

Using GenAI in the Academic Environment: A Survey on the Experience of Students of the Faculty of Business Administration

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Abstract: The paper discusses the results of a survey of university students' experiences with GenAI tools and their support for learning and other academic activities. The influence of GenAI on academic activities is undisputable. Since the moment the first GenAI tools became available, the academic environment has been one of the most affected industries. It is clear that GenAI speeds up and simplifies some tasks, changes how teachers and students work with knowledge, and raises ethical and legal questions about academic integrity, particularly regarding plagiarism. At the moment, GenAI is with us, and we cannot ignore it. Our students use it, and they will continue to use it, regardless of what their teachers believe, recommend, or ban. As GenAI use in the academic environment influences knowledge work and pedagogical processes, it is important to understand how our students work with it: for which tasks they use it and how, what advantages they see in its use, and whether and how they understand its risks. It is also important to determine whether students correctly understand GenAI and its relevance to academic work. To answer the questions listed above, we did the survey among master's students of the programme Management at the Faculty of Business Administration, Prague University of Economics and Business. The survey had two objectives. The first objective was to determine how students use GenAI in their learning and other academic activities. We developed three simple research questions to learn this: How do students use GenAI for learning and academic work? What are the advantages and what are the disadvantages of GenAI for learning and academic work from a student's perspective? Previous experience with students indicates that, even though students use and depend on GenAI tools extensively, they have no idea which principles GenAI works on. Therefore, the second research objective was to learn whether students understand the principles on which GenAI operates. To learn this, we developed the fourth research question: Do students know which principles GenAI works on? The survey results indicate that students use GenAI for various academic purposes and value it because it is readily available and simplifies and speeds up their work. They are aware of its impact on users, including their cognitive capacity. They also know that GenAI answers may be biased or incorrect. Unfortunately, they have no idea how GenAI works, and that its principles of operation differ from those of the human brain.

Keywords: GenAI, Knowledge, Tertiary education

1. Introduction

The paper discusses the results of a survey of university students' experiences with GenAI tools and their support for learning and other academic activities. The influence of GenAI on academic activities is undisputable. Since the first GenAI tools became available, the academic environment has been among the most affected industries. It is clear that GenAI speeds up and simplifies some tasks, changes how teachers and students work with knowledge, and raises ethical and legal questions about academic integrity, particularly regarding plagiarism.

At the moment, GenAI is with us, and we cannot ignore it. Our students use it, and they will continue to use it, regardless of what their teachers believe, recommend, or ban. As GenAI use in the academic environment influences knowledge work and pedagogical processes, it is important to understand how our students work with it: for which tasks they use it and how, what advantages they see in its use, and whether and how they understand its risks. It is also important to determine whether students correctly understand GenAI and its relevance to academic work.

To answer the questions listed above, we did the survey among master's students of the programme Management at the Faculty of Business Administration, Prague University of Economics and Business. In the Czech Republic, this University is part of tertiary education (Portal.gov.cz, 2026).

The survey had two research objectives (RO). The RO1 was to determine how students use GenAI in their learning and other academic activities. We developed three simple research questions to learn this: RQ1 How do students use GenAI for learning and academic work? RQ2 What are the advantages of GenAI for learning and academic work from a student's perspective? RQ3 What are the disadvantages of GenAI for learning and academic work from a student's perspective? Previous experience with students indicates that, even though students use and depend on GenAI tools extensively, they have no idea which principles GenAI works on. Therefore, the second research objective (RO2) was to learn whether students understand the principles on

which GenAI operates. To learn this, we developed the fourth research question: RQ4 Do students know which principles GenAI works on?

