



A Comparison of BA Distance Education Students' and AI Performances in Tailored- Made Exams at UNICEN.

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KEYWORDS

AI vs Students' performance- English for Specific and Academic Purposes- written exams.

ABSTRACT

The appearance of AI tools has raised immense interest and utter concern among teachers and researchers of diverse fields of expertise in higher education. Much has been said about the pros and cons of using artificial intelligence tools in education and in different areas of knowledge. In fact, throughout the last three or four years, AI tools like Chat GPT and Gemini are being introduced to design materials and to compare students' and machine performances. Nevertheless, nobody knows for sure whether AI tools can perform better, the same as or worse than students in tailored- made exams of English for Academic and Specific Purposes at university. For such reason, a test on reading comprehension with instructions in Spanish was administered for BA students of distance education at UNICEN and then uploaded and solved by two IA tools. Their responses were compared qualitatively, considering their answers to both close and open questions. In this piece of research, we exemplify how students' and these tools have solved the instructions provided. The preliminary results show that students' answers might be more related to their current practices in daily life and may also result in more thorough analysis in certain questions. Yet, AI tools provide answers which are convincing and accurate as well. Even though these results might not be conclusive, the exams for BA distance education students need to be changed urgently. These results also suggest that teachers' role is and will be crucial when designing evaluation tools from now onwards....

1. INTRODUCTION

The College of Humanities at the National University of the Centre of the Province of Buenos Aires (UNCPBA henceforth), Argentina, offers in- person graduate and postgraduate courses of studies in different fields of expertise. In addition, this prestigious faculty also offers 6 BA distance education courses: the BA in Geography, in Environmental Management, in Sustainable Tourism, in History, in Pedagogy and in Pre- School Education. Students with tertiary degrees from Buenos Aires, from other provinces of the territory and even, from neighbouring countries enrol in these Bachelor of Art courses each year. The figure below shows the national scope of the BA distance education courses at UNCPBA – or UNICEN as it is known locally:.





Fig. 1: National Scope of the BA Distance Education Courses of the Faculty of Humanities, UNICEN, 2025

English is a requisite in the different syllabuses of these BA distance education courses. To date, only two syllabuses of these university graduate courses explicitly state the approach and goals to pursue throughout the instruction of English. Due to a number of reasons, the teaching of reading comprehension skills has been and still is the primary focus of instruction for all the students who enrol in any of them [1]. The main goal of instruction is to help students tackle academic, scientific and disciplinary texts of other subjects which include bibliography in English as compulsory or complementary material in their syllabuses. At the end of the English reading instruction course which lasts from March to November and that students may choose to do in the first or the second year of their studies, students must sit for a final exam on any of the dates available. From July 2025 onwards, final exams of any subject at the Centre of Distance Education at the Faculty of Humanities are administered entirely online according to the last regulation passed on April, 2025 at the College of Humanities [2]. Since students sit for the reading comprehension exam of English on live via the Moodle platform, this procedure may engage students in unethical behaviour or academic misconduct during the examination time limit without being detected.

In fact, the use of diverse and more reliable on-line resources and the inception AI tools, leads teachers to reflect on the way BA distance education students are being tested currently. Different authors, for instance, warn about the almost infallible performance of AI tools in admission university tests and in exams in general. Some researchers have observed that ChatGPT could solve the United States Medical Licensing Examination satisfactorily [3], [4]; and, others have found that this same tool can pass the US Bar exam, an exam which allows professionals to work as lawyers in the United States [5]. The current use of IA tools has raised utter concern at university level, for their use may have a negative impact on critical or problem- solving skills in the studenthood [6], [7], [8], [9] since the feedback provided may reduce opportunities for meaningful dialogue and reflection, both necessary in higher- order thinking [10], [11]. It has also been suggested that using AI tools could have a negative impact on writing and communicative skills [12]. Hence, many institutions around the world have blocked the access to sites of this kind. There are studies which urge teachers to design tasks that require the use of creativity and/ or the inclusion of tasks designed with AI tools and demand students to judge them critically or to compare and contrast them with the information known or provided in exams [7], [8]. In their attempt to test Chat GPT, some researchers concluded that AI may be less competent when AI tools are asked to solve tasks which demand the use

of higher- order skills [12], [14], aspects that are also being challenged nowadays due to the fact that AI tools learn continuously after each question, each prompt, and each iteration.

