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CHATGPT OR THE LECTURER: EXPLORING SILENT AI RELIANCE AND LECTURER-STUDENT INTERACTION IN CLASSROOM LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

The rapid adoption of ChatGPT in higher education has introduced new opportunities for learning while also raising concerns about students' increasing reliance on artificial intelligence (AI). One emerging concern is "silent reliance," referring to students' use of ChatGPT to obtain immediate answers or explanations during learning without actively seeking assistance or clarification from their lecturers. Although ChatGPT can provide convenient and immediate learning support and may reduce students' hesitation to ask questions publicly, excessive reliance on AI may potentially weaken direct lecturer–student interaction and reduce opportunities for meaningful classroom communication. This conceptual paper discusses the potential implications of silent reliance on ChatGPT for classroom engagement, critical thinking, student participation, and the feedback process between lecturers and students. Drawing on previous literature on generative AI, student reliance, engagement, and the role of human interaction in education, the paper argues that over-reliance on AI may limit opportunities for lecturers to identify students' misconceptions, understand their learning difficulties, and provide personalised guidance. The discussion further highlights the importance of maintaining a balance between technological assistance and human interaction in higher education. Rather than replacing lecturer–student communication, ChatGPT should be positioned as a supplementary learning tool that supports rather than replaces human teaching and guidance. The paper concludes by proposing practical considerations for educators to encourage active classroom participation, meaningful lecturer–student interaction, and responsible integration of ChatGPT into teaching and learning.

Keywords: *ChatGPT, Silent Reliance, Lecturer-Student Interaction, Classroom Engagement, AI in Education*

Introduction

In recent years, artificial intelligence (AI) tools have increasingly changed how university students learn. Generative AI applications, particularly ChatGPT, are now widely used in higher education because they can provide immediate answers, explanations, ideas, summaries, and feedback (Cotton et al., 2024; Lo et al., 2024). The increasing accessibility of ChatGPT has influenced how students seek information and academic support. Recent evidence from Malaysian higher education indicates that students use ChatGPT as a supplementary learning tool, particularly for understanding difficult topics and supporting academic tasks, although concerns regarding accuracy and responsible use remain (Saari et al., 2025). Unlike traditional search engines, ChatGPT allows students to ask questions naturally and

receive conversational responses, making it an attractive source of immediate learning support (Grassini, 2023).

However, the convenience of obtaining immediate answers may also encourage a new classroom behaviour that this paper refers to as "silent reliance on ChatGPT." Silent reliance describes situations where students privately use ChatGPT to obtain answers or explanations when they experience difficulties during learning, rather than openly asking their lecturers for clarification. Students may choose this approach because ChatGPT provides a private and convenient environment in which they can ask questions without feeling embarrassed or judged. It also allows them to obtain assistance without interrupting the flow of a lecture. Research on students' perceptions and reliance on generative AI indicates that students value the accessibility and learning support provided by ChatGPT, although concerns about its appropriate use also remain (Chan & Hu, 2023; Stojanov et al., 2024).

Although ChatGPT can provide useful and immediate support, excessive or uncritical reliance on AI may affect students' active participation in classroom learning. Effective learning involves more than obtaining correct answers; it also requires students to ask questions, explain their reasoning, receive feedback, and engage in meaningful discussion. A systematic review by Lo et al. (2024) found that ChatGPT can have both positive and negative implications for student engagement, depending on how it is integrated into the learning process. Therefore, the issue is not simply whether students use ChatGPT, but how, why, and to what extent they rely on it.

Lecturer–student interaction remains an important part of effective learning. Through direct interaction, lecturers can identify students' misconceptions, clarify difficult concepts, provide relevant examples, and respond to individual learning needs. From a broader educational perspective, teaching involves communication and guidance rather than simply providing information (Heimans et al., 2023). Feedback is also essential because it helps students understand their current learning, identify areas for improvement, and determine how to progress (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). When students communicate their difficulties directly, lecturers have greater opportunities to provide feedback based on their actual understanding and classroom responses.

The challenge, therefore, is not whether ChatGPT should be accepted or rejected in education, but how its use can be balanced with meaningful human interaction. When used appropriately, ChatGPT can complement classroom learning by providing additional explanations and learning support. However, when students rely on AI instead of asking questions or seeking guidance from lecturers, opportunities for meaningful communication and feedback may potentially be reduced. This issue is particularly relevant in Malaysian higher education, where students are increasingly exposed to generative AI tools for learning support (Cheah & Wong, 2025; Saari et al., 2025).

Although previous research has examined the benefits, challenges, engagement, and reliance associated with ChatGPT, less attention has been given to the potential tension between students' private reliance on AI and their direct interaction with lecturers. This conceptual paper therefore explores silent reliance on ChatGPT in relation to lecturer–student interaction in classroom learning. It discusses the potential implications of silent AI reliance for classroom participation, student engagement, critical thinking, understanding, and the feedback process. Ultimately, the paper argues that ChatGPT should function as a supplementary learning tool rather than a substitute for lecturer–student interaction, allowing AI to support learning while preserving the human communication and guidance that remain important in higher education.

ChatGPT and Lecturer–Student Interaction as Different Forms of Learning Support

ChatGPT offers immediate, accessible, and private assistance, allowing students to obtain explanations or answers without having to interrupt the lesson or ask questions publicly. This can be particularly useful for students who feel hesitant or uncomfortable asking questions in front of their classmates. However, learning involves more than obtaining immediate answers. Students also need opportunities to explain their thinking, discuss ideas, clarify misunderstandings, and receive feedback that is relevant to their individual learning needs.

