# THE CHALLENGES THAT ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE BRINGS TO AUSTRALIAN TRANSNATIONAL PROGRAMS

Kathy Michael
*Victoria University*
AUSTRALIA

## Abstract

As offshore delivery of Australian degrees continues to grow, as do the challenges facing universities with the growing use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies, such as Chat GPT, InstructGPT, Chatbox, DeepSeek, Duobao, Poe among others.

This paper explores the multifaceted impact of AI on an Australian university's transnational education (TNE) programs delivered in China. In particular the paper will look at the challenges that AI presents to academics and students involved with offshore programs with a focus on integrity and maintaining academic standards.

Over a period of 12 months, information on student and staff experience with AI was gathered through a combination of focus group discussions and entries in a critical reflective journal. The study further contributes to the rapid growing literature surrounding AI in university settings with a particular focus on transnational programs, a dimension that has received little attention to date. The discussion in the paper will offer strategies to best manage the use of AI without compromising the pedagogy of TNE programs and the relationships of offshore partnerships.

*Key Words: Artificial Intelligence (AI), Australian Transnational Programs, Higher Education, Reflective Practices*

## Introduction

Transnational Education (TNE) refers to institutions crossing borders to provide educational experiences to students located in a country different from the awarding institution. Given TNE course offerings are expected to be a key growth area for Australia, it is appropriate that the concept of AI within the TNE landscape be examined (Australian Government Department of Education, n.d.).

This study will look at three TNE programs delivered by an Australian university in different regions of China, namely, Beijing, Shenyang and Kaifeng. All three programs operate using similar models, allowing Chinese

students to pursue a business course directly from China with the option for students to transfer to Australia in their second year and complete their course with the awarding university.

The paper will refer to these students as Offshore International Students (OIS). Likewise, the academics teaching into these programs in China will be referred to as International Local Staff (ILS). Whilst these OIS are required to follow the same curriculum and policies of the awarding university, there are always some slight alterations to ensure that OIS get the most from their Australian degree. The courses are delivered and assessed in English but where appropriate, curriculum development can be adapted to cultural differences in order to bring relevance to the international student audience. In line with Australia's Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), the federal regulator of Australian universities, assessment is moderated by staff from the awarding university.

The popularity of AI tools has inevitably increased to users, offering a range of capabilities from generating codes, images, videos and much more. Whether we like AI or not it is here to stay and it is growing profusely across all aspects of life, in particular the education sector. Whilst AI has dealt the education system with complexity and uncertainty, it has also filled us with excitement with what can be achieved with AI if used correctly in the appropriate landscape.

The increase global hype of how Generated AI has impacted the higher education (HE) sector has resulted in a spike of research (Baidoo-Anu & Ansah, 2023; Hu, 2023; Bearman et al., 2023; Lee et al., 2024; Jin et al., 2025), yet very little on examining and or exploring the concept of AI in TNE programs. Therefore, this paper will gather feedback from those directly involved with TNE programs primarily staff and students.

## Research Design

This paper offers a critical reflection from the role of Program TNE Coordinator for China coordinating various degree joint programs across China within the Business faculty, namely Accounting, Banking and Finance and International trade.

Reflective research using focus groups has shown to offer an insightful approach to qualitative research inquiry (Chai et al., 2024). Documenting an educators experience provides an important role with action research. Action research meaning the educator or researcher is participating in the matter that is being researched in this case, navigating the confronting challenges of technologies like AI (Simmons et al., 2021).

The study sought to draw on qualitative data to understand how OIS engage with AI tools and their comprehension of such tools in their studies. Likewise,

information was also collected from ILS assessing the challenges they faced with AI at HE. This information was collected using the following instruments: (i) qualitative data collected from focus group discussions and through survey questions; (ii) analytical data collected through a critical reflective journal; (iii) firsthand observations and direct involvement with reported AI cases; and (iv) email correspondence and WeChat messages with staff and students.

A total of thirty OIS and six ILS volunteers were recruited across the three China TNE Sites. Communication was maintained via zoom meetings, the occasional face to face meetings through site visits, emails, and WeChat, a social network platform used in China. Given that the focus of the study is on TNE programs and recognising that quality assurance for such programs requires the awarding university to moderate assessed work, it was fitting to include local Melbourne Staff from the awarding university in the focus groups.