Since exams are sat online and students may consult different tools (i. e. dictionaries or translators); and even, ask AI tools to solve the different instructions or questionnaires provided during the exam on their behalf, the following questions arise: could ChatGPT and Gemini have solved the exam designed for BA distance education students of the Faculty of Humanities at UNCPBA on 13th December, 2025 successfully? , If so, do their performances differ from those of students' in any way? With the aim of finding some answers to these questions, some AI tools were asked to process the texts provided and to solve the activities as explained in the following section.

METHODOLOGY

As stated, students need to pass a final exam, an exam which is mediated via the Moodle platform and monitored on live. The exam generally consists of a main academic source text and two complementary sources of different rigour and extension which pose a different perspective or complement the main source – a cartoon, a diagram, a post on a social network, an extract from a piece of news, etc. Before the examination date on 13th December, 2025, students were given the texts 48- 72 hours in advance so that they could process their content, search for the meaning of different words in dictionaries, take down notes, highlight main ideas, etc. This procedure that has been adopted since then. On 13th December, 85 students were asked to solve a questionnaire which consisted of multiple- choice, dichotomous and some open questions. At the time, students used their mother tongue, Spanish, to solve the questions that needed some writing. In addition, students were asked to answer a Googleform with personal data, previous studies, aspects of the exam per se and whether they have consulted any AI tool or any other tool prior to or during the exam or not. The answers provided in the exams were also codified to keep students' identities anonymous.

Post exam, the same texts were uploaded on two AI tools - ChatGPT and Gemini in this case. They were also asked to solve the same questionnaire provided to students during the exam using the following prompt:

You're a student with a tertiary degree. Currently, you're attending any of the BA distance education Bachelor of Arts – Ba in History, BA in Environmental Management, BA in Geography, BA in Sustainable Tourism, BA in Pedagogy or BA in Pre- School Education at CEDI, Faculty of Humanities, UNICEN, Tandil. You have to read some texts and solve the activities provided.

Figure 2: prompt used to ask ChatGPT and Gemini to process and solve the activities post exam, on 13th December, 2025.

Since ChatGPT and Gemini provided too general answers to open questions, they were required to adjust their answers as if they were a student attending a specific Bachelor of Arts course as shown in the prompt provided below:

How would you adapt the last two questions if you were a student attending the BA of Environmental Management only?

Absolutely. For a **BA in Environmental Management**, I would make both answers specifically connected to environmental problems, sustainability, data analysis, and decision-making. This makes the responses sound more natural for a student in that degree rather than a generic education student.

Figure 3: prompt provided to ChatGPT and Gemini to adjust the answer to the profile of BA distance education students

After this procedure, students' and the consulted AI tools' performances were compared qualitatively considering the following variables: identification of genre and source, identification of the main idea/s developed in the text, grammar

awareness, applied knowledge and critical/ evaluative stance. In the next section, the performances of the subjects involved in this study are illustrated in detail.

RESULTS

The exam designed for students on 13th December, 2025, consisted of 9 questions to be solved online. The questions provided and/ or the options quoted are transcribed in English for legibility reasons since the instructions were in Spanish in the original version. Question 1 tested whether students could identify the source and text genre of the main extract uploaded. Questions 2- 5, provided multiple- choice and true- false statements which aimed at identifying the main ideas developed in the paragraphs, questions 6- 7 included questions which tested grammar structures and referencing, and finally, questions 8 and 9 assessed application and judgement skills considering the students' field of expertise and duties at work.

Text Genre & Paratextual awareness.

