

THE IMPACT OF AI-ASSISTED TOOLS ON POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS' ASSIGNMENT PREPARATION

V. Lindakumbura ^{1*}, S.D.K. Wijesundera¹

¹Department of Education, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka

**lindakumbura@gmail.com*

Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools have emerged as a disruptive force in the new normal condition, significantly transforming various aspects of higher education. This study aims to explore the impact of AI-assisted tools in assignment writing in higher education, focusing on a state university. The main objectives were to identify the AI tools used for assignment preparation, understand how these tools were applied in writing assignments, find out the students' and teachers' views on using AI tools for assignment writing, and find out implications for assessment practices in postgraduate studies. A case study approach was adopted, focusing on postgraduate students from a state university. A sample of 100 postgraduate students was selected from a single program in two consecutive years, and 15 lecturers were selected. Data were gathered through questionnaires, document analysis, and semi-structured interviews. The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive methods, and the qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The study's findings emphasized that the primary purpose of assignments is to evaluate how far students have acquired the learning outcomes of a specific course, foster self-learning, and offer practical opportunities to apply theoretical concepts. At the university, students were assessed through written assignments, presentations, and videos. In preparation for these tasks, students use AI-assisted tools such as writing and editing tools, research and note-taking tools, presentation and visualization tools, and creative tools (ChatGPT, Quill Bot, Grammarly, Jenny AI, Gemini, Tutor AI, Microsoft Copilot, Canva). The findings of the study revealed that 93% of students were using AI-assisted tools in writing assignments and preparing presentations and videos. The students were of the view that the use of AI-assisted tools had shown positive effects, enabling them to collect information efficiently, demonstrate language fluency with grammar checkers, and synthesize or paraphrase content with ease. Moreover, they believed that assignment writing is tedious and time-wasting. As a result, they depend on AI-assisted tools for assignment preparation. However, 12 lecturers expressed concerns about the negative impact on students' critical thinking and creativity. Therefore, the lecturers faced critical issues in evaluating those assignments. In conclusion, while AI tools can enhance efficiency, improper usage can hinder students' intellectual development. Therefore, lecturers should try to evaluate Higher Order Thinking (HOT) skills when designing assignments. Students should be advised on the appropriate ethical use of AI-assisted tools, and AI detectors should be introduced to the university to mitigate the negative impact on fair and accurate assessment of students' work.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, AI detectors, AI-assisted tools