

A Study on Awareness of Using Generative AI Tools among Undergraduates in the State Universities of Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Generative Artificial Intelligence tools such as ChatGPT, Grammarly, and Google Gemini are rapidly transforming higher education, yet their adoption in developing contexts like Sri Lanka remains underexplored. While global studies emphasize their potential to enhance learning, limited empirical evidence exists on Sri Lankan undergraduates' awareness and ethical understanding of these tools, creating a critical policy and curriculum gap. The study focuses on four independent variables: Attitude, Peer Influence, Perceived Usefulness, and Technological Readiness, based on the Technology Acceptance Model, Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology, and Technology Readiness Index. A deductive explanatory research design was used, and data were collected through a structured questionnaire from 384 undergraduates in state universities using quota sampling. Findings reveal a significant positive relationship between all four variables and students' awareness of GAI tools. Technological Readiness and Perceived Usefulness emerged as the strongest predictors, underscoring the role of digital competence and perceived academic benefits in shaping awareness. However, despite frequent usage, only a limited proportion of students demonstrated strong ethical understanding, revealing a gap between adoption and responsible practice. The study concludes that universities should integrate AI literacy and ethical guidelines into curricula and that a national AI literacy strategy is needed to standardize responsible usage. Collaboration among universities, educators, and student-led initiatives is also essential to promote awareness, accessibility, and ethical engagement. By offering localized evidence, this research fills a theoretical and empirical gap in Sri Lanka, providing practical guidance for policymakers and educators in fostering responsible AI adoption in higher education.

Keywords: attitude, generative AI tools, peer influence, perceived usefulness, technological readiness