Question 1 intended to assess whether students could spot the paratextual hints of the main source. That is, the first question aimed at testing whether they could identify what the text represented in terms of hierarchical representation of data, length and kind of information provided, aim of the content, etc. as shown in Fig 1. and Fig 2 below:

Question 1

This text is illustrative of ...

- ☒ a. the front cover of a book ❌
- ☐ b. a website of a university.
- ☐ c. an academic paper
- ☐ d. the post cover of a book

Question 1

This text is illustrative of ...

- ☐ a. an academic paper
- ☒ b. a website of a university. ✅
- ☐ c. the front cover of a book
- ☐ d. the post cover of a book

Fig 1. Answer chosen by ST_13_12_25_O_76
ST_13_12_25_O_1

Fig. 2. Answer provided by

In the case of students' answers, some solved this item satisfactorily and some others did not. Even though the option seemed to be obvious, students' mistaking the answer suggests that they have not studied or revised their notes thoroughly or that they had not fixed, neither identified, the typical layout, textual density and the information a reader may encounter in these different pieces of texts. The two AI tools consulted chose the correct options as expected, though, and both included an explanation for their choice as shown below in Fig. 3 and Fig. 4 without being asked to do so:

1. This text is illustrative of ...
b. a web site from a university.
(Evidence: The source citation at the bottom indicates it was published by the University of Illinois Office of Communications and retrieved from their .edu website).

Fig. 3: answer and justification provided by Gemini

1. This text is illustrative of...

Correct answer: b. a web site from a university.

Justification: The text is an article published by the *Office of Communications, College of Education*. It is an informative university publication dated October 24, 2024. It is not the cover of a book or an academic paper.

Fig 4: answer chosen and explanation provided by ChatGPT

This finding suggests that if students consulted any of these two tools during the exam they would choose the right option without revisiting the text or reflecting upon the typical layout, length and type of information provided, instances which are part of learning. In this sense, including a multiple- choice like this is not convenient for students which are evaluated

via automated questionnaires online.

Identification of Topic and Main Ideas.

The exam also included some multiple- choice and true- false statements, for these were intended to test students' comprehension of main ideas in different paragraphs. As expected, students solved different items satisfactorily and also made mistakes as expected in any learning process. The following captions illustrate some examples:

Question N° 3

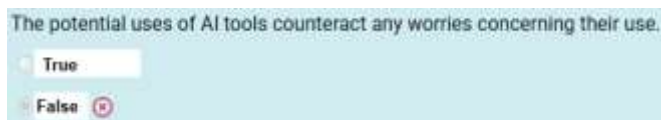


Fig. 2: Answer chosen on a True- False item by ST_13_12_O_9 item by ST_13_12_7

Question N° 5



Fig. 3: Answers chosen on an M- C

The previous screenshots show that students made mistakes in the questionnaire, though there were students whose performances were almost perfect. Yet, Chat GPT and Gemini not only solved the dichotomous and multiple choice perfectly but both ChatGPT and Gemini, for instance, provided an explanation and quotes again for each item without being asked to do so, as illustrated below:

Question 3

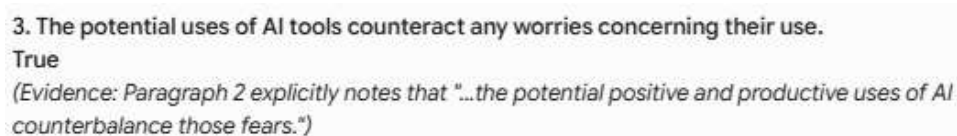
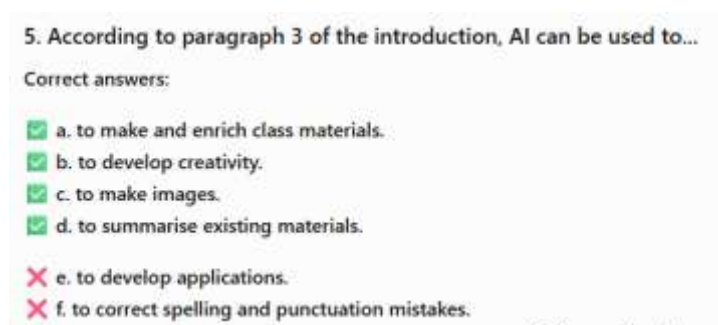


Fig. 4 Suggested answer to question N° 3 by Gemini.

