USE OF AI TOOLS IN COMPLETING ACADEMIC TASKS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools in education has transformed how students approach academic tasks, offering convenience, efficiency, and enhanced productivity. However, this increasing reliance has raised concerns among educators and researchers regarding its impact on students' critical thinking, creativity, and academic integrity. Although AI use in education has been widely discussed, few studies in the Philippine context have focused on the lived experiences and perspectives of college students. To address this gap, this study explored the perceptions, experiences, and insights of students at Assumption College of Nabunturan, Inc. on their use of AI tools in academic work. Guided by a qualitative phenomenological design, the researchers conducted in-depth interviews with ten purposively selected students from five different departments. Thematic analysis of the data revealed both advantages and drawbacks of AI use. While students appreciated the tools for improving efficiency, writing quality, and learning convenience, they also expressed concerns about overreliance, loss of originality, and ethical risks such as plagiarism. Participants emphasized the importance of fact-checking, critical thinking, and combining AI use with personal effort. These findings highlight the need to promote AI literacy and self-regulated learning and call for institutions to provide clear guidelines that support responsible, ethical, and productive use of AI in academic contexts.

Keyword: *AB English, Artificial Intelligence, AI tools, academic tasks, education, ethical concerns, phenomenology, phenomenological study, student perceptions, self-regulated learning*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Artificial intelligence (AI) has significantly influenced educational environments by streamlining research and learning processes. While these tools offer convenience and efficiency, there is growing concern surrounds their impact on students' cognitive development. Increased reliance on AI may hinder critical thinking and independent problem-solving, as students often struggle to evaluate the credibility of AI-generated content. This reliance can lead to ethical dilemmas and an overreliance on it (Zhai et al., 2024)[1].

A study conducted in Thailand revealed a notable dependence on AI-powered educational tools among students, particularly writing aids such as Grammarly. While these applications contributed to improvements in grammar and vocabulary, many students reported decreased in creativity and intellectual engagement. Notably, over 87% of respondents indicated that their creativity had declined due to frequent reliance of AI for academic tasks. These findings suggest that, rather than actively engaging with learning materials, students primarily used AI to retrieve answers, thereby reducing the time and effort they invested in studying and critical thinking (Thangthong et al., 2024)[2].

In the Philippine context, the integration of AI in education has raised similar concerns. Educators have expressed worries about its potential negative impact on students' learning processes and overall development. A 2023 survey by Hanover Research involving 115 vocational institutions found that 52% of respondents feared AI might weaken students' creativity and critical thinking. Additionally, 49% cited data privacy 2 as a major concern, while only 31% mentioned plagiarism indicating that broader ethical and cognitive implications take precedence. The study also revealed that nearly 70% of these institutions either refrain from using AI or have implemented outright bans, reflecting a cautious stance toward its adoption in educational settings (Mateo, 2024)[3].

A pre-survey was conducted among 100 respondents from Assumption College of Nabunturan, Inc. in Davao de Oro, with 20 college students representing each department. The survey revealed that all respondents (100%) had used AI tools. ChatGPT, Grammarly, QuillBot, Meta AI, Perplexity, and Cici. These tools were valued for saving time, enhancing accuracy, ensuring availability, offering personalized experiences, and reducing costs. The findings highlighted a growing dependence on AI technologies within the local context, indicating their integration into teaching and learning practices.

Prior to the main study, the pre-survey served to explore students' experiences, perceptions, and insights regarding the use of AI in their educational journey. The study aimed to contribute meaningful knowledge about the challenges of the students in managing AI tools correctly and independently in their academic work.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore and understand the lived experiences of ten college students, with two from each of the five departments, regarding their use of AI tools for academic work and how these experiences shaped their perceptions, insights, and perspectives on the integration of AI in education.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Artificial Intelligence (AI) refers to the simulation of human intelligence in machines that are designed to think, learn, and solve problems like humans. These systems can perform tasks such as understanding language, recognizing patterns, making decisions, and even adapting over time through experience. AI has also played a significant role in the modern learning system, particularly in enhancing student engagement and teaching methods. As schools increasingly adopted AI technologies, they improved computer literacy levels among students, which changed how students approached their assignments, searched for information, and collaborated (Familoni et al., 2024)[4]. Intelligent learning environments, smart tutors, and virtual classes are crucial tools in modern education processes, changing teaching goals and enhancing learning achievements (Hare et al., 2024)[5]. As Abbas et al. (2023)[6] mentioned, ChatGPT helps develop educational assets, facilitates assessment and feedback, and offers opportunities to personalize the learning process. Scholars and researchers worldwide have expressed considerable concern in this area, prompting various studies on its advantages, disadvantages, and potential educational applications. According to Fitria (2022)[7], a writer whose article was published in the Journal of Education and Practice in 2022, ChatGPT is proficient in language and can use active or passive voice in English writing tasks for students. As illustrated by Huang and Li (2023)[8], there are significant possibilities for applying ChatGPT in scientific writing to enhance the writing rate, work out meaningful points into fine details, create a helpful outline, and improve the style of writing to discuss scientific ideas convincingly. Utilizing AI methods, such as ChatGPT, presents an exciting opportunity for researchers seeking to enhance study outcomes. They determined that ChatGPT enables researchers to generate scientific knowledge more efficiently by providing structures, essential information, and coherence.

