Artificial Intelligence and the Transformation of Academic Interaction Orders: Evidence from Georgian Higher Education

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Abstract — This paper examines how artificial intelligence (AI) is reshaping teaching, learning, and academic interactions in Georgian higher education. Drawing on participant observation and eight in-depth interviews with lecturers and students from public and private universities, the study explores emerging practices of AI use, including academic task automation, the "TikTokization" of learning, and the growing reliance on AI for explanation, writing, and emotional support. While AI enhances efficiency and improves access to learning resources, it simultaneously generates new risks related to academic integrity, digital inequality, and the erosion of students' independent reasoning. Drawing on Erving Goffman's social interaction theory, the paper interprets these changes as shifts in academia's interaction order. In these roles, rituals, and impression management increasingly involve non-human actors. The analysis highlights how AI disrupts traditional performances of academic identity and raises questions about stigma, authority, and the future social order of AI-saturated universities.

Keywords— Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education, AI-Mediated Learning Practices, Digital Inequality, Goffman's Social Interaction Theory.

I. INTRODUCTION

The development of artificial intelligence (AI) has accelerated particularly rapidly in the post-pandemic period [1]. One of the most pressing issues in this context is the use of AI within academic environments. In recent years, academic dishonesty and superficial engagement have become increasingly visible worldwide, including in the Georgian academic field [1]. This, in turn, has led all Georgian higher education institutions to require the use of Turnitin for checking student papers. However, even under these conditions, plagiarism cannot be entirely prevented, as Turnitin cannot identify ideas or texts appropriated from English- or other-language sources when they appear in Georgian-language academic work.

The widespread availability and active use of AI tools have further complicated this situation for educational institutions. The challenge is intensified by the fact that Georgian universities have not yet developed either internal institutional guidelines or general regulatory frameworks for the use of AI in academic settings to ensure academic integrity. Although the discussion often focuses on risks, it is essential to note that the active use of AI has also introduced certain positive developments in education. Although in the Georgian context we do not have the research to find out about how AI Capital enhances a graduate's employability, as in the case of [2], what we trace is that AI has significantly reduced the time needed to search for literature and formulate arguments, improved the accuracy of citations, and enhanced other aspects of academic work.

This study aims to explore the challenges and opportunities arising from the use of AI in Tbilisi's higher education institutions and to understand how AI may transform teaching and learning processes in the future. In line with this aim, the study pursues the following objectives: a) to identify the most common practices of AI use among lecturers and students in the Georgian academic sphere; b) to examine how AI replaces the functions of lecturers in academia and reduces the individual work of students. c) to analyse the extent of digital inequality in the Georgian academic context and its implications for future teaching and learning. Accordingly, the central research question is: What large-scale transformations will the active use of artificial intelligence bring to the academic sphere?

To address the research objectives, a qualitative methodological approach was adopted. Specifically: a) Participant observation was conducted over the last two semesters to examine AI-related practices within academic settings. Eight in-depth interviews were carried out, including four with academic and invited staff from both public and private universities, and four with students—also from public and private universities—who actively used AI for educational purposes. Respondents were selected using purposive sampling, based on two criteria: (1) active use of AI in teaching and learning, and (2) the institutional type (public or private), ensuring broad coverage of Tbilisi's higher education landscape. Data were analysed using content analysis. At the first stage, open coding was applied; the codes were then grouped into thematic categories, which form the basis of this paper.

Throughout the research process, particular attention was paid to ethical standards. All data collected through participant observation were fully anonymised to prevent the identification of individuals. For interviews, informed consent, confidentiality, and impartiality were strictly ensured. A key limitation of the study is that it does not include regional universities, where digital inequality and AI usage practices are likely to be more visible. Additionally, the research sample comprises only students and academic personnel from the

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social sciences; therefore, the identified trends cannot be ascribed to other disciplines.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Although open-access AI systems have been widely available for only the past two years—a relatively short period for conducting robust empirical research and producing peer-reviewed publications—several prominent studies have already examined the impact of these technological innovations on higher education [1], [2], [3], [4]. Across these emerging papers, there is a strong consensus that AI has become an integral component of contemporary university learning environments.