## Definition of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Technology has long played a role in enhancing education, and with it always came challenges, but nothing like the wave of obstacles that the launch of ChatGPT by OpenAI introduced to us in November of 2022. As highlighted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 2021), understanding this changing landscape, particularly within a TNE environment, requires us to examine the correlation between technology, language, and pedagogy.

The term AI is very broad and covers an array of technologies. At its core AI is the intersection of a machine and a human. It refers to machines having the ability to take on human intelligence, allowing them to complete human tasks such as problem solving, reasoning, making decisions, and much more. In order to have a grasp on what we are dealing with globally, it is vital that we establish what artificial intelligence (AI) means in today's educational setting. As highlighted by Schuett (2023), having a globally accepted technical and legal definition of AI would help streamline regulation, research, and educational policies.

The concept AI dates back to the 1950's, when Alan Turing had predicted that computers would at some point become thinking machines. This led to the creation of the "Turing Test", a significant tool well-known for determining whether the cognition of a machine was comparable to that of a human being. The term "artificial intelligence" was introduced by John McCarthy in 1955 as the science and engineering of making intelligent machines (Cordeschi, 2007). Copeland (2023) further referenced AI as the capacity of a computer or a computer-controlled robot which could execute tasks typically requiring human intelligence. Lastly, Kaplan & Haenlein (2019) define AI as "a system's ability to correctly interpret external data, to learn from such data, and to use those learnings to achieve specific goals and tasks through flexible adaptation" (p. 5).

Irrespective of the definition applied a consistent similarity emerges, that AI is the ability of a computer to perform various intelligent task(s).

# Findings

## Academic Integrity of Assessment

Academic integrity has been defined as a commitment to the values of "honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and courage" in academic work (International Center for Academic Integrity, 2021, p. 4). It is difficult to engage in meaningful research or discussion about AI in HE without addressing the issues it brings to academic integrity. Only by addressing the ethical concerns that accompany the integration and spread of AI within HE are we then able to propose solutions and policies to regulate the way it is used.

Notably since the COVID -19 pandemic, when teaching was propelled to online platforms, academics have generally found a decrease in academic integrity adherence (Eshet, 2024). The rise of AI generated content from tools like ChatGPT, amongst other AI tools, has added another layer of complexity to academic integrity (Elkhatat et al., 2023). Until recently, academic integrity to most of us working in the HE sectors represented either a case of plagiarism, contract cheating, and or collusion found in student work (Newton, 2018; Parkinson et al., 2022). The integrity matters we faced predating the development of AI tools seemed much simpler to deal with.

AI tools have unlocked for students a passage to customised learning but seemingly have also facilitated academic dishonesty. Studies have reported students leveraging AI tools to automate assignment completion, avoid plagiarism detection, prepare presentations, and other shortcuts (Nguyen & Goto, 2024). Furthermore, the ease of access to online paraphrasing tools provides students, particularly OIS, with the opportunity to submit work they have not directly prepared themselves, placing them at risk of not achieving the likely learning outcomes.

The unsettling aspect of all this remains that information collected from OIS for this study suggest they have failed to see how paraphrasing tools can also lead to a breach of academic integrity. This informs me as an educator that despite students having to complete compulsory academic integrity models as part of their first-year studies, they are still not sure how the use of AI paraphrasing tools can lead to a breach of academic integrity. This poses numerous questions such as, are the academic integrity models fulfilling what they were set out to achieve, and are staff (both Melbourne and ILS) explaining the concept and impact of AI clearly to OIS?

When OIS students were asked what they thought a breach involving the use of AI looked like, there was unified consensus that instructing AI to complete an entire assignment piece would be considered an academic breach. However, when asked, "if a student writes their assessment piece entirely in Chinese and then translates the entire piece into English using an AI tool and submits the work as their own, would this constitute an academic breach?" there was complete silence. Furthermore, when OIS were asked whether they have viewed or know what the academic integrity policy of the awarded university contains, the response was "No". One student replied, *"one subject outline indicated that we can use AI so I assumed the same with all subjects" (*Student 14).

