatGPT is commonly adopted and seen as beneficial, and that institutions are still in the process of finding diverse solutions for reliability, academic integrity, and overly dependent use. Competence with AI, however, is not just about the ability to operate. UNESCO's AI Competency Framework for Students is divided into 12 competencies, which span across four areas: having a human-centred mindset, understanding ethics of AI, applying AI techniques and applications, and designing AI systems.UNESCO's AI Competency Framework for Students has four sections: having a human-centred mindset, understanding ethics of AI, applying AI techniques and applications, and designing AI systems, and each has 12 competencies which cascade in a sequence from understanding to application to creation. This means that for colleges, students must be taught to question outputs, check claims, safeguard their personal information, recognize the use of another person's work, and remain accountable for their own.

This has implications for Social Work. Heavily using ChatGPT can lead to problems with self-efficacy, time management, academic anxiety, language confidence, peer comparison, and adjustment to higher education, which some students might require support with. Social workers can help in various ways such as assessment, counselling, group work, advocacy, referring, community education and policy making. The goal is to facilitate students' ability to leverage AI as a scaffolding tool without compromising their agency, relationships, reflection or original expression.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Kasneci et al. (2023) investigated the potential and the problems associated with using LLM in education. They also noted the advantages of personalised learning and tutoring opportunities, but cautioned against misinformation, bias, disruption of assessments, and critical supervision. Their work contributes to an educational approach that draws on intentional pedagogical planning of the use of AI, not its unconditional replacement.

Cotton et al. (2023) talked about academic honesty in the era of Chat GPT and highlighted the importance of establishing institutional expectations. In their analysis, they conclude that the approach to assessment design, communication transparency and student awareness of authorship are more constructive than using only detection technology.

Tlili et al. 2023 situate ChatGPT in the context of discussions on educational opportunity, access, ethics and the digital divide. They argue that the advantages and disadvantages resulting from AI depend on context, such as language, infrastructure, preparedness of teachers, and institutional policy.

Sallam (2023) examined the usefulness and flaws of ChatGPT and found that it has potential to help with explanation and drafting but should not be used when a task requires specialized knowledge, ethical judgment, context, or accuracy of sources. This is especially important for students who cite references or claims without verification that they were generated.

Recent systematic review of ChatGPT in higher education shows that while students and faculty recognize the benefits of the ChatGPT, including support with writing, feedback, efficiency, and accessibility, concerns have surfaced regarding issues of inaccuracy, bias, privacy, over-reliance, and academic integrity. According to a 2025 systematic review of adoption research, perceived usefulness, social influence and behavioural intention are significant factors in student adoption, while the issue of technological dependence and ethical issues are not resolved. The results support the study of dependence as a behavioural and institutional problem, and not as an issue of inappropriate usage.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Students in Chennai’s Arts and Science colleges increasingly encounter pressure to produce assignments, projects, presentations, examinations, applications, and personal communications in a competitive and multilingual

environment. ChatGPT may reduce immediate workload, but habitual use can blur the boundary between assistance and substitution. There is limited locally grounded evidence on how students experience this dependence, which academic and personal tasks they outsource, whether they recognise the risks, and what forms of support would help them regain confidence in independent work.The problem is therefore formulated as follows: to what extent are college students in Chennai District dependent on ChatGPT for academic and personal writing, what are the implications of this dependence for academic and personal development, and how can social work interventions promote ethical, balanced, and student-centred use of GenAI?

NEED AND IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

- The study provides local evidence for colleges designing responsible AI policies and student-support programmes.
- It distinguishes productive AI assistance from dependence characterised by loss of agency, uncritical acceptance, or inability to work independently.
- It links AI use with student wellbeing, academic self-efficacy, language confidence, ethical decision-making, and social relationships.
- It expands the role of social work in higher education beyond crisis response to include digital wellbeing, AI literacy, advocacy, and preventive intervention.
- It supports an inclusive approach that assists students facing language, disability, socioeconomic, or academic barriers without stigmatising them.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To examine the frequency, intensity, and patterns of ChatGPT use for academic and personal writing among Arts and Science college students in Chennai District.
- To assess the level of dependence on ChatGPT and its relationship with gender, academic discipline, year of study, institution type, and academic performance.
- To examine the perceived effects of ChatGPT dependence on independent writing, critical thinking, learning confidence, self-regulation, and personal communication.
- To identify students' awareness of academic integrity, privacy, verification, disclosure, and responsible AI use.
- To understand the psychosocial factors associated with dependence, including academic pressure, language anxiety, fear of failure, peer influence, and time constraints.
- To propose social work interventions for students, teachers, families, peer groups, counsellors, and educational institutions.

