# UK teens lead surge in generative AI use reshaping education and social norms



When 16-year-old Lara Jeetley starts her day, her first ritual involves checking her phone for messages from friends, followed by a quick interaction with ChatGPT, an AI tool she employs to explore her thoughts or intriguing ideas that linger from the previous night. “Sometimes I ask things I was thinking about overnight,” she explains. This interaction isn’t merely utilitarian; it's indicative of a sweeping change in the way young people engage with technology. In the UK, recent data shows that approximately four out of five 13 to 17-year-olds are now using generative AI, reflecting a seismic shift in the educational landscape that has seen early resistance to these tools give way to acceptance.

The phenomenon of teenagers’ relationship with technology is not new but takes on fresh significance in the context of generative AI. Lara’s experience mirrors that of a 15-year-old intern from Morgan Stanley back in 2009, whose insights on media consumption rocked adults' preconceived notions. This younger generation, less tied to traditional structures, seems more willing to experiment, leading to innovative interactions with AI tools. For instance, Lara discovered that ChatGPT responds more effectively when given concise, refined prompts, a learning curve that highlights her adaptability and creativity in using new technologies.

Lara’s routine includes leveraging ChatGPT for various academic purposes, sparking a conversation around the increasing reliance on AI for tasks traditionally done by students themselves. Although her parents caution her against over-reliance—which they argue may lead to “intellectual atrophy”—she manages to balance its use by creating preliminary checklists and revision schedules. Given that a recent Pew Research Center survey indicates that 26% of U.S. teens aged 13 to 17 have used ChatGPT for schoolwork—more than double the figure recorded a year prior—Lara’s practices are emblematic of a broader trend.

Moreover, the diversity in AI usage reveals interesting demographic patterns. Black and Hispanic teens reportedly utilise ChatGPT for academic assistance more than their White counterparts, which suggests that socioeconomic factors may play a significant role in shaping these digital behaviours. Interestingly, while 79% of teens have heard of ChatGPT, only a quarter have used it specifically for school assignments, revealing room for further exploration and adoption.

Beyond academic applications, Lara’s engagement with generative AI extends to several tools such as Claude, Notion AI, and Descript, demonstrating her exploration of various functionalities within the AI landscape. Her peers show similar enthusiasm, although some, like Lara, steer clear of AI companions that promise emotional support, aware of the potential psychological impacts involved. Mhairi Aitken, a senior ethics fellow at The Alan Turing Institute, raises a crucial alarm regarding unmonitored interactions with AI, pointing out that chatbots can reinforce harmful worldviews. “AI companions are designed to affirm whatever the user’s worldview is,” she notes, expressing concern about how these interactions may shape the social experiences of young people.

Despite her nuanced understanding of the possible perils, Lara remains optimistic about the future of generative AI. “By the time I get to university, I think it will be part of everything,” she predicts, envisioning a world where AI facilitates not just academic success but broader personal and social interactions. This sentiment echoes findings from a survey conducted by Common Sense Media and others, where a significant portion of young adults anticipates both positive and negative impacts of AI over the next decade.

With daily engagement in these technologies, Lara Jeetley and her contemporaries are not just early adopters; they are also shaping the future landscape of communication, learning, and even social relationships. As schools begin to grapple with the implications of AI in education, the potential for innovation comes hand-in-hand with ethical considerations that will need to be addressed for future generations.

### Reference Map

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* Paragraph 4: [[2]](https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2025/01/15/about-a-quarter-of-us-teens-have-used-chatgpt-for-schoolwork-double-the-share-in-2023/), [[3]](https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/11/16/about-1-in-5-us-teens-whove-heard-of-chatgpt-have-used-it-for-schoolwork/)
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4. <https://www.axios.com/2024/06/03/ai-teens-young-adults-survey> - A survey by Common Sense Media, Hopelab, and the Harvard Graduate School of Education's Center for Digital Thriving reveals that while generative AI is gaining traction among young Americans, it is not yet a daily habit. Conducted in late 2023 with 1,274 U.S. teens and young adults aged 14-22, the survey found only 4% use AI tools regularly. Despite this, 41% expect AI to have both positive and negative impacts over the next decade.
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