Several OIS from one of the China sites completing a second-year unit in a business degree were asked to explain the use of AI in a group assignment after Turnitin AI detector had reported a high AI percentage. The student responses were as follows:

> *Subsequently, I combined these data for analysis, and after drawing preliminary conclusions, I used AI to assist in rewriting to make the article more professional and academic.* (Student 11)

> *When I used AI to assist with my assessment 3, I integrated the introductions and main bodies written by other members into one file, and asked AI to help me summarize a conclusion and recommendation.* (Student 8)

> *We did not use AI to create arguments or alter analytical substance. We used Doubao and our goal was simply to achieve clearer academic expression.* (Student 2)

The information collated on OIS's understanding of academic integrity signifies more education is required to enhance and support student education on AI and its appropriate use. This feedback led to guidelines prepared requesting Melbourne unit convenors to ensure their unit spaces on the Learning Management System (LMS) had clear instructions on the following: (i) *Use of AI tools*, specifying whether OIS can use AI in their assessment. If allowed, specify how and when AI is appropriate to use; (ii) *Translation tools*. Given feedback from focus groups pointed to many OIS using AI based translation tools, it is crucial to point out to students the level of acceptance and the requirement to acknowledge the use of AI; and (iii) *Academic Integrity Policy*. Provide the link to the academic integrity policy reinforcing that some responsibility needs to be taken up by the student to understand what can and can't be done. Remember that policies are changing at high speed.

## How Offshore International Students Engage with Artificial Intelligence

Throughout the focus group conversations, OIS spoke very openly about their views and use of AI tools in their learning journey. They all admitted to using AI tools to various degrees to assist them with the completion of assessment. It became apparent that AI has become embedded into students' daily lives and increasingly integrated into their academic work. In response to questions about how they use AI in their studies, the below three areas were revealed:

### 1. Improve Writing Skills

AI powered writing tools such as Poe and DeepSeek are used by OIS to help structure and rephrase sentences, polish up language, and check grammar and tone.

> *We used DeepSeek to check the grammar in our article and modify our language, so it reads more smoothly (*Student 4)

> *As non-native English speakers, we want to achieve higher scores by using more formal and professional language. Therefore, we employed DeepSeek to check for grammar errors and to improve the quality of our writing (*Student 9)

### 2. Translation Support

Noting that these OIS are studying in a second language, it would be appropriate to require support translating terms, unit content, and or assessment requirements.

> *some sentences are borrowed from translation software (*Student 7)

> *We also used translation software Netease Yodao Translator to help us understand some complex parts (*Student 2)

### 3. Study Aid

Similar to using translators, some students were found to use DeepSeek to have content explained to them differently so that they were better able to understand. This allowed students to resolve their queries instantly without needing to schedule appointments with their tutors for assistance. This also demonstrates how AI is personalising learning for OIS.

*If I email my teachers in Australia or China, they take a couple of days to respond but DeepSeek can help me straight instantly with my questions (*Student 1)

*We used DeepSeek to help us research the assessment topic. We entered the question, "What is the importance of sustainability reporting?" In the AI's response, we found an aspect that we hadn't considered (*Student 21)

*In order to enhance efficiency and reduce workload, we used Poe and DeepSeek to search for references. We also asked the system to give us the references using the Harvard format (*Student 4)

*The reason we use AI is simply to increase efficiency and shorten the completion time of tasks (*Student 15)

## Challenges in Accurately Detecting AI

As academics, our concerns for the misuse of AI and the lack of reliable resources to detect AI are not unfounded. There is a range of AI detectors available (Turnitin's AI writing detector, OpenAI's AI text classifier, AI Writing Check, GPTZero, Copyleaks, GPT Radar, Originality.ai, Catch GPT, Winston, Content at Scale, amongst others); however, the accuracy rates have been reported to be unreliable.