2. Background

2.1 Artificial Intelligence

Artificial intelligence (AI) is “a metaphor coined by John McCarthy at the international conference organized by Dartmouth College in 1956. The metaphor suggests that AI imitates natural intelligence from a computing perspective” (Bratianu and Bejinaru, 2025). It is “a set of technologies that enables machines to mimic human intelligence and perform advanced functions. It can: understand and respond to spoken and written language; analyze data and make recommendations; learn from new information and make decisions; use math and logic to simulate human reasoning; and solve complex problems by perceiving its environment, dealing with what it perceives, and acting to achieve a goal” (Office of Communication, College of Education, 2024, What is AI?). AI systems apply mathematical algorithms to large amount of data, they “learn from the patterns observed in the data and make predictions based on those patterns” (Office of Communication, College of Education, 2024, What is AI?). Learning happens continuously through system adaptation and the collection and analysis of more data.

Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) is the type of artificial intelligence that “uses deep learning techniques to create new content, such as images, music, animation, 3D models, and text” (Office of Communication, College of Education, 2024, What is generative AI?). It is “generative because it is capable of generating text based on developed patterns and predictions. That is a significant shift from the previous AI applications with predefined sets of possible alternatives offered to the user.” (Bratianu and Bejinaru, 2025, p. 134).

GenAI uses different types of learning models, but generally said it takes data, organises them and chooses statistically probable outputs. This can be simply explained on specific GenAI, a large language model. Large language models do not actually work with words or sentences but with so-called tokens, subword units. For example, the word friendship may consist of two tokens, friend-ship. E.g. the model does not see words or sentences but sequences of tokens. The model works with a huge but limited number of tokens. It is called the context window and represents the working memory.

The model learns to see the probable relationships among tokens in the training data (billions of tokens), e.g., it learns the probability that a concrete token will be followed by another concrete token. This pretraining constructs “patterns from huge data sets, which will be used then in predicting the outputs” (Bratianu and Bejinaru, 2025, p. 134). When working, the model compares its prediction of probability with “reality” (training data). It measures the difference between prediction and “reality”, finds the mistake and adjusts the model to minimise the mistakes. It means that the model does not generate the answers directly because it knows the correct answer, but instead produces many outputs, assigns them probabilities, and chooses the one based on the so-called sampling, the probability distribution the model was allocated. As such, “these algorithms create patterns from the input dataset and, based on them, make predictions for the possible answers using syntactic rules” (Bratianu and Bejinaru, 2025, p. 134). Bratianu and Bejinaru (2025, p. 134) call the output of AI learning artificial knowledge.

2.2 Human Learning

Human learning is a complex bio-social process. As for the biological site, learning means the brain adapting to accommodate new knowledge. Neurons, nerve cells in the brain, develop connections (synapses) that link them into the complex networks, so-called brain maps (Merzenich, 2015). Development of synapses is a physiological process based on the mix of electrical and chemical signals and “the formation of synaptic connections in response to our experiences and environment” (Merzenich, 2015, p. 20). During learning, new synapses strengthen. If we do not use the knowledge, e.g. we do not use the synapses that communication created, relevant synapses in the brain weaken, e.g. synapses change depending “on how active or inactive they are” (Queensland Brain Institute, n.d.). “Synapses only have access to their own “local” information, yet collectively they help shape broad new learned behaviors. The issue is analogous to individual ants that work on specific tasks without knowledge of the goals of the entire colony” (Today.ucsd.edu, 2025). This synaptogenesis creates brain plasticity. It is “the ability of the brain to change and adapt to new information” (Queensland Brain Institute, n.d.).

However, learning is not only a biological process. It also occurs in interactions with other people through observation and collaboration, and as such is anchored in “a social process that is situated in a cultural and

historical context” (Farnsworth et al, 2016, p. 3; Lave and Wenger, 1991). Human collaboration in learning is based on neural synchronicity. So-called mirror neurons are neurons that fire (are active) not only when we act but when we observe someone else perform the same action (Smith 2016, How stories unfold in our bodies).

To sum it up, human learning depends on the involvement of large numbers of different neurons across multiple brain areas and is integrated with our bodies. Plus, it is anchored in social processes. Therefore, human learning and human knowledge are based on different principles than AI learning.

