The Influence of Generative AI Tools on Students' Social Interactions in Intercultural Settings

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Abstract

This exploratory research study aims to investigate the use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GAI) tools by university students in social interactions within intercultural settings, with a focus on their usage outside the classroom. The main research question for this research was to investigate how international university students utilise GAI tools in cross-cultural social contexts and assess their impact on intercultural communication. A questionnaire was specifically developed to gather data from 287 students participating in international bachelor's degree programs at a private university in Thailand. Findings show that the main usage of GAI was for language and communication, social interactions and cultural understanding, trust and information reliability, as well as a balanced and critical approach to GAI. The researchers recommend universities develop a structured support system, create an awareness program about GAI tools, and integrate GAI tools into existing cultural integration programs.

Keywords: generative artificial intelligence, higher education, intercultural communication

Introduction

The adoption of Generative AI tools in education has exploded in recent years, particularly in higher education. Universities, academic instructors, and students alike have either embraced GAI tools or fought against their usage. Many studies have been conducted on how universities and students have implemented GAI into their academic lives (Jin et al., 2025; Walayu & Kusumastuti, 2024), covering both the positive and negative aspects. There have been multiple reports produced documenting the rise in the international student population in higher education (Bolton, 2022; De Wit & Altbach, 2021), and previous studies have covered the importance of intercultural communication within higher education (Pradanova & Kocarev, 2024; Ramstrand et al., 2024). While the use of GAI tools has mostly been documented to be used as a tool for students to complete classwork and assignments, the exponential rate of GAI's influence in society, particularly in social interactions, is something that has also been reported by Sabherwal and Grover (2024). Understanding how GAI tools are shaping students' lives outside the classroom would be important to study, as the same academic concerns that have been raised in past studies could spill over to social interactions. Multiple areas of concern were identified, and research questions were developed to address these concerns.

The main research question for this study was to investigate how international university students utilise GAI tools in cross-cultural social contexts and assess their impact on intercultural communication.

The researchers identified three sub-questions to address the intricate nuances of GAI outside of the classroom. The three sub-questions focused on: usage patterns across diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, perceived benefits and drawbacks for social interactions, and trustworthiness evaluation and its impact on peer interactions.

1. In what ways do GAI tools facilitate communication and collaboration among international students from diverse cultures and linguistic backgrounds?
2. What are the perceived benefits and drawbacks of using GAI tools for social interactions among international students?
3. How do international students evaluate the trustworthiness of information generated by GAI tools, and how does this perception impact their interactions with international peers?

This initial explorative study may help shed some light on the usage and influence of GAI on International students, which may lead to developing appropriate awareness programs and support if/when needed. Those involved in educational technology design may wish to utilise the information and help develop tools that students feel comfortable embracing. Finally, educational institutions could use the findings to influence cultural integration policies and practices.

This paper includes a literature review of the relevant studies completed that have influenced the social interactions of students in different settings, addressing the gaps in current research. A detailed methodology section outlining the scope of the participants, survey instruments, and analysis instruments follows. A results section provides the statistics from the survey results, followed by a findings and discussion section. The paper concludes with recommendations for future studies and how educational institutions can use the findings to better address cultural policies.

Literature Review

Introduction to GAI

Generative AI's (GAI) integration into all sectors of academic life has sparked significant interest and debate amongst educators and students, with the issue particularly vocal within higher education. While this literature review primarily focuses on the implications of GAI within educational settings, it acknowledges that the findings are closely related to students' use outside the classroom. The term Generative AI (GAI) can refer to different aspects of applications that produce data or content. For example, GAI can refer to artificial intelligence systems (Farrelly & Baker, 2023), machine learning models (Lin, 2023), or large language models (Lodge et al., 2023). The most popular current GAI applications include ChatGPT, Claude, Midjourney, DALL-E 3, Suno, ElevenLabs, Pico, Grammarly, and Tome. Students find these applications extremely helpful with their studies as the data and content these applications can produce include "text, images, video, music, computer code, or complex combinations of these media, that closely resemble human-created content" (Farrelly & Baker, 2023). Students also use these applications for reasons such as practice questions, receiving feedback on their written work, which can help with grammatical aspects, or constructing an argument or determining reason (Lodge et al., 2023). Lodge et al. (2023) also highlight other factors, including personalised learning, such as using GAI as a tutor to cater to individualised learning needs, and also a recognition that GAI will be important in their future careers, so early adaptation and encouragement of usage is a necessity. This literature review explores the implications of GAI on intercultural interactions among university students outside of the classroom, focusing on academic integrity, student trust, cultural competence, and social interactions.