Programs such as Turnitin AI were initially embraced as a deterrent to the problems created by AI (Ismail & Jabri, 2023; Elkhatat et al., 2023) but research continues to demonstrate the shortcomings of Turnitin AI (Chaka, 2023; Weber-Wulff et al., 2023) therefore forcing universities to question the use of this and other AI detector tools. Turnitin AI amongst other similar products have been reported to give false readings and, in some cases, unfairly target non-native English speakers (Fowler, 2023; Klee, 2023). It has been further reported that AI detectors are more likely to label text written by non-native English speakers as AI written work (Myers, 2023). The term "nonnative English speakers" generally refers to people who have learnt English as a second language, hence the OIS used in this study would differently be captured under this heading.

Despite the shortcomings of AI detectors, the absence of a more effective solution means that most universities will keep using them in hopes of deterring students and maintaining some level of academic integrity. In light of the shortfalls, universities should consider a more holistic approach when dealing with reported AI academic integrity cases. Simultaneously, effort should be directed to universities to look at redeveloping assessment.

At present the awarding university of the three TNE programs referenced in this study are taking an educative approach to AI identified via detector tools. The

shortcomings of the AI detection tools have become known to students, in particular to OIS, and they have not held back in using it as an argument when they are asked to please explain the AI detected percentage in their assessment submissions. The group leader of an assessment (Student 17) replied with the following, when asked to explain to staff how AI was used within the group project, *"…AI is bias towards students like us who have a second language English. We didn't use AI incorrectly…"*

International local staff opinions on AI detection tools were mixed. Whilst staff thought it would be a good prompt to start discussions with OIS, they also shared concerns about their accuracy. ILS also expressed the time required to look into high AI reported cases. Some classes in the TNE programs are made up of 400 plus students, so you can appreciate the concern that echoes through staff. Some other comments put forward by ILS included:

> *Yes, I think it is ok to have the Turnitin AI detector there as a deterrence*" (Staff 2)
>
> *Everyone, including the students know the detectors are bias against non-natives so I think they are not going to work and waste time* (Staff 7)
>
> *Yes, I feel it would be a deterrence, but it is a lot of work to look at every high AI especially when we know it is most likely due to translation* (Staff 6)

It should be pointed out that in almost all cases of AI detection and breaches where OIS were required to explain the AI detected, it was referred from the participants as a case of translation, checking English proficiency, and/or correcting grammatical errors.

## Challenges with Regulation / Policies / Strategies

As pointed out in the previous section, academic integrity is a cornerstone of HE, and without it there would be no credibility to universities. The principles of academic integrity need to be embedded into institutional policies to promote intellectual growth. Regardless of the benefits associated with AI in education, universities have moved fast to regulate the way AI is used within an academic setting. We need to be mindful that these regulations /policies will continue to evolve as universities better understand how these platforms work and the impact they have on academic integrity.

For instance, the Pro-Vice Chancellor of the University of Cambridge stated the need to recognise ChatGPT rather than not ban it (Olsson, 2023). Along the same thoughts, in 2025 the website of the university indicates that AI is not banned, but students need to be mindful how and where it can be used. Similarly, The University of Oxford also makes no mention of AI being banned

but rather encourages the use of AI as part of the learning process and also points out that "…in some instances academic staff, departments and colleges may give more detailed guidance on how they expect AI tools to be used (or not used)…." (University of Oxford, 2025).

Australia's TEQSA, in their ongoing work to carry out and regulate academic standards across Australian institutions, has reminded students to exercise caution in their use of AI in order to ensure that engagement with any AI tools aligns with university policies and academic integrity guidelines (Australian Government TEQSA, 2024).

In 2023, TEQSA further commissioned a document to support university faculties in evaluating the influence which AI has had on assessment practices. The document was intended to offer expert insights on how and why assessment strategies may need to change in this fast-evolving AI educational setting (Lodge et al., 2023). TEQSA has also prepared a document summarising Australian institutional responses to the use of Generative AI (Australian Government TEQSA, 2023). However, given the rapid updates to policies, for the most accurate and up to date information on what each institute is doing with AI it would be recommended to visit each institute's official website.