Recent studies present a complex picture in which AI functions simultaneously as a transformative educational tool and a source of significant pedagogical and ethical challenges. Research shows that structured training in AI substantially enhances students' AI-related knowledge, skills, and competencies—collectively referred to as AI Capital—and strengthens academic performance and post-graduation employability, suggesting that AI integration can support learning outcomes and facilitate the transition to the labour market [2]. Parallel findings indicate that students increasingly employ AI for learning support, using it to obtain explanations, receive tailored feedback, or improve efficiency—practices that many students perceive as beneficial for their educational progress [3], [4]. Faculty perspectives partially align with these experiences: many lecturers report having developed stronger digital competencies and pedagogical adaptability as a result of the post-pandemic shift toward technology-mediated teaching [1].

However, these benefits are consistently accompanied by notable risks. Unequal acquisition of AI Capital—where male, White, and mathematically stronger students benefit disproportionately—reveals new manifestations of digital inequality and stratification within higher education [2], [4]. Simultaneously, heightened reliance on generative AI tools may reduce students' confidence in their own academic abilities and weaken foundational skills such as critical thinking, independent reasoning, and problem-solving [3]. Authors also express increasing concern about academic integrity, noting the rise of AI-generated assignments, inconsistent student compliance with institutional AI guidelines, and ongoing difficulties in detecting unauthorised AI use with existing tools [1], [4]. Moreover, the growing automation of student tasks, combined with the risk of AI-generated misinformation or "pseudo-reasoning," raises concerns about the accuracy and reliability of AI as a learning support mechanism [3], [4].

Taken together, these studies indicate that while AI is now firmly embedded in contemporary academic life, its equitable and pedagogically meaningful integration requires intentional institutional planning, inclusive teaching practices, and robust policies designed to safeguard academic honesty and learning quality [1], [2], [3], [4].

In this paper, I propose to analyse the ongoing intrusion of AI into academic life through the theoretical lens of Erving Goffman's social interaction theory. Goffman's foundational argument—that social life is not only structured by norms but is also performed, ritualised, and managed through the manipulation of impressions—offers a valuable framework for interpreting the profound transformations currently unfolding in higher education [5].

According to Goffman, social interaction operates as a form of theatre, in which individuals perform roles to construct particular impressions in others' minds [5], [6]. Applied to higher education, this suggests that lecturers, students, and educational administrators continually engage in performance-oriented activities intended to communicate competence, credibility, and academic identity—not only to one another but also to external audiences, such as employers, accreditation bodies, and society at large.

Higher education institutions (HEIs) have historically maintained a stable interaction order, regulating behaviour through established rituals, norms, and professional codes. Yet, the introduction of AI fundamentally disrupts these micro-interactional routines. Teaching and learning practices increasingly resemble staged performances involving multiple technological intermediaries: a lecturer designing an assignment with AI, a student completing the assignment with AI, and an AI tool evaluating the final product. In this emerging context, HEIs are compelled to create new micro-rituals—ethical codes, revised assessment formats, AI-use policies—to preserve social order within an environment where AI-mediated practices partially replace face-to-face academic interaction.

This raises critical theoretical questions. In an AI-saturated academic environment—where technological systems shape, monitor, and potentially regulate teaching, learning, and evaluation—can Goffman's concept of total institutions [7] be applied? Might AI function as a new form of institutional control, structuring the behaviours of lecturers and students in ways that resemble Goffman's tightly regulated institutional settings?

Additionally, Goffman's theory of stigma [8] offers a valuable lens for understanding the marginalisation of individuals with weaker digital skills. As AI proficiency becomes increasingly essential, traditional academic identities—centred on expertise, intellectual autonomy, and disciplinary mastery—may be symbolically "spoiled" when individuals lack the digital competencies required to participate in AI-influenced academic routines.