As Bratianu and Bejinaru (2025) sum it up, human knowledge differs from artificial in its definition (a justified true belief x a prediction), the process of its creation (human learning x machine learning), linguistic dimension (semantic, syntactic, pragmatic x syntactic), type of knowledge (tacit and explicit x explicit), fields of knowledge (rational, emotional, spiritual x rational) and integration in the SECI model (socialisation, externalisation x combination).

2.3 GenAI in Tertiary Education

From the very beginning, AI and especially GenAI “has revolutionized the field of higher education, and sparked debates on the potential of tools such as ChatGPT in teaching, learning and assessment processes (Galent et al, 2023, p. 1). GenAI tools “brought both transformative opportunities to education” (Zhao, Chapman and Sabet, 2024, p. 125) from reducing the workload of teachers to “providing personalised and dynamic assistance, streamlining complex tasks, and fostering active engagement ... to simplifying complex materials or providing illustrative examples and foster students’ problem-solving skills through step-by-step guidance for tackling intricate tasks or challenges” (Zhao, Chapman and Sabet, 2024, p. 125). GenAI is “enhancing students’ learning experience through its ability to respond to user prompts to generate highly original output” (Chan and Hu, 2023, p. 2).

On the other hand, GenAI also brings “unprecedented challenges to education” (Zhao, Chapman and Sabet, 2024, p. 125). “The wide availability of generative GenAI has meant that the barriers to engaging in cheating behaviour (in terms of effort and risk) have been lowered significantly, and the ability to detect cheating has become significantly more difficult, if not impossible” (Lodge, Thompson and Corrin, 2023, p.3).

Nevertheless, GenAI also negatively influence the learning process. “Due to the adaptive nature of the tool, this approach to using technology for learning is different to the use of search engines, where learners are given options and critical thinking skills are applied to synthesise information from a variety of sources” (Lodge, Thompson and Corrin, 2023, p.4). “When learners interact with ChatGPT, the information is already synthesised, without attribution to sources (unless specifically requested)” (Lodge, Thompson and Corrin, 2023, p.4) there is “the risk of hindering students’ intellectual growth and problem-solving skills”. “While these systems enhance academic writing and research efficiency, they frequently undermine originality, creativity, and independent critical thinking (Zhao, Chapman and Sabet, 2024, p. 125). Excessive dependence on GenAI tools has been linked to diminished problem-solving capabilities and increased reliance on GenAI generated content” (Zhao, Chapman and Sabet, 2024, p. 126).

All this means that “within the education landscape and particularly in tertiary education institutions, generative AI has impacted how students learn, how teachers teach and how assessments are conducted (Lye and Lim, 2024, p. 1). Therefore, “perhaps the most pressing task for many in tertiary education has been to make sense of what generative AI is, how the tools flooding the market are using this AI technology, how they have built up their “knowledge”, and the implications for stakeholders and practice in education” (Lodge, Thompson and Corrin, 2023, p.2).

3. Objective, Methodology, Limitations

The survey had two research objectives (RO). The RO1 was to determine how students use GenAI in their learning and other academic activities. We developed three simple research questions to learn this: RQ1 How do students use GenAI for learning and academic work? RQ2 What are the advantages of GenAI for learning and academic work from a student's perspective? RQ3 What are the disadvantages of GenAI for learning and academic work from a student's perspective? Previous experience with students indicates that, even though students use and depend on GenAI tools extensively, they have no idea which principles GenAI works on. Therefore, the second research objective (RO2) was to learn whether students understand the principles on which GenAI operates. To learn this, we developed the fourth research question: RQ4 Do students know which principles GenAI works on?

The theoretical part of the paper is based on papers identified by a Boolean keyword search of 2 keywords: "artificial intelligence" and "tertiary education". The search was done in WoS and Scholar.Google. WoS search identified one relevant paper, Scholar.Google search provided 5 relevant papers. Other papers were collected by the snowball method from these papers.