Some Australian universities have taken a similar approach. Victoria University (2025) outlines the following in a section of its academic integrity webpage entitled *"*Student Guidelines for using text generating tools in assessments": "In your studies with Victoria University (VU), you may find that some assessment tasks explicitly ask you to use such tools, whereas some other assessment tasks will explicitly ask you to not use them*… "*

The University of Melbourne, Australia further outlines their policy as, *"…if a student submits work created and /or significantly modified by AI tools for assessment as if it was their own, then this may constitute academic misconduct and will be subject to the usual academic misconduct procedures of the University"* (n.d.)

Noting that policies of the awarding university will roll out to any established TNE programs. OIS need to be mindful of the policies their awarding university has established around the use of AI. Using AI maybe restricted, banned, and or in some cases compulsory. Most universities have taken a general view on AI policy, advising students that it will depend on the individual units they are enrolled in. It is not difficult to see why students are confused. Student 6, from the focus group reported just that: *"…it is hard to know what is required from us and we are worried about asking or using the word AI with our teachers…".* As academics we want our students to be open and to engage with us as much as possible, but due to the lack of clarity on the use and appropriateness of AI, OIS are deterring from having a discussion in case their teachers think they are looking to use AI within their assessment. We cannot avoid the use of AI, and

our OIS will need to have some level of AI literacy skills upon graduating (Long & Magerko, 2020)

### Enhancing AI Literacy Among Local and Partner Academic Staff

As the AI landscape continues to grow, so must the knowledge of staff. The changes in AI tools and concepts are moving faster than the education system can keep up with. It is crucial for staff to have access to ongoing professional development (PD) opportunities to harness an understanding to this evolving development (Bekdemir et al., 2024)PD can take various forms—external courses or conferences, internal workshops, even institutional focus groups. More importantly, we need to ensure that PD isn't forgotten for TNE partner staff. The ILS need to be just as up-to-date with training so they can execute the curriculum and address student matters on a day-to-day basis.

There was a recurring concern emerging through the ILS focus groups, and that was the absence of professional training opportunities made available to them to help them with the application of AI and methods of detection. The sentiment was consistent with both TNE staff and staff in Melbourne from the awarding university. One staff member teaching into one of the TNE China sites expressed, "*I worry, it is becoming difficult to advise and direct students on the use of AI when I don't fully understand how to maximise the benefits of AI but also minimise the downfalls…there appears to be no consistent application of whether students can or can't use AI" (*Staff 5).

Feeling that you have been left behind can be daunting; as academics we need to stay on top of this fast-growing AI plague and the more, we share, discuss, and exchange with colleagues, the more robust we become. More importantly, in the setting of this paper we cannot lose sense of cultural differences and the approach towards AI from the Chinese perspective.

### Limitations and Future Direction

This study focused just on TNE programs of one Australian university operating in China. It could further be expanded to encompass additional TNE sites across other geographical areas, allowing for an examination of factors unique to different locations, such as cultural influence, support services, and resource availability. The study could further expand and draw comparisons with domestic students enrolled in the same course within the same university in Australia. Expanding the study would allow for a more comprehensive understanding of AI across different educational modes.

## Conclusion

Through reflections, focus groups, and one-on-one dealings with AI reported cases, this study sought to identify the challenges that generative AI has

inflected on TNE programs that mainly consist of Chinese students. As universities and educators navigate this complex and ever-growing use of AI, it is imperative we continue to share and collect information from diverse stakeholders to navigate ethical considerations and develop a culturally responsive but equitable approach to dealing with AI.

It has become evident that universities need to invest in professional development to ensure AI literacy, pedagogical skills, and an understanding of ethical AI practices for both TNE OIS and ILS. The study has identified that a balanced approach should be taken between mitigating inappropriate AI usage while still having an open mind about the benefits it can bring to teaching and learning in a TNE environment, without compromising academic integrity

The findings of this study further provide insight into how OIS and ILS perceive and use AI. The knowledge collected provides a path to improving the way we create assessment, moderate assessment, and report breaches of AI use. Using a reflective and focus group approach allowed for more open-ended responses and collection of information (thoughts and perceptions). Expanding the study across three TNE geographical sites in China allowed for a variety of viewpoints and experiences.

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## Author Details

Name: Dr Kathy Michael
Department and Institution: Business College – Victoria University
Country: Australia
Kathy.michael@vu.edu.au