Although there are suggestions that these methods can improve AI performance, they also pose serious questions about academic integrity. Several studies have explored how AI can be exploited for cheating, particularly in the context of high-stakes tests (Abd-Elaal et al., 2021)[9]. Thus, as AI is both an academic and an enemy, a more critical examination of the program's ethical advantages and disadvantages is still required. One issue in a recent article by Dergaa et al. (2023)[10] was the validity of research papers, as they were being used to improve writing ability. In

addition, Jaiteh et al. (2024)[11] aim to investigate the perceptions of university students on the application of AI in university settings. The findings revealed that perceptions towards the application of AI in university settings among university students vary. Four qualitatively distinct types of AI perceptions were also derived from interview data. According to research, college students view AI as a necessary academic tool, a means to personalize learning, and a potential hindrance to critical thinking while also raising ethical concerns. Moreover, as students increasingly use AI technologies, there is a growing need to assess how these tools impact their research capacity, particularly in terms of the quality of research papers and the originality of ideas. Examples of AI include ChatGPT 16 and Grammarly, which are now among the most popular AI tools among people (Wilkinson, 2024)[12].

In North America, artificial intelligence tools were seen to improve operational efficiency. According to the literature, most students in the United States and Canada view artificial intelligence as a means to enhance educational effectiveness and quality. Ascione (2024)[13] identified that over 51 percent of learners who adopted AI technologies gained higher scores and overall efficiency. On the downside, controversies persist regarding the effects of AI on problem-solving, compelling educators to exercise caution in relying too heavily on these technologies (Zhai et al., 2024)[14]. The Philippines remains hindered by a deep digital divide, which hampers students' ability to leverage AI as a resource, particularly in both urban and rural environments. In this case, urban students have better access to AI tools due to their improved connectivity and access to teaching and learning resources that incorporate AI (Philippine Institute for Development Studies, 2021)[15]. On the other hand, students in rural areas often lack access to such resources, resulting in inequalities in academic support and opportunities for skill development (Climaco & Mangarin, 2024)[16].

3. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative, phenomenological design to explore students' perceptions, attitudes, and experiences regarding the use of AI tools in learning activities. The descriptive part of the study aimed to illustrate the prevalence of the phenomenon, while the exploratory part sought to examine how such experiences are managed and under what conditions (Patton, 2015)[17]. This approach was used to gain deeper insight into how human beings interpret a given occurrence.

The phenomenological design was the most suitable approach for the research purpose, as it facilitated an investigation into the integrations of AI in learning settings. By focusing on participants' everyday experiences, the study aimed to address the research question of the concerning effect of students' reliance on AI during direct learning. It provided an in-depth analysis of how teachers' pedagogical practices and students' learning processes were affected by students' perceptions of AI integration.

This phenomenological study was limited to the perceptions, experiences, and insights of 10 college students in different college departments at Assumption College of Nabunturan, Inc. Specifically, this study included two students each from the following programs: Bachelor of Arts in English Language, Bachelor of Science in Office Administration, Bachelor of Science in Business Administration, Bachelor of Science in Secondary Education, and Bachelor of Science in Accounting Education. These students were selected based on the following inclusion criteria: they must be enrolled at Assumption College of Nabunturan, Inc. for the 2024-2025 school year, belong to one of the five college departments, and have prior experience using AI tools to complete academic tasks.
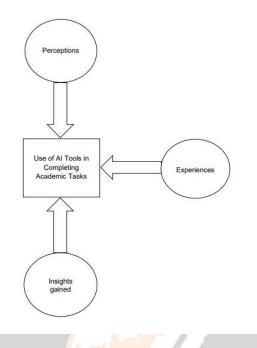
Fig -1: Conceptual Framework

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study explored students' experiences and perceptions of AI usage in academic tasks, aiming to uncover its benefits, challenges, and implications for educational development. The following questions guided this:

1. What are the students' perceptions when using AI tools to complete academic tasks?
2. What are the students' experiences about using AI tools for academic tasks?
3. What insights have students gained from using AI tools to accomplish academic tasks?