GAI and Communication

Cultural Competence and Communication Enhancement

GAI tools can enhance cultural competence and communication among diverse university students by facilitating personalised learning and supporting non-native English speakers (Farrelly & Baker, 2023; Johnston et al., 2024). Their asynchronous, text-based nature simplifies communication and promotes inclusion, particularly for students who lack confidence in their language skills (Chen, 2023). By bridging linguistic and cultural gaps, GAI fosters a more inclusive academic environment and supports collaboration in multicultural settings.

Social Interactions Impact

GAI's influence on social interactions is mixed. While tools enhance communication, raise awareness, and help build relationships (Abbas et al., 2019), they may also reduce traditional face-to-face engagement, potentially undermining cultural norms (Kolhar et al., 2021). Biases in GAI systems can further complicate intercultural communication (Solaiman et al., 2024). Careful design and oversight are needed to maximise benefits and minimise risks.

Gaps in Literature

Several gaps have been identified in the literature. It has been noted that there is limited empirical evidence on how GAI enables collaborative work in diverse student groups (Chen,

2023; Johnston et al., 2024). Additionally, there is insufficient understanding of how GAI bridges cultural differences in collaborative settings (Farrelly & Baker, 2023). The literature shows contradictory findings on whether GAI enhances or hinders social interactions (Abbas et al., 2019; Kolhar et al., 2021). Finally, there is little focus on mitigating cultural biases in GAI tools (Solaiman et al., 2024). This research addresses these gaps by examining GAI's role in facilitating collaboration, mediating cultural differences, and mitigating bias in intercultural student interactions. These previous findings underline how GAI tools can both support and challenge intercultural communication among students, reinforcing the need to examine their actual use and impact in diverse social contexts.

Benefits and Drawbacks

Benefits of GAI in Social Interactions

GAI tools support international students by addressing language barriers, providing cultural guidance, and fostering collaboration. Language proficiency is a major challenge for many; GAI functions as a virtual tutor, improving grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, and boosting confidence in interactions (Wang & Dang, 2024). GAI also offers insights into cultural norms, etiquette, and expressions, helping students navigate social situations and integrate into new communities (Chan & Hu, 2023). In collaborative settings, GAI generates prompts, summarises ideas, and improves group communication, ensuring all students can contribute effectively (Open Education Manitoba, 2024). Additionally, GAI provides a non-judgmental space to practice conversations and presentations, reducing social anxiety and building confidence (Chukwuere, 2024). Its 24/7 availability allows students to access language and cultural support flexibly, even outside normal academic hours (Harvard Online, 2023).

Challenges and Drawbacks of GAI in Social Interactions

Despite its benefits, GAI presents several challenges. Overreliance can hinder the development of interpersonal skills and authenticity in relationships (Chan & Hu, 2023). Cultural bias and misrepresentation remain risks, as GAI may reinforce stereotypes and generate inappropriate responses, leading to misunderstandings (Van Heerden & Schuengel, 2023). Privacy and ethical concerns also arise when students unknowingly share sensitive data through AI platforms (Modern Pathology, 2024). Furthermore, GAI sometimes produces inaccurate or misleading information, which can harm communication and academic work (Frank, 2023; Ullman, 2023). Unequal access to technology, due to financial or infrastructural barriers, may also prevent some students from fully benefiting from GAI tools (Lin, 2023).

Gaps in Literature

Several gaps remain in the literature regarding GAI's impact on international students' social interactions. There is limited research specifically addressing international students' unique challenges. Few studies examine how GAI supports or hinders social connections, and most research focuses either on benefits or drawbacks rather than providing a balanced perspective from students' perspectives. This study aims to fill these gaps by exploring real-world perceptions and examining GAI's role in fostering social integration among culturally diverse students.