The survey was conducted as an open-ended questionnaire at the beginning of the winter semester 2026. Forty students (22 men, 18 women, aged 22-29) from the master class in management completed the questionnaire. As we intended to capture important topics related to the use of GenAI in academic work, the questionnaire data were analysed using thematic analysis. We conducted three rounds of inductive coding: rough coding of text from answers to questions identified themes, followed by detailed coding of these themes into subthemes. Finally, we did a control coding a few days after the first two codings. If the code was relevant to more themes, it was classified under one. The coding results showed that some answers to Q1 and Q2 overlapped. We did not move codes between questions.

There are certain limitations due to this methodical approach. The theoretical part of the paper is done on a simplified keyword search, as the keyword "artificial intelligence" is too broad, and the keyword "tertiary education" has many synonyms that were not examined. Due to this, we probably missed important papers. Even though we used reputable databases for our keyword search, a proper literature review, though not our intention, might yield additional resources. The group of respondents was small, from one faculty and all studying one specialised field. Therefore, the survey results cannot be generalised to students or to tertiary education as a whole.

4. Findings

The analysis of answers to RQ1: How do students use GenAI for learning and academic work? brought results listed in Table 1. It identified six themes: work with the formal aspects of text (editing, structuring), work with content (summaries, explanations, initiating thinking), what students create with GenAI (assignments, support for learning, support for research activities), the role of GenAI, and other tools.

Table 1: How do students use GenAI for learning and academic work?

Examples of codes	Subthemes	Themes
Text editing, grammar, formulation of ideas in academic style, text editing, editing notes, text editing, text editing, simplification of text, translations, complex formulations,	Editing text	Work with the formal aspect of text
Logical structure of paper, structure of seminar papers, structure of presentations,	Structuring text	
Summation of text, summation of topic, summation of notes to more legible ones, summation of long papers,	Summations	Work with content
Explanation of materials, explanation of terms, explanation of information I do not understand,	Explanations	
Inspiration, search for new perspectives,	Initiation of thinking	
Generating pictures, presentations, seminar papers, for time-demanding tasks,	Assignments	What students create with GenAI
Self-examination, creation of notes, making the course folder, creating a learning plan, preparing tests, notes, quiz+cards+podcast for exam, sorting of ideas,	Support for learning	
Reviews, getting to real papers, uploading materials, searching for resources, searching in text,	Support of research activities	
Quantitative analysis, simulations, generation of ideas, search for relationships,	Other	
Teacher, mentor, tutor,		Role of GenAI
Every day, non-ethical use – listen to text and answered questions,		Other
Gemini, ChatGPT, Copilot, NotebookLM, Elicit, Gamma, Deph, Canva, Perplexity, Everbot, Thea,		Tools

Answers to RQ1 indicate that students use GenAI for typical tasks involving the formal aspects of text and summaries. Up to this, they use it as an interactive support for learning, which is a pleasant surprise.

Analysis of answers to RQ2: Which GenAI advantages are important for students? brought results listed in Table 2. We identified three themes: advantages (save time/effort, fast, simplifies, explains, available), activities GenAI can do (organisation and management, help with research, summary, text creation, support for self-learning, other) and how it helps (inspiration, personalised, good for special needs, naïve ideas).

Table 2: Which GenAI advantages are important for students?

Examples of codes	Subthemes	Themes
Save time by summarising a large amount of information, fast, save energy,	Save time/effort	Advantages
Fast, fast explanation of the topic, fast work with resources, fastens learning,	Fast	
Simplification of topic, simplifies work, simple explanations,	Simplifies	
Explain complex things, explain concepts better than some teachers, a legible explanation of the topic,	Explain	
Available, broader spectrum of resources, more info in one place,	Available	
Help plan and organise, structure work,	Organisation and management	Activities GenAI can do
Data analysis, show direction of the paper, gives the process of how to get to info,	Help with research	
Summarise information into one file, summarise the important from the text,	Summary	
Can create text, can structure text,	Text creation	
Possible to examine oneself without another person, learning from GenAI cards, can generate test questions,	Support for self-learning	
Higher quality of work, help with simpler topics, work efficiency,	Other	How it helps
Inspiration, inspiration, creativity, brings ideas you do not get,	Inspiration	
Motivates to learn,	Personalised	
Good for people with dysfunctions,	Good for special needs	
Correct explanation, connects knowledge, able to understand context,	Naïve ideas	

Answers to RQ2 show that students understand that GenAI not only save time and energy but can provide personalised help. The important finding is that GenAI helps people with dysfunctions.