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings of this study were organized into nine main themes that reflect the participants' perceptions, experiences, and insights gained to the use of AI tools in academic work. Each theme is discussed in relation to relevant literature, offering a comprehensive view of how students navigate the benefits and drawbacks of AI in their academic journey.

Perception on the Reliability and Credibility of AI-Generated Content. Two dominant forms of adverse reaction among participants regarding the reliability and credibility of AI-generated content were that this content is not perfect and that it is not yet credible enough. Respondents acknowledged the convenience of AI tools but remained cautious about their accuracy, noting that AI sometimes produces outdated or incorrect information. Most stressed the need for cross-verifying with reliable sources. These findings align with Ou et al. (2024)[18] also emphasized that fact-checking AI output fosters more responsible and informed use, a sentiment echoed by participants in this study.

Impact of AI Tools in Learning and Skill Development. Three of the most engaging themes among the respondents regarding how learning and skills acquisition are being affected by AI tools are overdependence, the convenience that AI offers in knowledge acquisition, and its potential in skill building. While AI supports learning, many respondents warned that over-reliance could hinder critical thinking, problem-solving, and independent effort. Ward et al. (2024)[19] also emphasized that AI should serve as a support tool rather than replace traditional learning. Others acknowledged AI's role in generating ideas, structuring content, and aiding research, which aligns with Treve's (2024)[20] findings on AI's ability to enhance personalized learning and engagement when used appropriately.

Ethical Concerns Faced in Using AI Tools for Academic Tasks. Two central themes that can be inferred from the respondents' responses regarding the ethical concerns of using AI tools in academic work are the risk of plagiarism and the untrustworthiness of data. Participants voiced concern over students presenting AI-generated work as original, thus compromising academic honesty. This aligns with Rentier's (2024)[21] view that generative AI blurs the line between original and automated content, creating challenges in preserving integrity. Another key issue was the inaccuracy of AI outputs, which some respondents found misleading or outdated. Vannette (2025)[22] supports this, noting AI's data limitations and bias can lead to false or misleading information, increasing students' burden of verification.

Ways AI Tools Improved the Efficiency and Accuracy of Academic Tasks. Four prominent themes were summarized from the participants' reflections on how AI technology increases efficiency and precision in learning work: proofreading and grammar aid, enhanced time management effectiveness, idea enhancement aid, and facilitation of learning ease. Students reported that AI improved their academic writing through grammar checks and proofreading tools. This reflects Chaudhary et al.'s (2024)[23] finding that AI tools provide immediate feedback, enhancing grammar and sentence structure. Respondents also appreciated the time-saving benefits of AI in citation generation and summarizing, allowing more focus on analysis. However, Yaseen et al. (2025)[24] cautioned that over-reliance on such tools may impair critical and creative thinking skills.

Challenges Encountered in Relying AI Tools for Academic Work. Four prominent themes on AI flaws in academic work are: errors in generated material, overly utopian outcomes, excessive reliance, and knowledge deficits. Respondents shared that AI often produced incomplete or incorrect information, confirming Athaluri et al. (2023)[25], who noted many AI-generated citations were fabricated. Participants also said AI gave unrealistic suggestions that didn't fit local academic needs. Some admitted becoming too reliant on AI, fearing it reduced self-learning and critical thinking. Lastly, concerns were raised about ethical issues and long-term knowledge gaps caused by overdependence, emphasizing the need for transparency and academic integrity.

Coping Mechanism Used with the Difficulties Faced in Using AI Tools. Four key strategies were identified from the respondents' responses on how they verify AI-generated information: cross-checking with credible sources, using multiple AI tools, crafting specific prompts, and applying critical thinking with paraphrasing. Students emphasized fact-checking with academic sources such as books and peer-reviewed journals to validate AI content. Aguilar (2025)[26] supports this approach, noting the importance of balancing AI use with personalized, credible learning. Others reported consulting multiple AI platforms to compare answers, enhancing response accuracy. Mollick and Mollick (2023)[27] reinforce this practice, advocating for guided AI use that complements, not replaces, student engagement and oversight.