Trust and Integrity

Academic Integrity and Trust Concerns

Integrating GAI tools into higher education has raised concerns about academic integrity and trust, both crucial for fostering intercultural interactions. Students with lower confidence in academic writing are more likely to use GAI, suggesting that trust is linked to academic capability (Johnston et al., 2024). Moorehouse et al. (2023) note that trust depends on clear guidelines, without which students may misuse GAI. Amoozadeh et al. (2024) recommend designing more trustworthy interfaces to moderate trust appropriately. This is especially relevant for international students, who face additional challenges due to differing norms and expectations (Bannister, 2024). GAI's potential to enable misconduct further complicates trust, extending beyond the classroom into intercultural collaborations (Johnston et al., 2024). Addressing these issues is essential for maximising GAI's benefits while maintaining integrity and trust in education.

Biases and Ethical Considerations

GAI's rapid adoption has exposed biases and ethical concerns that must be addressed to ensure fairness. Solaiman et al. (2024) highlight how systemic and demographic biases can perpetuate inequalities through algorithms. Farrelly and Baker (2023) add that discrimination and false accusations may arise from biased data, stressing the need to address these during development. Ethical concerns also extend to academic integrity, as misuse of GAI undermines trust (Johnston et al., 2024). Ensuring GAI systems are accurate and reliable across cultures is crucial for fostering an inclusive, trustworthy academic environment.

Gaps in Literature

Significant gaps remain in understanding how international students assess GAI's trustworthiness and its impact on peer interactions. Few studies focus specifically on international students' unique challenges, such as differing norms and expectations (Bannister, 2024). Current research overlooks how trust perceptions influence both academic and social interactions (Johnston et al., 2024). This research addresses these gaps by examining how cultural, educational, and linguistic diversity shapes trust assessment, linking individual trust to intercultural behaviour in academic and social contexts. The gaps in understanding trust and ethical concerns, particularly for international students, point to the need for further investigation into how perceptions of trustworthiness shape their intercultural interactions.

Methodology

Introduction

This explorative study employed a quantitative research approach to answer our main and sub-research questions. The research was conducted at a private university in Bangkok, Thailand. The target population consisted of 500 undergraduate international and Thai students registered in the international section of the university.

Design of Survey Instrument

The survey instrument consisted of two parts. The first part collected demographic information and GAI practices. Before administering the survey to the full sample, the researchers conducted a pilot study with 93 students to gauge GAI usage patterns. The pilot study's results informed and refined the final survey design. This part included 16 questions.

The second part tested the three sub-research questions. As no pre-existing instruments were identified, the team developed their own items. For each hypothesis, three GAI usage questions were created, using a 5-level Likert scale from "Strongly Disagree (1)" to "Strongly Agree (5)" with a neutral midpoint, along with two open-ended questions. These were reviewed to ensure clarity and accessibility for students. A copy of the survey instrument can be downloaded from https://shorturl.at/HYe1s

Data Collection Procedures

The final questionnaire included 36 questions, primarily multiple-choice with some open-ended items. The survey was administered via Google Forms and distributed through MS Teams and Line. Definitions and examples of GAI tools were provided to ensure understanding. The survey remained open for a two-week period, with students incentivised through a draw for five Starbucks vouchers.

Ethical Considerations

The University Institutional Review Board approved the survey instrument before data collection. Standard ethical procedures were followed. Participation was voluntary, with the right to withdraw at any time, and all responses remained anonymous. These options were clearly outlined in the survey introduction, and entry to the prize draw was optional.

Results

Participant Demographics

Out of approximately 500 invited students, 287 international undergraduate students responded, yielding a response rate of over 50%. SPSS was used for descriptive and inferential analysis. Participants represented 22 countries (Table 1), mainly Myanmar (38%), Thailand (36%), and China (7%), across all eleven international majors. 40% were under 20 years old (Figure 1), and 64% were male (Figure 2).

Table 1

Students' Countries of Origin

Country of Origin	Count	%	Country of Origin	Count	%
Bhutan	1	0.30%	Laos	3	1.00%
Burma	2	0.70%	Myanmar	109	38.10%
Cambodia	9	3.10%	Nigeria	1	0.30%
China	20	7.00%	Norway	4	1.40%
Germany	1	0.30%	Philippines	3	1.00%
Hungary	1	0.30%	Russia	4	1.40%
India	4	1.40%	Saudi Arabia	2	0.70%
Indonesia	2	0.70%	Sweden	1	0.30%
Italy	1	0.30%	Taiwan	4	1.40%
Japan	2	0.70%	Thailand	104	36.40%
Korea	2	0.70%	Vietnam	6	2.10%