Question 5



Justification: The text says that AI can be used to "inspire and foster creativity," "summarize existing materials," "generate and reinforce lesson plans," and "stimulate image creation." It does not mention developing applications or correcting spelling and punctuation mistakes in this paragraph.

Fig. 5: Suggested answer to question N° 5 by Chat GPT.

Question 5

5. According to paragraph 3 of the introduction, AI can be used to ...
(Choose one or more options)
- a. to make and enrich class materials. (Text: "generate and reinforce lesson plans")
 - b. to develop creativity. (Text: "inspire and foster creativity")
 - c. to make images. (Text: "stimulate image creation")
 - d. to summarise existing materials. (Text: "summarize existing materials")

Fig. 6: Suggested answer to question N° 5 by Gemini.

If students relapse into unethical behaviour during the exam, students may lose an instance which is necessary and essential for their learning process: making mistakes, revising the feedback post exam, revisiting the text, asking themselves above all: what the mistakes were, why this question was partially right and not completely right, etc. That is to say, students could not only learn from the feedback post exam but also re- read the text/ s once the exam had finished and consult the material provided throughout the course.

Grammar Awareness and referencing.

The exam also tested some grammar topics which had been explored throughout the distance education reading instruction course. Whereas students made mistakes in some items which tested grammar structures or referencing, the AI tools consulted were infallible when providing the answers to those items. In fact, both Chat GPT and Gemini included the reason why the item chosen was the right one. Examples of both students and the AI's responses are shown below:

Question 6

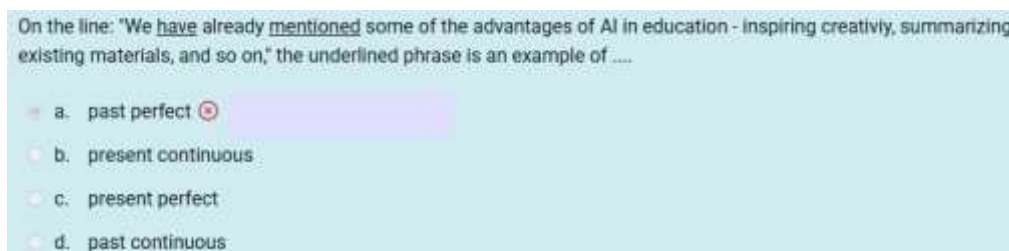


Fig. 7: option chosen by ST_13_12_O_39

Question 6

6. "We have already mentioned some of the advantages of AI in education – inspiring creativity, summarizing existing materials, and so on."
The underlined phrase "have already mentioned" is an example of:

Correct answer: c. present perfect.

Explanation: The Present Perfect is formed with:

have/has + past participle

In this sentence:

- have = auxiliary verb
- mentioned = past participle
- already = adverb

Therefore, "have already mentioned" is Present Perfect.

Fig. 8: Answer provided by Chat GPT to question N° 6.

Question 7

7. "AI offers students instantaneous and detailed feedback on their work..."
Correct answer: d. is an anaphoric reference.

Explanation: The word "their" refers back to "students," which was mentioned immediately before it:

AI offers students → their work

This is an anaphoric reference because the reference appears before the pronoun.

Fig. 9: Answer provided by Chat GPT to question N° 7.

As the examples illustrate, neither Chat GPT nor Gemini made mistakes in items where topics like tenses and referencing were tested. Even though students may have chosen the wrong answers, a possible attempt to use Chat GPT or Gemini would deprive them from taking their own decisions and from doing their own reasoning, whether right or wrong. In fact, if this happens, there would be no need to revise the feedback provided after the exam since the answers suggested by both tools would be perfect after all.

Application in open- ended questions provided.