The analysis of answers to RQ3: Which GenAI disadvantages are students familiar with? brought results listed in Table 3. It identified three themes: impact on the user (support laziness, students do not use other resources, less independent work, loss of brain functions), disadvantages anchored in GenAI (loss of authenticity, works with limited resources, cannot solve complex tasks, makes mistakes), other (ethical problems, other).

Table 3: Which GenAI disadvantages are students familiar with?

Examples of codes	Subthemes	Themes
More lazy students, human gets quickly used that does not have to use brain,	Supports laziness	Impact on the user
Limits the use of other resources,	Students do not use other resources	

Examples of codes	Subthemes	Themes
Less independent work, people lose autonomy,	Less independent work	Disadvantages anchored in GenAI
Atrophied brain, loss of critical thinking, decreases creativity, smaller space for learning and development, loss of cognitive functions,	Loss of brain functions	
Using GenAI for non-personal creation of tasks, losing authenticity in text creation,	Loss of authenticity	
Limited with its resources, limited dB,	Works with limited resources	
GenAI cannot solve more complex tasks, not possible to use for deeper understanding, in specialised fields is not reliable, necessary to validate data	Cannot solve complex tasks	
Hallucinations, inaccurate info, lack of knowledge replaced by nonsense, offers resources that do not exist, mistakes, misunderstanding with the user, elaborates,	Makes mistakes	Other
Difficult to control if the work was done by the student or not, damage to the planet,	Ethical problems	
I do not like this data collection scheme, costs money	Other	

Answers to RQ3 show that students are aware of GenAI disadvantages, both due to its limits and those that directly impact the user's cognitive capabilities. Surprisingly, only one student mentioned that GenAI has an impact on the planet's environment.

The analysis of answers to RQ4: Do students know on which principles GenAI works? brought results listed in Table 4. It identified two themes: principle it works on (past experience, words/sentences put together based on probability, machine learning, like human thinking) and what it works on (big dB, questions, prompts, I do not know, other).

Table 4: Do students know on which principles GenAI works?

Examples of codes	Subthemes	Themes
Based on last experience, learns from conversation and then answers better, learns when people use it,	Past experience	The principle it works on
Probability algorithm predicting what should follow in the next sentence, it is a code that creates sentences putting individual words together based on probability, creates the most probable answer to my question,	Words/sentences put together based on probability	
Based on machine learning, learns based on available resources and algorithms, via codes and answers, based on neural networks – connects info together,	Machine learning	
Imitates human thinking and learning, works as a "mind of the internet", it has its memory with info – collects info and searches for answers	Like human thinking	
Big dB of info, GenAI has a lot of data it creates answers based on, functions based on available resource search,	Big dB	What it works on
Based on questions, you write a question, and it answers,	Questions	

Examples of codes	Subthemes	Themes
Based on prompts, on requirement goes through relevant data and prepares output,	Prompts	
I do not know – it is important that it works, it is a mystery for me,	I do not know	
GenAI makes steps and user fills them cannot think itself	Other	

Answers to RQ4 showed that students do not understand the principles on which GenAI operates.

To sum it up, students use various GenAI tools to perform typical academic tasks (assignments, research, and learning). GenAI helps them with both the formal and content aspects of text work. Some students have reported that GenAI takes a more active role, serving as a teacher, mentor, and tutor. Students see advantages of GenAI, including its speed, reduced effort, availability, simplification of work, and the ability to explain more complex problems. As such, it supports learning, provides inspiration, and can provide personalised answers. GenAI also eliminates disadvantages for people with various learning dysfunctions. Students understand the disadvantages of GenAI from two perspectives. The first is the impact on the user, their brain functions, independence, and will. The second are disadvantages rooted in GenAI, including mistakes it makes, limited resources it uses, a lack of authenticity, and an inability to solve complex tasks. Some students mentioned typical ethical problems GenAI poses for academia; only one mentioned GenAI's negative environmental impact.