Figure 1

Students' Age Range

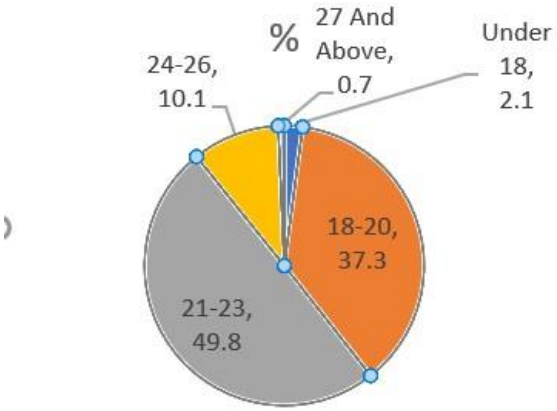
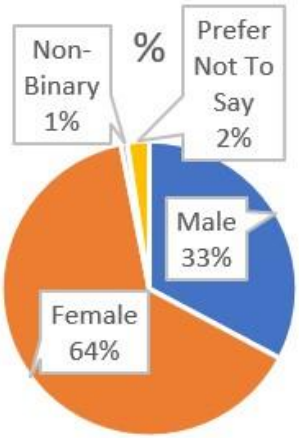


Figure 2

Students' Gender



GAI Usage

Average GAI usage among students was 3 (occasional) on a 1-5 scale, with ChatGPT usage higher at 3.62, indicating students were more comfortable using GAI for general purposes than international interactions.

Segment analysis (Figure 4) showed 12.2% daily users, 44.3% moderate (weekly/monthly), and 43.5% rare or never users.

Figure 3
GAI Tool Usage and Frequency

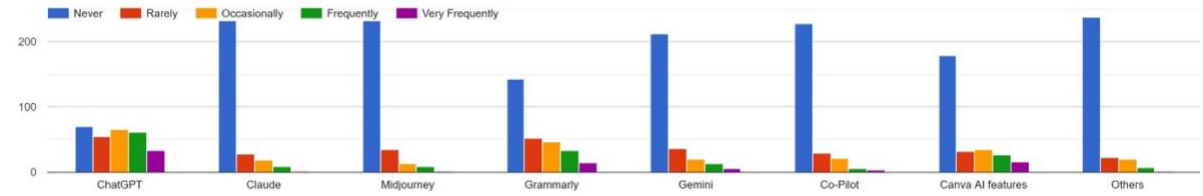
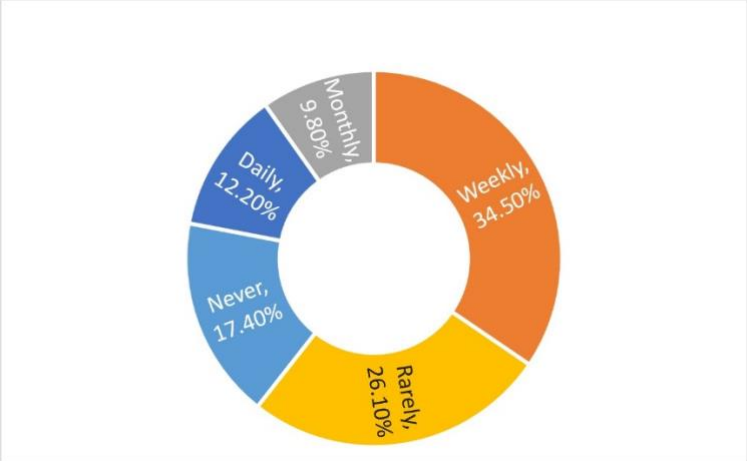


Figure 4
Usage When Interacting With Students Outside the Classroom



Language and Communication

To address our first sub-research question, "In what ways do GAI tools facilitate communication and collaboration among international students from diverse cultures and linguistic backgrounds?", participants answered six Likert-scale questions; three on communication and three on collaboration.

For communication:

- 43.9% agreed that GAI tools make it easier to communicate with peers who speak different languages, 33.1% were neutral or unsure, and 12.6% disagreed.
- 25.8% agreed that GAI tools make it harder to communicate effectively with culturally and linguistically diverse peers, 40.4% were neutral or unsure, and 34.8% disagreed.
- 41.1% agreed that GAI tools improve the quality of their interactions with peers from diverse cultural backgrounds, 45.6% were neutral or unsure, and 110.5% disagreed.