The exam for BA distance education students also included two open- ended questions. Thus, students had to write complete answers relating the content of the text with their fields of expertise, duties at work and/ or niches of research. Gemini and/ or Chat GPT's answers and those provided by some students are quoted below:

Question 8

8. Choose one advantage mentioned in the text, write it down and explain how you would apply it.

Advantage: It can be used to personalize learning.

As a student of Environmental Management, I could use AI to make complex environmental concepts easier to understand. For example, I could use AI tools to create diagrams, images, or explanations about climate change, biodiversity, pollution, deforestation, or the effects of human activities on ecosystems.

One practical example would be studying climate change. AI could help me create a visual representation of how changes in temperature can affect ecosystems, water resources, agriculture, and local communities. This could help me understand the connections between different environmental processes.

However, I would not use AI as my only source of information. I would verify the information with scientific articles, official reports, and reliable environmental databases because AI can sometimes provide inaccurate or biased information.

Fig. 10: Answer given by Chat GPT to question N° 8.

Question 8

Here is how I would adapt the answers to the last two questions if I were studying Environmental Management, Geography, or Sustainable Tourism at UNICEN:

8. CHOOSE one advantage mentioned in the text, WRITE IT DOWN and EXPLAIN how you would apply it or materialize it taking into account your duties as a teacher, technician, counsellor, mother or father, etc.

- **Selected Advantage:** "It can make abstract concepts more understandable."
- **Application:** As a future professional in Environmental Management or Geography, a major part of my job will be environmental education and community outreach. Concepts like watershed dynamics, the cumulative effects of carbon emissions, or soil erosion can be highly abstract for the general public. I would use AI image-generating and modeling tools to create localized, visual examples. For instance, I could generate predictive visuals showing the potential impact of unregulated urban sprawl on the *Sierras de Tandil* or how a sustainable tourism corridor would practically look in our region. This turns complex, data-heavy ecological concepts into accessible visual realities that communities and policymakers can easily grasp.

Fig. 11: Answer given by Gemini to question N° 8.

Question 8

"I work as a teacher in a Tertiary Institution and I'm also an inspector in the Secretary of Environment in the province of San Juan. I will try to provide an answer which could cover both jobs. As regards being an evaluator, which means to analyse the reports of different companies considering the Declaration of Environmental Impact in Argentina (Law 5041), AI tools help me to improve the written reports and when these are too complex, AI gives hints on how to analyse them. Concerning my teaching responsibilities, I only use it to adapt exams for students with special needs since I have no pedagogic background; I'm a technician and do not have much knowledge on how to adapt exams or to deliver classes" (ST_13_12_EM_O_29)

Question 8

"I choose: 'it offers students immediate and detailed feedback about their pieces of work.' As an environmental inspector at the townhall, I would use AI to analyse data about the quality of the air, soil and water in my city. I think that could help identify critical areas that need urgent attention and could help to develop effective strategies to overcome/ environmental problems. AI could be used to monitor air quality in areas where there a huge density of materials in suspension. In Malargüe, there are many gypsum pits. AI could help develop strategic plans to reduce pollution and identify areas with waste management problems. It could also be used to implement programmes of recycling and waste reduction. Also, it could be used to analyse data of rivers and lakes and petrol extraction areas in order to take decisions (...) (ST_13_12_EM_O_25)

The examples provided illustrate that both Gemini and ChatGPT's productions are correct and credible. Some students' reflections include very detailed and specific information of their own duties or field work which makes them very down to earth and enriching. The same applies to the last question in which students had to include their opinion. Yet, both Chat GPT and Gemini could solve them accurately as the examples below prove.

9. In your opinion, which is the disadvantage that should worry the most to your group of peers or to you? **EXPLAIN and PROVIDE EXAMPLES.**

In my opinion, unpredictability and inaccurate information is the aspect of AI that should worry Environmental Management students the most. Environmental Management requires reliable information because decisions about natural resources, pollution, biodiversity, climate change, and sustainability can affect both ecosystems and communities.