By employing Goffman's framework, this paper seeks to illuminate how the adoption of AI reshapes interactional dynamics, status hierarchies, and identities within higher education and to explore how institutions and individuals attempt to maintain social order amid these technologically driven transformations.

III. RESEARCH FINDINGS

During a training session organized by a leading European university for academic staff—aimed at improving practical

skills in the use of AI—the trainer devoted nearly twenty minutes to teaching participants how to provide AI with effective prompts: how to request AI to write a reader for teaching a specific topic, how to generate a podcast, and finally how to create examination materials based on this content. It was during this moment that a key question emerged: What roles do we, as academic personnel, still hold in the educational space that AI cannot replace?

A second episode occurred during an Erasmus+ visit to a European university, when a colleague shared her concern that students frequently verify the lecturer's explanations in real time by consulting AI during the lecture. At times, students praise the lecturer when the explanations align with AI-generated responses; at other times, they criticise the lecturer when discrepancies appear. In reality, my colleague was troubled by the sense that, even when explaining familiar topics, one feels as if one is competing in the classroom with a collective artificial intelligence—one that possesses far more information than any individual academic can hold. Initially, when reflecting on the excessive use of AI in the Georgian academic field, I perceived it mainly as a negative practice linked to students' attempts to obtain high grades with minimal effort. Later, however, I realised that this process affects all of us worldwide and will inevitably transform the academic sphere.

To understand this transformation, it is helpful to briefly outline the roles and obligations of lecturers and students in the academic environment. The role of lecturers primarily includes: developing educational courses; sharing accumulated scientific knowledge verbally and visually, both through direct lecturing and through the creation of instructional materials; designing mechanisms for assessing students' learning; evaluating students based on these mechanisms; mentoring; and providing student support. Students, in turn, are expected to read and reflect on course materials, engage in the learning process through attendance and participation, prepare presentations and written assignments required by the course, and develop their final qualification papers.

The empirical material shows that AI now overlaps with, and in some cases substitutes, several of these functions. Anyone who has tried it will agree that AI is highly effective at developing educational courses. More importantly, AI can offer a far more diverse selection of reading materials than any single academic may have processed on a given topic. With an appropriately crafted prompt, AI can propose innovative assessment methods. Similarly, AI can spare lecturers the routine labour of designing detailed grading rubrics—documents in which assessment criteria must often be broken down to the level of individual points. AI also performs well in drafting course objectives and learning outcomes, tasks for which institutions have long provided numerous training sessions to ensure their correct formulation by academic staff.

If we consider another function of AI—the ability to produce high-quality podcasts on various topics, tailored to the specific program or academic level of students (including the choice between a male or female voice)—we begin to see that the

lecturer's role in verbally delivering content during lectures is also becoming replaceable.

As noted above, AI can generate highly refined and detailed examination materials based on the provided content, whether the assessment requires open-ended or closed-ended questions. It can also supply sample answers, reducing the lecturer's workload considerably. The same applies to the evaluation of written assignments. AI can offer highly original topics for presentations or papers, and, if given detailed instructions, it can even evaluate student work.

Regarding mentoring and support, analysis of students' current practices shows that during the preparation of their written work—especially their qualification papers—they often engage with AI far more intensively than with their supervisors. AI suggests relevant literature, provides guidance on writing strategies, and indicates academic writing standards. Moreover, based on one respondent's experience, when a student faces limited time and high stress, they may also rely on AI for emotional support. This can be more comfortable for the student, as AI does not judge or remember the student's anxiety and offers empathetic responses—support that their supervisor may not always provide.