Table 2
GAI Usage for Communication

Response Option	Easier to communicate with peers who speak different languages	Harder to communicate with diverse peers	Improved quality of interactions with diverse students
Strongly Agree	10.5%	2.1%	2.8%
Agree	43.9%	23.7%	41.1%
Neutral / Don't know	33.1%	40.4%	45.6%
Disagree	8.4%	29.3%	9.1%
Strongly Disagree	4.2%	4.5%	2.4%

For collaboration:

- 46% agreed that GAI tools enhance collaboration with culturally and linguistically diverse peers, 43.9% were neutral or unsure, and 10.8% disagreed.
- 49.3% agreed that GAI tools make it easier to collaborate effectively with peers from diverse backgrounds, 43.6% were neutral, and 9.8% disagreed.
- 50.2% agreed that GAI tools help them feel more prepared to engage socially with individuals from diverse backgrounds, 36.2% were neutral, and 13.6% disagreed.

Table 3
Gai Usage for Collaboration

Response Option	Enhance collaboration with peers	Easier to collaborate effectively	Feel more prepared for social interactions
Strongly Agree	4.2%	4.5%	6.3%
Agree	41.1%	41.8%	43.9%
Neutral / Don't know	43.9%	43.9%	36.2%
Disagree	9.1%	8.0%	8.7%
Strongly Disagree	1.7%	1.8%	4.9%

Benefits and Drawbacks

For our second sub-research question, "What are the perceived benefits and drawbacks of using GAI tools for social interactions among international students?", one Likert-scale question was asked, as well as two open-ended questions.

On whether GAI improves or restricts social interactions:

- 39.4% believed GAI tools improve social interactions.
- 36.6% believe it has both positive and negative effects.
- 15.3% were unsure.

- 6.3% said it neither improved or restricted social interactions.
- 2.4% believe it obstructs or restricts social interactions.

For benefits (open-ended, categorised responses):

- 25.1%: Language Support and Translation
- 11.8%: Uncertain/No Opinion
- 11.5%: Mixed/Multiple Benefits
- 10*%: Cultural Understanding
- 9.1%: Conversation Support
- 8.0%: Confidence Building
- 6.6%: Confidence Building
- 6.3%: General Communication
- 5.6%: Practical Daily Support
- 5.2%: Learning Enhancement
- 2.8%: Negative Perspectives

For drawbacks (open-ended, categorised responses):

- 27.2%: Over-Reliance/Dependency on AI
- 22.6%: Loss of Authentic Communication
- 16.4%: Miscommunication/Errors
- 13.2%: Reduced Critical Thinking and Creativity
- 7.7%: Privacy and Integrity Concerns
- 6.3%: Mixed Views
- 3.8%: Uncertain/No Opinion
- 2.8%: No Risk/Positive Views

Table 4

Perceived Benefits and Drawbacks of GAI Tools for Social Interactions

Category	Option / Theme	% / Count
Overall Perception	Improve	39.4%
	Both Improve and Obstruct	36.6%
	Neither	6.3%
	I Don't know	15.3%
	Obstruct/Restrict	2.4%
Top 3 Risks / Drawbacks	Over-Reliance and Dependency on AI	26
	Loss of Communication and Authenticity	19
	Communication Errors and Misunderstandings	17
Top 3 Benefits	Language Support and Translation	28
	Uncertain or No Opinion	15
	Mixed or Multiple Benefits	14

Trustworthiness and Perceptions

To address the third sub-research question, "How do international students evaluate the trustworthiness of information generated by GAI tools, and how does this perception impact

their interactions with international peers?", participants answered seven Likert-scale questions.

Accuracy and scepticism:

- 32.4% trusted GAI-generated information, 47% were neutral or unsure, and 20.5% disagreed.
- 35.6% expressed scepticism, 50.2% were neutral, and 14.2% disagreed.

For trustworthiness in cultural/social contexts:

- 47.4% found GAI reliable when seeking cultural/social advice, 39.4% were neutral, 13.2% disagreed.
- 36.8% relied on GAI to understand cultural norms and behaviours, 42% were neutral, and 21.2% disagreed.
- 32.8% found it hard to trust GAI's cultural recommendations, 51.9% were neutral, and 14.6% disagreed.