The most striking findings of the research were that students do not know how GenAI works. Even though some answers were partly correct, the other part of the answer showed that the respondent does not understand the basic rules GenAI operates on. None of the forty respondents answered RQ4 correctly. We think this is why students overestimate GenAI's abilities and use it extensively. They view GenAI as a partner that operates on the same principles as their brain.

5. Discussion

The survey results align with the literature, which reflects the rapid development of GenAI tools in recent years.

The advantage of GenAI's ability to provide personalised and adaptive learning corresponds with Lodge, Thompson and Corrin (2023), who see personalised and adaptive learning as one of the potential future advantages of GenAI. The fact that students use GenAI also as an interactive help with learning and personal tutor corresponds with Zhao, Chapman, and Sabet (2024, p. 125) who write that GenAI "promotes engagement by creating dynamic, interactive learning environments that make learning enjoyable and impactful" and with Wut, Chan, and Wong (2026, p. 2) who note, "AI chatbots can act as a virtual teaching assistant, affecting how students learn, how instructors teach, and how assessment is designed and conducted" or as Zhao, Chapman and Sabet (2024, p. 125) write "For students, GenAI can support their learning by providing personalised and dynamic assistance, streamlining complex tasks, and fostering active engagement".

Our findings that students use GenAI for summarising and simplifying are compatible with Zhao, Chapman and Sabet (2024, p. 125) findings that: "For instance, GenAI can aid students' comprehension by summarising and simplifying complex materials or providing illustrative examples and foster students' problem-solving skills through step-by-step guidance for tackling intricate tasks or challenges".

This survey on how students use GenAI adds up to the survey conducted by the author in 2024 (Mládková, 2024). RQ2 and RQ3 were similar to two questions asked in the 2024 survey. The comparison of answers shows that, due to the development of GenAI tools, respondents in the 2026 survey use GenAI for more activities and see more GenAI advantages than respondents in the 2024 survey. For example, respondents in 2024 mentioned GenAI advantages as fast, simple, and readily available, and that it delivers good results, but did not see the advantage of personalised communication and support for learning. As for disadvantages, both groups of respondents mentioned the same problems.

Although "there has been much discussion and debate about the possibilities for using GenAI to assist with reducing workloads for teachers" (Lodge, Thompson and Corrin, 2023, p.4), this is probably not going to

happen as the most problematic disadvantage respondents of the survey mentioned is the impact of GenAI on the cognitive ability of the user which supports ideas of Lodge, Thompson and Corrin (2023).

6. Conclusions

The paper presents the results of a survey on GenAI use in academic work conducted among students in the master's programme at the Faculty of Business Administration, Prague University of Economics and Business. The first research objective was to determine how students use GenAI in their academic activities. The results indicate that students use GenAI for various academic purposes (RQ1) and value it because it is readily available and simplifies and speeds up their work (RQ2). As for disadvantages (RQ3), they are aware of its impact on users, including their cognitive capacity and stated that GenAI answers may be biased or incorrect. The second research objective was to learn whether students understand the principles on which GenAI operates. RQ4 identified that students do not know how GenAI works, and that its principles of operation differ from those of the human brain. This is probably the reason for the extensive dependence of students on GenAI, and its use for creative tasks, GenAI cannot do well.

After evaluating RQ4, respondents were instructed on how GenAI works. The paper author discussed the difference between machine and human learning with respondents.

Ethics Declaration: Ethical clearance was not required for the research. Respondents to the research were asked to confirm their agreement to publish the anonymised results.

AI Declaration: Except for the WOS search, language editing (Grammarly), and reference editing (Gemini), AI was not used at any point in this paper's development.

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