Observation of student behaviour, together with insights gathered from interviews, reveals several key tendencies. Students frequently rely on AI when preparing seminar materials—primarily to reduce large volumes of reading. As one student explained: "When I have very little time but a lot to read, I ask AI to extract the key ideas from the text. Since I started using AI, I have never gone to a seminar unprepared." Another student emphasised that while his academic performance had previously been average, it improved significantly after he began using AI. He attributes this improvement to the fact that AI not only reduces the amount of reading but also explains difficult concepts in detail: "AI can explain complex theories in straightforward language; it genuinely helps me perform better academically."

A second widespread form of AI use appears in the preparation of papers and presentations. In some cases, students fully delegate the creation of written assignments to AI. Although students rarely admitted to this practice during interviews—insisting they used AI merely as assistance—numerous submitted assignments clearly show extensive AI-generated content. In many cases, students submit AI-generated texts without having read them. This becomes immediately apparent when citations include nonexistent authors, scholars unrelated to the topic, or fabricated sources with titles that vaguely resemble the research theme. During the early stages of AI use in Georgian, such texts were straightforward to identify because AI frequently produced incorrect or transliterated English terminology and poorly structured sentences.

AI misuse also becomes evident in the literature review sections of student papers. Instead of a coherent, thematically integrated analysis, the text often consists of paragraph-by-paragraph summaries of individual sources—an indication of AI-generated structure rather than the student's

synthesis of arguments. The peak example of inappropriate AI use was discovered in a draft version of a master's thesis, which included the following sentence: "For example, during the pandemic, volunteerism in the NGO sector encouraged many individuals to pursue professional transformation in social work or media communication. Some activists now work in or establish social impact startups, showing that activism can become a catalyst for career change (Eurasia Partnership Foundation & Research Resource Centres, 2011)." This example illustrates how AI can fabricate a source, and how the student may fail to notice that a 2011 publication could not possibly discuss the effects of a pandemic that occurred nearly a decade later.

Despite these problematic practices, the use of AI in academia has also generated several positive trends. First, AI saves time for both professors and students—particularly by reducing time spent on routine tasks. AI also enables the quick completion of technical academic work, such as drafting assessment rubrics. In contexts where lecturer–student relationships are not characterised by close personal interaction and where lecturers cannot fully understand individual student needs—especially in large classrooms—AI provides personalised explanations in response to follow-up questions students may hesitate to ask. When used with precise prompts, AI supplies relevant information quickly and efficiently.

Furthermore, as AI becomes integrated into everyday professional practice worldwide—corporations producing video content, medical professionals using AI for diagnostic reasoning—its use in academia aligns with evolving labour-market expectations, as noted by various actors [3]. AI use in teaching processes also facilitates rapid assessment by lecturers at a time when academic workloads are increasing due to growing expectations for teaching, research, and administrative engagement. AI improves the linguistic and stylistic quality of student assignments, especially for those whose learning, teaching, or publication languages are not their native languages (particularly English). Finally, AI enables the creation of highly appealing and explicit visual materials.

However, alongside these opportunities, the use of AI in academia generates a range of challenges. A notable trend is that students increasingly avoid reading lengthy analytical texts, choosing instead to reduce them through AI. I refer to this phenomenon as the "TikTokization of education." Just as many people now prefer short TikTok-style videos over full-length films, in education, we observe a similar pattern: instead of reading extensive, argument-rich texts with examples, students reflect only four or five key arguments. This reductionist tendency diminishes their reading and writing skills, as the comprehension of large volumes of text no longer occurs, and writing practices often become dependent on AI.

The intensive use of AI also fosters dependency. In the Introduction to Sociology course, for example, students are required to write an in-class argumentative essay without gadgets. When comparing these essays with assignments completed at home, the differences are striking: in-class work shows a weaker writing style, fewer examples, and

underdeveloped arguments. If such tendencies continue, students' capacity for independent and critical thinking may become increasingly compromised.