For example, an AI tool could provide incorrect information about the causes of a particular environmental problem or give inaccurate data about climate trends or biodiversity. If a student accepts this information without checking reliable sources, they could reach incorrect conclusions or propose inappropriate environmental solutions.

For this reason, I believe that AI should be used as a complementary tool, not as the only source of information. As Environmental Management students, we should verify AI-generated information using scientific research, official statistics, environmental reports, and other reliable sources. We also need to develop critical thinking so that we can distinguish between useful information and inaccurate or biased information. (Answer provided by Chat GPT to question 9).

Fig. 10: Answer given by ChatGPT to question N° 9.

Question 9

If I were a student in Environmental Management, Sustainable Tourism, or Geography, the disadvantage that would worry me the most is **Unpredictability and Inaccurate Information (Hallucinations)**.

The Greatest Concern: Flawed Environmental Data

In the environmental and spatial sciences, we don't just write essays—we analyze climate trends, map fragile ecosystems, and design sustainability policies based on hard scientific data. The text points out that "if the data [AI] draws from is inaccurate or biased, then the information it creates will be inaccurate or biased."

If an AI hallucinates (makes up) statistics about pollution levels, species endangerment, or topographical features, it doesn't just result in a bad grade. In the real world, relying on that fabricated data could lead to disastrous environmental policies, flawed conservation efforts, or the destruction of critical habitats.

Fig. 11: Answer given by Gemini to question N° 9.

The answers provided by Chat GPT and Gemini to the last open question of the test are both accurate and reliable, though hypothetical and general. Students' answers provide very specific information and detailed explanations at times which make their interventions very enriching and generate utter concern to the reader because they introduce examples of real life, anecdotes that happened to them, as the following lines prove:



Even though the aspect that worries me the most it that one related to privacy and security concerns, I will make reference to academic misconduct. After receiving reports that need to be evaluated and/ or approved, we have detected examples of plagiarism, conceptual mistakes, imprecisions or information that does not correspond to the place analysed and other aspects which prove that an AI tool was used to write such report. This conduct does not only undermine the credibility of the professional but his/ her report needs to be evaluated again, overloading subjects' work load in the public sector and generating extra costs (ST_13_12_O_EM_106)

In my opinion, the disadvantage that worries me the most ... is the loss of essential abilities; and thus, imminent cognitive dependency. Even when AI is a powerful tool to make summaries, essays or complex analyses, its use in excess may lead to intellectual atrophy that Geography helps students to develop. The problem is that AI platforms provide final products (a text, a mind map) without demanding students to undergo the rigorous cognitive process that is crucial for learning (i. e. searching and selecting information, organizing and relating complex concepts (systemic and spatial thinking), and stating a valid position with technical and suitable vocabulary. If the student resorts to AI to do the job for him/ her, he/ she is externalizing the process of learning and developing a strong technological dependency. (ST_13_12_G_O_37)

In my opinion, the disadvantage that should worry university colleagues is academic misconduct; that is, the use of AI for plagiarism and the use of it to do pieces of work or tests with AI entirely. As the main text provided suggests, the unsuitable use of AI tools to solve tasks, exams or academic pieces of work is not only unfair for those who follow the rules of academic ethics, but its use undermines the process of learning since it replaces cognitive and critical thinking via technological shortcuts. This concern is particularly relevant in higher education where students are expected to develop intellectual autonomy, analytical capacities and academic rigour.

