

Generative AI in Interdisciplinary Student Collaboration: Insights from Higher Education Students

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Summary

This study explored the role of generative artificial intelligence (AI) in interdisciplinary collaboration among higher education students and examined students' perceptions of AI and its connection to interdisciplinary teamwork. The analysis builds on interview data collected as part of a broader project investigating students' experiences with interdisciplinarity and generative AI. Overall, the results show that generative AI has become an important tool in students' academic lives. Students use AI in a variety of ways, including generating ideas when starting assignments, improving their understanding of concepts from unfamiliar disciplines, and completing repetitive or time-consuming tasks. In interdisciplinary settings, AI can function as a support mechanism that helps students bridge disciplinary boundaries and engage with knowledge outside their own field of expertise. At the same time, students express considerable caution regarding the technology. While many acknowledge its usefulness, they also worry that excessive reliance on AI may reduce independent thinking and weaken opportunities for deeper learning. Several participants raised concerns that students may begin to delegate parts of the intellectual work to technology rather than engaging fully with the critical reflection and knowledge integration that interdisciplinary collaboration requires. Consequently, AI is perceived as both an opportunity and a challenge within higher education.

The analysis also revealed notable disciplinary differences in attitudes toward AI. Students from science and technology disciplines generally described AI as a practical and effective tool for tasks such as programming, troubleshooting, and problem-solving. In contrast, students from the social sciences and humanities were more skeptical of AI's ability to handle complex questions that require nuanced judgment, contextual understanding, and multiple perspectives. These differences can influence interdisciplinary group work, particularly when students hold diverging expectations about how AI should be used.

Several students highlighted potential tensions that may arise in interdisciplinary teams. If some group members view AI-generated responses as authoritative or use AI as a shortcut, this can reduce academic discussion and create disagreements about the quality and validity of knowledge. Furthermore, interdisciplinary groups may face challenges when evaluating AI-generated information that falls outside their existing areas of expertise. Without sufficient disciplinary knowledge, it can be difficult to assess the accuracy and reliability of AI outputs.

In conclusion, generative AI has significant potential to support interdisciplinary collaboration in higher education, but its value depends on how it is used. The technology can facilitate access to knowledge and improve efficiency, yet it also raises important questions about learning, critical thinking, and knowledge quality. Further research is needed to explore how higher education institutions can develop guidelines, training, and assessment practices that promote ethical and academically sound use of generative AI in interdisciplinary learning environments.