Within the field of social sciences, empirical research—such as interviews, focus groups, and ethnographic observation—remains resistant primarily to AI substitution, since AI cannot independently conduct these methods of fieldwork. However, if data collected through such methods is uploaded to AI systems for analysis, the confidentiality of research participants is at risk of being compromised.

Although academia relies on Turnitin to detect plagiarism, AI's paraphrasing capabilities render detection increasingly ineffective. Beyond identifying conceptual plagiarism—which requires an attentive, experienced eye—Turnitin struggles to recognise AI-modified text. Similarly, AI detectors are essentially useless, as AI "humaniser" tools can easily bypass them. This dynamic creates a likely trend in which both sides—students and institutions—invest in increasingly sophisticated paid tools, ultimately cancelling each other out and preventing an accurate picture from emerging.

The growing use of AI for emotional support and clarification of academic materials reduces informal interaction and effective mentorship between lecturers and students. As a result, opportunities for meaningful social connections within academic spaces may diminish even further.

Although AI saves lecturers' time in many aspects of the teaching process, it also increases their workload in others. For instance, identifying AI-generated texts—such as verifying the validity of sources—becomes time-consuming. Likewise, lecturers must invest additional time in designing assignments that incorporate AI use in ways that foster students' analytical skills rather than undermine them.

Active integration of AI into teaching requires, at a minimum, two key elements: access to technology and well-developed digital skills. Internet access in Georgia is relatively widespread, with only 9% of urban residents and 12% of rural residents lacking internet access [4]. Unfortunately, detailed statistics regarding access to technological devices are not available. The second factor—digital skills—is far more problematic. The digital skills gap in Georgian academia became particularly evident during the pandemic, particularly among older professors and at regional universities.

Only 12.9% of academic and scientific staff in Georgian higher education institutions are aged 25-34 [5]. Although there is no official data on the average age of Georgian professors, general observation—especially in public universities—indicates that most academic staff are above middle age. One contributing factor is that the status of "emeritus" is not effectively implemented in Georgia, and there is no retirement-based restriction preventing pension-age faculty from holding academic positions. It is widely understood (though unfortunately not statistically documented) that older individuals generally possess weaker digital skills, making them more vulnerable both to missing out on the benefits of AI and to failing to detect cases of its dishonest use

by students.

For example, during the pre-defence of master's theses at one university, an older professor expressed concern that many students were selecting the same research methods or theoretical frameworks. She attributed this trend to an overemphasis on particular teaching approaches or standardised mentoring practices, whereas the research projects showed clear signs of AI-generated patterns and common prompts.

With regional universities already struggling to attract and retain qualified young teaching staff, digital inequality is likely to intensify as AI integration in academia increases. This may produce broader social consequences, such as further strengthening educational migration from regions to the capital—a trend that is already pronounced.

Although the history of using free, open-access AI systems is relatively short, we can already observe significant shifts in public attitudes. When information about open-access AI first became widespread, many early users experienced a sense of shock, a phenomenon that appears to be common worldwide [6]. Despite its immediate appeal, widespread fear emerged—fear that this "all-powerful" technology would replace human labour. This sentiment partly explains why some academic institutions took an oppositional stance and banned the use of AI.

However, banning AI is not a viable strategy. First, detecting AI-generated content is nearly impossible, and second, such bans would forfeit the considerable benefits AI can bring. Historically, technological advancements—from calculators to statistical software—have been met with scepticism, yet none have ever been prohibited.

A second approach emphasises the ethical use of AI and the upholding of academic integrity. This perspective argues that instead of banning AI, institutions should educate students on responsible and ethical use—focusing on awareness and values rather than punishment, control, or distrust. However, because behavioural practices (including the widespread, sometimes unethical use of AI) have evolved more quickly than ethical norms, maladjustment has emerged [7]. Defining the boundaries and content of academic integrity is further complicated by the rapid evolution of AI technologies.