Table 5

Trust/Scepticism/Reliability in Gai Information

Response Option	Trust the accuracy of GAI information	Skeptical of GAI information	GAI reliable for cultural/social advice
Strongly Agree	2.1%	3.5%	3.5%
Agree	30.3%	32.1%	43.9%
Neutral / Don't know	47.0%	50.2%	39.4%
Disagree	16.0%	13.2%	10.8%
Strongly Disagree	4.5%	1.0%	2.4%

For confidence in interactions:

- 40.4% felt GAI increased their confidence when interacting with peers from other national backgrounds, 42.2% were neutral, and 17.4% disagreed.
- 37.2% felt GAI had little to no impact on their ability to confidently initiate conversations, 44.6% were neutral, and 18.1% disagreed.

Table 6

GAI Perceptions

Response Option	Rely on GAI to understand social norms	GAI increases confidence interacting with different nationalities	GAI has little impact on starting conversations
Strongly Agree	2.5%	3.1%	5.6%
Agree	34.3%	37.3%	31.7%
Neutral / Don't know	42.0%	42.2%	44.6%
Disagree	14.1%	10.8%	14.3%
Strongly Disagree	7.1%	6.6%	3.8%

Results and Discussion

Sub-research Question 1: How Do GAI Tools Facilitate Communication and Collaboration Among International Students?

Facilitated Communication

GAI tools help overcome language barriers, with 57.8% using them for translation and 54.4% agreeing they ease communication with peers speaking different languages. Additionally, 43.9% agreed that GAI tools enhance cultural understanding and help with social media content, conversation starters, and problem-solving. These findings corroborate Chen (2023) and Johnston et al. (2024), who argued that asynchronous and text-based GAI tools foster inclusivity and enhance confidence among non-native speakers in multicultural settings.

Social Interaction Influence

A weak positive correlation ($r = 0.179$, $p > 0.05$) was observed between general ChatGPT usage and its application in international interactions, based on the full sample ($N = 287$). This suggests that although some students are highly engaged with GAI tools overall, their specific use for international interactions remains less frequent. The mean usage difference of 0.64 (General $M = 3.62$, $SD = 0.85$, Intercultural $M = 2.98$, $SD = 0.91$) highlights this trend, with students reporting weekly to monthly use in general contexts but only monthly or less in intercultural contexts. These findings are consistent with Abbas et al. (2019), who reported that digital tools can enhance social activity and communication skills, but also support Kolhar et al. (2021), who noted that overreliance on technology can reduce traditional social interactions. The nuanced responses in our study reflect this dual role of GAI in both facilitating and complicating intercultural engagement.

Cultural Understanding

GAI supports cultural engagement by helping students understand their peers' cultures (47.7%) and share their own (42.5%), aligning with Farrelly & Baker's (2023) findings. However, a mean usage gap suggests scepticism about reliability; 50.2% were sceptical or neutral about GAI-generated information, echoing concerns about bias and ethical risks (Solaiman et al., 2024). This also aligns with Chan and Hu (2023), who highlighted how AI-powered tools offer real-time suggestions to navigate cultural norms and etiquette. However, our finding that scepticism limits full adoption echoes Solaiman et al. (2024), who identified biases and misrepresentations in GAI outputs as barriers to cross-cultural understanding.

Trust in GAI Information

Trust remains cautious; 46.3% trust GAI when it aligns with their prior knowledge, while 50.2% express scepticism in unfamiliar contexts. Strategies to improve trust include transparency, training on critical assessment, and integration with clear guidelines (Johnston et al., 2024; Moorehouse et al., 2023).

Collaboration and Engagement

GAI supports collaboration, with 41% agreeing it improves interaction quality and 41.8% saying it eases collaboration. High-usage students demonstrated stronger collaboration skills,

while low-usage students could benefit from targeted support and peer mentoring. This mirrors Farrelly and Baker's (2023) findings that targeted support is crucial to bridge gaps between digitally fluent and hesitant students in multicultural environments.

Conclusion

GAI effectively facilitates language translation and fosters cultural understanding, though scepticism limits broader adoption. High-usage students exhibit stronger engagement, indicating opportunities to develop trust and support among hesitant users.

Sub-research Question 2: What Are the Perceived Benefits and Drawbacks of GAI Tools for Social Interactions?