In my case, as a university teacher, this problem arises when students hand in essays, case studies or practical works done with AI almost entirely, without a real understanding of the content developed o without editing the product. In fact, they even copy and paste the prompt in their pieces of work. In subjects that require interpretation, argumentation or conceptual application, these kinds of practices limit the development of key skills and generates a false sense of achievement. Thus, I consider that it is necessary to establish criteria to use AI ethically, to redesign tests that prioritize processes, reflections and oral defences, it is also necessary to promote critical thinking in terms of the information provided by these tools instead of prohibiting them. In this way, AI can be a complementary source or learning and not only a mechanism that weakens higher education (...) (ST_13_12_O_6)

As illustrated, both Chat GPT and Gemini could solve the multiple choice and the dichotomous items satisfactorily. Their performances were accurate but not so detailed and field specific as in those testimonies provided by students. After sharing some productions, table I provides a synthesis of the results of their performances:

TABLE I
students vs ChatGPT and Gemini's performances

Q#	Comparison between different productions			
	Aim of the items	Students	ChatGPT	Gemini
Q1	Text genre awareness	fallible	infallible	infallible
Q2-5	Main ideas of the main text	fallible	infallible	infallible
Q6-7	Grammar awareness	fallible	infallible	infallible
Q8	Applied knowledge	Suitable and field specific	Suitable/ accurate and trustworthy	Suitable/ accurate and trustworthy
Q9	Applied knowledge	Suitable and field	Suitable/ accurate and	Suitable/ Accurate and

		specific	trustworthy	trustworthy
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Conclusions

The aim of this paper was to find out whether Chat GPT and Gemini could solve the exam designed and used to test BA distance education students at the Faculty of Humanities at UNICEN on 13th December, 2025. Besides, it was also our aim to compare the performance of Chat GPT, Gemini and those of students'. After having analysed the answers provided by the subjects involved, two main concerns arise. First, even when the exam had specifically been designed for BA distance education students, the multiple choice and dichotomous questions need to be replaced of any online questionnaire of the subject in the future. If students consulted Chat GPT and/ or Gemini to solve part or the whole of the exam, they would have any of these items solved satisfactorily in seconds. Bare in mind that the regulation at the faculty has established that the exams for BA distance education students should be administered virtually (RCA N° 70/ 2025), a procedure which may trigger academic misconduct without being noticed by teachers. Needless to say that students referred to this same concern in the questionnaire post exam, as the following quote shows:

"I feel worried about students using AI to solve the questionnaires online on their behalf at university level. The analysis of sources at university is no more a requisite: many students copy and paste the answers provided by AI tools. In the case of distance education studies, this problem increases since the questionnaires online motivate such practices" (alumn@: 13_12_O_67)

This remark reawakens old discussions concerning the use of multiple choice and dichotomous questions in the design of final exams. Apart from that, even when students' interventions in open questions were very illuminating and enriching and related to their workplaces or research duties, the answers provided by both Chat GPT and Gemini are also accurate and convincing considering the instructions provided. Yet, again, if any student consulted Chat GPT, Gemini or any other AI tool, he/ she would reduce minimum editing work on productions and would pass the exam anyway.

These findings call for immediate action in our context, especially in an age where AI tools can process huge quantities of information in a matter of milli seconds and can solve these challenges without effort. Thus, it is necessary to change the ways of evaluating and testing our students, i. e. to introduce tasks which require integrating and relating content, comparing, contrasting and judging sources among other higher order thinking skills, for instance:

Introducing tasks where students can share the difficulties and procedures used to overcome them while reading the text before the exam on a forum;

Testing students orally as it is becoming the norm in many countries due to academic misconduct detected in exams lately;

Incorporating AI- produced tasks in the design of final exams and ask students to find similarities and differences between the text provided, other sources and their knowledge on the topic;

Adding the "text field" – i. e. the texts suggested as processed before the exam (underlined, with notes on the margins, vocabulary items that were consulted in the dictionary, etc.),

Doing a collaborative piece of work online on separate rooms the day of the exams,

Asking students to make a video or multimedia resource individually or in groups in which they could comment on the material provided, and then, establishing connections with other sources of their choice justifying them.

These are some ideas that could be implemented in the context analysed. We hope to pilot some of them and analyse their impact and reception in the student hood. We also hope to share some productions and results in the near future so as to generate room that could develop and/ or forge higher order thinking competencies in our students. Likewise, we believe that teaching, learning and evaluating with emerging technologies may contribute to these processes but the role of teachers will be a key factor to enhance them..

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