Another frequently recommended strategy from AI proponents is to integrate AI directly into the learning process. For example, one common suggestion is to assign students the task of generating a research design with AI, then instruct them to critique AI's approach and produce an improved version. However, one student honestly admitted that he generated the initial design with one AI system, then fed the result into several additional AI tools—each of which suggested further improvements. As a result, the process became circular and did not yield the intended learning outcomes.

A further strategy adopted by some universities is to shift assessment toward in-person examinations. At one European institution, faculty were even advised to return to "pen-and-paper" exams. However, this approach resembles reverting from electric trains to coal-powered locomotives.

Moreover, prioritising examinations strengthens memorisation-based learning, whereas preparing papers and presentations develops analytical skills that are far more sustainable and highly valued in the labour market.

Another potentially useful recommendation from my perspective for regulating AI use is to strengthen in-class activities and increase classroom time. In a supervised environment, lecturers can ensure that assignments are completed without AI or, where appropriate, can guide students in proper and ethical AI use. Such a setting also allows for greater emphasis on group work, brainstorming, and role-playing activities, which may help revive the weakened social interaction. However, this approach also has limitations. Increasing classroom hours necessarily means increasing academic staff workloads—a decision unlikely to be favoured by educational administrators.

IV. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that the rapid emergence of artificial intelligence is already reshaping the social, pedagogical, and ethical foundations of higher education in Georgia. While AI offers substantial benefits—such as saving time, improving academic writing, diversifying learning materials, and personalising support—it simultaneously challenges the very interactional order that traditionally defines academic life. Through the lens of Erving Goffman's [5], [6], [7] social interaction theory, these transformations can be understood not merely as technological shifts but as changes in the ritualised performances, identities, and social expectations that constitute the everyday reality of teaching and learning.

Empirically, AI is altering the roles of academic actors. Lecturers increasingly delegate course development, assessment design, feedback provision, and even emotional support to technological systems. Students, in turn, use AI as a learning companion, a writing assistant, a problem-solver, and—at times—a surrogate mentor. These practices demonstrate how AI now participates in the performance of academic roles, co-producing the impressions of competence and preparedness that student and lecturer identities rely upon. The classroom thus becomes a hybrid performance space in which human and non-human agents jointly shape educational interactions.

At the same time, the "TikTokization" of learning, the spread of AI-generated assignments, and the decline in students' independent reasoning illustrate how AI can destabilise core academic values. Goffman's notion of the interaction order [5] helps explain how established educational rituals—reading, writing, discussion, and evaluation—erode when technologically mediated shortcuts replace embodied engagement. New micro-rituals must therefore be created to sustain social order, including revised assessment formats, AI-use guidelines, and ethical frameworks adapted to the realities of generative technologies.

Moreover, the growing reliance on AI intensifies existing inequalities. Older faculty members, regional universities, and

individuals with limited digital skills face heightened vulnerability, increasing the risk of stigmatisation in an AI-saturated academic environment. Goffman's insights into stigma and spoiled identity illuminate how digital disadvantage may damage scholarly reputation, professional belonging, and academic self-efficacy. The parallel between AI's expanding regulatory role and Goffman's concept of total institutions [8] also suggests that algorithmic oversight—if unregulated—could centralise control within higher education in new and potentially restrictive ways.

Overall, this study shows that AI is not simply a technological tool but an emerging social actor reshaping academic performances, identities, and hierarchies. Its integration requires more than technical adaptation; it demands a rethinking of pedagogical values, institutional norms, and interactional ethics. For Georgian higher education, the challenge lies in balancing AI's pedagogical opportunities with safeguards that protect academic integrity, support equitable participation, and sustain the relational and dialogical foundations of learning.

Future policy and research efforts must therefore move beyond simplistic binaries of prohibition versus unrestricted use. Instead, they should focus on developing inclusive digital literacy initiatives, context-sensitive ethical guidelines, and hybrid pedagogical models in which AI complements—but does not replace—the human-centred interactions that remain essential to academic life.

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