Benefits

39.4% believe GAI improves social interactions, while 36.6% see both benefits and risks. Students most often cited language support (25.1%), cultural understanding (10.8%), conversation support (9.1%), confidence-building (8%), and collaboration (6.6%) as key benefits. This aligns with Wang and Dang (2024), Open Education Manitoba (2024), and Chukwuere (2024), who documented language support, brainstorming, and confidence-building as primary benefits. This fills the gap in the literature on "first-hand" evidence of intercultural facilitation.

Drawbacks

Concerns included over-reliance on AI (27.2%), reduced authentic interaction (22.6%), miscommunication (16.4%), and diminished activity (13.2%). Privacy and ethical concerns (7.7%) and mixed or cautious views (6.3%) were also noted. These support Chan and Hu's (2023) and Modern Pathology's (2024) findings on dependency, loss of skills, and data risks. These findings are also consistent with Van Heerden & Schuengel (2023), who warned of biased AI responses undermining intercultural understanding.

Sub-research Question 3: How Do International Students Evaluate the Trustworthiness of GAI Tools?

Facilitated Communication and Social Interactions

Students trust GAI more when information aligns with their prior experience, but scepticism persists in new contexts (50.2% neutral or sceptical). While 54.4% said GAI eases communication and 39.4% said it improves social interactions, trust remains conditional. This dual effect of GAI on social interactions echoes Abbas et al. (2019), who highlighted its role in building relationships, and Kolhar et al. (2021), who cautioned about diminished face-to-face engagement.

Cultural Understanding

GAI enhances cultural understanding (47.7%) and self-expression (42.5%), though trust gaps persist. Building transparency and providing guidelines could encourage greater adoption for cultural purposes. These also support Chan and Hu's (2023) finding that GAI assists students

in navigating cultural norms, as well as Solaiman et al. (2024), who underscored the risks of bias in cross-cultural contexts.

Trust in Information

Trust is higher for cultural/social contexts than for general accuracy, indicating that students value relevance over universal reliability. This supports Amoozadeh et al.'s (2024) and Moorehouse et al.'s (2023) recommendations for user education and clear academic guidelines. This pattern aligns with Moorehouse et al. (2023), who found that trust is shaped by clear academic guidelines, and Johnston et al. (2024), who reported that confidence levels influence trust in GAI outputs.

Collaboration and Engagement

GAI facilitates collaboration (41.8%), particularly for high-usage students. Tailored training and mentoring can engage low-usage students more effectively. This mirrors Farrelly and Baker's (2023) observation that bridging the gap between digitally fluent and hesitant students is essential for effective collaboration in diverse academic teams.

Summary of Discussion

The findings highlight students' balanced approach to GAI tools: recognising benefits in translation, confidence building, and cultural exchange, while maintaining healthy scepticism. Students trust GAI more when it aligns with their experience, indicating mature, cautious adoption. These results enrich discourse on technology use, trust, and intercultural communication by illustrating how students integrate GAI tools into social interactions while navigating its limitations.

Conclusion

This study set out to investigate how international students use GAI tools in cross-cultural contexts outside of the classroom. The findings highlight GAI's role in facilitating language translation (57.8%), easing communication with peers from different linguistic backgrounds (54.4.%), improving interaction quality (41%), and enhancing cultural understanding (47.4%) and sharing (42.5%). However, students expressed cautious optimism, with 50.2% showing neutrality or scepticism about the reliability of information generated by GAI tools, recognising both benefits and drawbacks depending on the context and the user's familiarity with the technology.

This research contributes a much-needed student perspective to the existing literature, providing first-hand evidence of how students perceive and use GAI tools in social and cultural settings. Overall, students demonstrate a balanced approach: valuing GAI as a tool for communication and intercultural exchange while maintaining a critical awareness of its risks, such as overdependence, reduced authenticity in interactions, and privacy concerns.

The study's limitations include its single-institution sample and exploratory nature, which limit the generalisability of the findings. Future research should consider multi-institutional and longitudinal studies, as well as qualitative investigations, to explore motivations and behaviours in greater depth. Examining institutional policies, support systems, and qualitative

student experiences would also provide valuable insights into effective implementation of GAI tools in higher education.

The findings underscore the importance of institutional support and training, particularly in building trust, addressing bias, and promoting effective use of GAI tools for cross-cultural communication. Universities are encouraged to offer digital literacy training, peer-led workshops, and integrate GAI tools into cultural integration programs to fully realise their potential as a supplement to real-world social interaction.

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