In contrast, lecturer–student interaction provides a more contextual and human-centred form of learning support. Through direct communication, lecturers can observe students' responses, identify misconceptions, adjust their explanations, and provide guidance based on the students' level of understanding. Such interaction also creates opportunities for discussion, questioning, and active participation. Therefore, comparing silent reliance on ChatGPT with lecturer–student interaction can help highlight the different strengths and limitations of AI-based and human-based learning support.

The comparison below focuses on several aspects that are closely related to classroom learning, namely accessibility, questioning, feedback, understanding, critical thinking, engagement, and the learning relationship. The purpose is not to determine whether ChatGPT or lecturers are superior, but to demonstrate how the two forms of support differ and why ChatGPT may be more appropriately used as a complementary tool alongside meaningful lecturer–student interaction.

Comparison between Silent Reliance on ChatGPT and Lecturer–Student Interaction

Although ChatGPT provides students with fast and convenient learning support, lecturer–student interaction offers a different form of learning experience through direct communication, personalised guidance, and feedback. Therefore, it is important to consider the differences between relying on ChatGPT privately and interacting directly with lecturers during classroom learning. The comparison focuses on several aspects, including accessibility, questioning, feedback, understanding, critical thinking, classroom engagement, and the learning relationship. These dimensions provide a basis for examining how silent reliance on ChatGPT differs from direct lecturer–student interaction. Table 1 summarises these differences and highlights the distinct roles of AI-based support and human interaction in the learning process. The comparison also illustrates why ChatGPT may be more appropriately viewed as a complementary learning tool rather than a replacement for lecturer–student interaction.

Table 1: Comparison Between Silent Reliance on ChatGPT and Lecturer–Student Interaction

Aspect	Silent Reliance on ChatGPT	Lecturer–Student Interaction
Accessibility	Immediate and convenient	Requires direct interaction
Questioning	Private and potentially less intimidating	Open communication and discussion
Feedback	Fast and AI-generated	Personalised and contextual
Understanding	Depends on the quality of the prompt and AI response	Lecturer can identify misconceptions
Critical thinking	May encourage answer-seeking if used uncritically	Encourages questioning and reasoning
Engagement	May reduce visible classroom participation when overused	Promotes active classroom participation
Learning relationship	Limited human connection	Builds communication and lecturer–student relationship

The comparison indicates that ChatGPT and lecturers serve complementary rather than identical roles in the learning process. ChatGPT is valuable for providing immediate and private assistance, while lecturers offer contextual understanding, personalised feedback, and direct human interaction. Therefore, the concern arises when students rely on ChatGPT in a way that reduces their willingness to communicate with lecturers. A balanced approach would allow students to benefit from the convenience of AI while continuing to seek clarification, participate in discussions, and engage directly with their lecturers.

Potential Implications of Silent Reliance on ChatGPT

While ChatGPT can provide useful and immediate learning support, the way students use the technology may influence their classroom learning experience. Silent reliance becomes a concern when students consistently turn to ChatGPT for answers or explanations without communicating their difficulties with their lecturers. Such behaviour may provide short-term convenience, but it may also reduce opportunities for direct questioning, discussion, personalised feedback, and active participation. Therefore, it is important to consider both the potential benefits and concerns associated with students' reliance on ChatGPT in classroom learning. Table 2 summarises these potential implications across several important areas of learning.

Table 2: Potential Implications of Silent Reliance on ChatGPT in Classroom Learning

Area	Potential Benefit	Potential Concern
Learning support	Immediate explanations and assistance	May encourage dependence on AI
Questioning	Students can ask questions privately	May reduce direct questioning of lecturers
Engagement	Convenient access to learning assistance	May reduce classroom participation when overused
Critical thinking	Can provide ideas and different perspectives	Students may accept answers without evaluation
Feedback	Provides immediate responses	May lack classroom-specific context
Understanding	Offers additional explanations	Students' misconceptions may remain unnoticed
Learning autonomy	Allows students to seek help independently	Excessive reliance may reduce independent thinking

The comparison shows that the use of ChatGPT is not necessarily negative. Its immediate accessibility can help students overcome learning difficulties and obtain additional explanations. However, the concern arises when convenience becomes excessive reliance, particularly when students use ChatGPT instead of communicating with their lecturers. In such situations, lecturers may have fewer opportunities to identify students' misconceptions, provide personalised feedback, and encourage discussion.

Therefore, the main issue is not the use of ChatGPT itself, but how and when students use it. When used appropriately, ChatGPT can complement classroom learning. However, when it replaces questioning, discussion, and direct lecturer support, it may potentially weaken important elements of active learning. This highlights the need for a balanced approach in which AI provides additional support while lecturer–student interaction remains an essential part of the learning process.

Conclusion

The increasing use of ChatGPT in higher education provides students with fast and accessible learning support, but it may also encourage silent reliance, where students seek answers from AI instead of communicating their difficulties with lecturers. While ChatGPT can support learning, excessive or uncritical reliance may reduce opportunities for questioning, discussion, feedback, and active classroom participation. Therefore, ChatGPT should be used as a supplementary learning tool rather than a replacement for lecturer–student interaction. Lecturers provide guidance, contextualised explanations, personalised feedback, and human communication that AI cannot fully replace. Higher education should therefore promote a balanced approach in which ChatGPT supports learning while students continue to engage actively with their lecturers. Ultimately, the effective integration of AI depends on combining the convenience of technology with the essential human elements of teaching and learning.

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