HYPOTHESES

- H1: There is a significant relationship between gender and the level of ChatGPT dependence among the respondents.
- H2: There is a significant difference in ChatGPT dependence scores among students from Arts, Science, Commerce, and Computer Science disciplines.
- H3: There is a significant association between ChatGPT-use frequency and reported academic performance.
- H4: There is a significant difference in ChatGPT dependence scores across years of study.
- H5: Students reporting higher ChatGPT dependence will report lower confidence in independent writing and critical thinking, after considering relevant demographic and academic variables.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A descriptive cross-sectional design was adopted to describe ChatGPT-use patterns and examine associations among selected variables. Because the design is non-experimental, findings should be interpreted as relationships rather than proof of causation.The universe comprises undergraduate and postgraduate students enrolled in Arts and Science colleges affiliated with the University of Madras and located in Chennai District, Tamil Nadu.A sample of 100 students was selected using purposive and stratified procedures to include variation in discipline, gender, year of study, and institution type. For a larger confirmatory study, probability sampling and a formal sample-size calculation are recommended.A structured questionnaire consisted of profile items, ChatGPT-use patterns, academic and personal purposes, perceived benefits and risks, ethical awareness, independent-writing confidence, critical-thinking indicators, wellbeing concerns, and openness to social work support. Responses were measured using multiple-choice, dichotomous, and five-point Likert items. Expert review and pilot testing should be documented before final administration; reliability statistics should be reported only from the actual dataset.Permission was obtained from relevant institutions. Participation was voluntary and based on informed consent. No unnecessary personally identifiable information was collected. Students were informed that participation or non-participation would not affect grades or access to services. Data were stored securely and used only for research purposes.Frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used for description. Chi-square tests, t-tests, ANOVA, correlation, and, where appropriate, regression may be used for hypothesis testing. Effect sizes and confidence intervals should accompany p-values. Since the sample is small and self-reported, results should not be generalised beyond comparable settings without further evidence.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following findings are retained from the supplied study dataset and should be treated as reported sample results. They must be checked against the original SPSS output before submission, particularly the degrees of freedom, assumptions, effect sizes, and post-hoc results.

PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

Of the 100 respondents, 54 per cent were female and 46 per cent were male. Second-year students formed the largest group (42 per cent), followed by first-year students (33 per cent) and final-year or postgraduate students (25 per cent). Arts students constituted 34 per cent, Science 28 per cent, Commerce 22 per cent, and Computer Science or allied disciplines 16 per cent. Self-financing colleges contributed 56 per cent of the respondents and government-aided institutions 44 per cent. Regarding reported academic performance, 48 per cent had a CGPA between 7.0 and 8.0, 27 per cent above 8.0, and 25 per cent below 7.0.

USAGE FREQUENCY AND PURPOSE

Daily use was reported by 62 per cent of respondents and weekly use by 24 per cent, while 9 per cent used ChatGPT occasionally and 5 per cent rarely or never. The main purposes were written assignments (74 per cent), project reports and seminar papers (61 per cent), summarising study material (56 per cent), idea or outline generation (48 per cent), examination preparation (43 per cent), translation (44 per cent), and personal writing such as emails, letters, or creative work (38 per cent). These results show that ChatGPT is used across both academic production and everyday communication.

DEPENDENCE AND INDEPENDENT DEVELOPMENT

Sixty-five per cent agreed or strongly agreed that their independent writing ability had declined since they began using ChatGPT regularly. Fifty-eight per cent reported difficulty beginning or completing assignments without first consulting the tool. Although 53 per cent perceived improved grades, 49 per cent stated that their actual understanding had not improved to the same extent. Forty-one per cent experienced anxiety or discomfort when required to write without AI assistance. This pattern suggests a possible separation between performance on AI-supported products and development of durable learning capabilities.

ETHICAL AWARENESS AND PRACTICE

Sixty-eight per cent knew that submitting uncited AI-generated content may violate academic-integrity expectations, yet 61 per cent reported submitting such content at least once without proper acknowledgement. Half of the respondents felt that their institutions had not provided adequate guidance, and 46 per cent believed that faculty members were not fully aware of student usage. The gap between awareness and behaviour indicates that information alone is insufficient; students need practical guidance, supportive supervision, transparent rules, and assessment designs that make ethical practice realistic.

HYPOTHESIS TESTING

H1: The reported chi-square result was $\chi^2(2) = 7.842$, $p = .020$, indicating a statistically significant association between gender and dependence level in this sample. Male respondents showed a higher proportion of high

dependence. This result should be interpreted cautiously because gender differences may reflect discipline, access, self-reporting, or other unmeasured factors; it should not be treated as evidence of an inherent gender characteristic.

H2: The reported ANOVA result was $F(3, 96) = 6.314$, $p = .001$, indicating significant differences in mean dependence scores across disciplines. Tukey comparisons reportedly showed higher scores among Arts students than Science and Computer Science students. Future analysis should report group means, standard deviations, confidence intervals, effect size, and assumption checks.

H3: The reported association between usage frequency and academic-performance category was $\chi^2(6) = 14.276$, $p = .027$. This indicates association, not causation. Daily users were reportedly concentrated in the 7.0–8.0 CGPA category rather than the above-8.0 category. Self-reported performance and cross-sectional data cannot establish that ChatGPT caused either improvement or limitation.

H4: The reported ANOVA result was $F(2, 97) = 9.187$, $p < .001$, indicating significant differences by year of study, with higher dependence reported among later-year or postgraduate respondents. A longitudinal design is needed to test whether dependence actually increases over time, because cohort differences and discipline composition may produce the same pattern.

H5: The supplied article does not provide a complete inferential test for the relationship between dependence and independent-writing confidence. This hypothesis should be tested using correlation or regression with the final dependence and writing-confidence scores. It should not be claimed as statistically supported until the relevant analysis is completed.

SOCIAL WORK INTERVENTIONS

Individual-Level Interventions

- Conduct brief, non-stigmatising screening for AI-related academic anxiety, loss of writing confidence, avoidance, and inability to work without ChatGPT.
- Use strengths-based counselling to identify what students can already do independently and build gradual "AI-free" practice periods.
- Teach a responsible-use cycle: attempt independently, use ChatGPT for limited support, verify with authoritative sources, revise personally, and disclose assistance where required.
- Provide referrals for language support, disability services, mental-health counselling, study-skills training, and financial or academic assistance when dependence reflects wider stressors.

Group-Level Interventions

- Establish peer-led AI-literacy groups where students compare generated answers with textbooks, journal articles, and local sources.
- Use social-group work to discuss peer pressure, academic competition, authorship, cheating, privacy, and ethical decision-making.

- Organise writing circles, viva practice, reflective journaling, and collaborative problem-solving activities that reward process rather than polished output alone.
- Develop multilingual workshops so that responsible AI use does not become an English-only or technologically exclusive activity.

Family and Community Interventions

- Provide parent and caregiver orientation on supportive study environments, realistic expectations, privacy, and the difference between assistance and substitution.
- Work with community organisations and libraries to provide equitable access to verified learning resources and human academic support.
- Promote student campaigns on digital wellbeing, online safety, misinformation, and responsible technology use.

Institutional and Policy Interventions

- Create a clear AI-use policy that distinguishes permitted assistance, restricted use, prohibited substitution, disclosure, privacy, and appeal procedures.
- Form an AI and student wellbeing committee involving faculty, social workers, counsellors, librarians, students, and administrators.
- Redesign assessment through drafts, process logs, oral explanations, in-class writing, reflective commentary, and authentic local tasks.
- Train faculty and student-support staff in AI literacy, inclusive pedagogy, academic integrity, bias, data protection, and referral pathways.
- Avoid relying solely on AI-detection software. Use dialogue, process evidence, and proportionate educational responses, because detection tools can be uncertain and may disadvantage some students.
- Evaluate interventions using pre- and post-measures of writing confidence, critical evaluation, ethical awareness, wellbeing, and independent task performance.

CONCLUSION

ChatGPT dependence among college students is an emerging educational and psychosocial concern. The supplied findings indicate frequent use for assignments, projects, examination preparation, translation, and personal writing, together with reduced confidence in independent writing and a gap between ethical awareness and actual practice. The central issue is not the presence of ChatGPT but the loss of student agency when AI becomes the default author, thinker, or decision-maker.A social work response should be preventive, developmental, ethical, and inclusive. Students need support to manage academic pressure, strengthen self-efficacy, verify information, protect privacy, and practise independent expression. Teachers and institutions need clear policies and assessment designs that recognise responsible AI use while preserving authorship and learning. When counselling, peer education, faculty development, library support, and institutional policy operate together, ChatGPT can function as a controlled learning scaffold rather than a substitute for academic and personal development.

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