Influence of Understanding AI's Limitations in Shaping its Utilization Approaches Four emergent themes arose from the respondents' reactions to their knowledge and use of AI: growing caution, increasing awareness, resisting overdependence, and acting ethically. Students described a more reflective and cautious approach to using AI, recognizing its limitations in contextual understanding and critical depth. Ateeq et al. (2024)[28] emphasized the need for ethics-focused education to guide informed AI use. Many participants also reported resisting overdependence, aware that ease of use could reduce effort and critical thinking. Cotton et al. (2023)[29] similarly warned that unchecked reliance on AI may hinder long-term academic growth and intellectual development.

Best Practices Developed to Maximize the Benefits of AI Tools in Academic Tasks. Five overarching themes were identified from the respondents' responses regarding the proper utilization of AI in learning processes: using AI for specific purposes, using it sparingly only where necessary, utilizing it as a tool for information gathering, verifying AI outputs, and integrating AI with their own capabilities and competence. Participants emphasized the use of AI for well-defined purposes like brainstorming or developing outlines and stressed that AI should assist, not augment, their knowledge. They also shared their habit of verifying AI outputs with scholarly sources and emphasized filtering AI results through their own analysis and creativity, aligning with Gealone's (2024)[30] study promoting a hybrid model of AI support and student responsibility.

Recommendation to Other Students in Using AI for Academic Tasks. Through the responses of participants, five major themes emerged regarding the ethics of using AI tools in academia: imposing bounds, employing AI prudently and responsibly, fostering a culture of verification, applying AI only to specific aims, and resorting to it only when necessary. Students emphasized the importance of setting boundaries and using AI as a support tool, not a replacement for independent learning. This view is supported by Francis, Jones, and Smith (2025)[31]. Participants also shared their practice of fact-checking AI-generated content with credible sources, highlighting the need for AI literacy and critical thinking, aligning with Walter's (2024)[32] emphasis on safeguarding academic integrity.

IMPLICATION FOR PRACTICE

According to the findings of this research, there are some practical and positive implications regarding the appropriate use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools in educational settings:

Perception of the Reliability and Credibility of AI-Generated Content. Students should be equipped with the ability to assess the credibility of AI-generated content critically. This entails verifying information against peer-reviewed material and applying proper scholarly judgment. Academic institutions can support this effort by incorporating digital and information literacy into their curriculum. Such courses must address the limitations of AI, including errors in fact and algorithmic bias. Educators must also remind students continuously and instruct them not to accept AI's content indiscriminately. Such practices further strengthen critical thinking and promote autonomous intellectual development.

Impact of AI Tools in Learning and Skill Development. While AI facilitates academic work more easily, it should not come at the expense of fundamental educational skills. The task is to engage students with AI output in a positive way by critiquing, questioning, and reflecting on the material rather than accepting it passively. Instructors can aid by 90 establishing learning experiences that utilize AI in ways that require critical thinking, thereby enabling students to continue developing skills in reasoning, synthesis, and problem-solving. A systematic balance between the aid of AI and traditional instruction will promote greater learning and more meaningful scholarly development.

Ethical Concerns Faced in Using AI Tools for Academic Tasks. As there is an increasing emphasis on AI in education, institutions need to establish clear and understandable ethical principles that define the proper use of AI tools in students' assignments. They need to develop policies for plagiarism, accrediting work done through AI, and avoiding excessive dependence. Ethics education may be provided through workshops, classroom seminars, or co-curricular seminars. Maintaining open lines of communication between students and instructors will further enhance ethical sensitivity and cultural awareness, promoting academic responsibility and honesty.

Ways AI Tools Improved the Efficiency and Accuracy of Academic Tasks. Students experienced greater efficiency and accuracy in academic work when utilizing AI tools correctly. For maximum benefit, teachers must provide systematic guidance on applying AI to perform operations such as brainstorming, content drafting, and editing without allowing AI to substitute for student input. Educators can structure systematic training practices or learning module blocks to enable students to apply AI efficiently and ethically. This ensures that technology assistance aims to augment, rather than hinder, academic density and innovation.

Challenges Encountered in Relying on AI Tools for Academic Work. Despite its benefits, AI also has its limitations, such as factual inaccuracies and students' vulnerability to over-dependence. This could be rationalized through institutions adopting an ongoing 91 training and technical support strategy. Facilitating a combination of AI-supported and non-digital learning activities will enhance students' resilience and flexibility in coping with both digital and non-digital learning environments.

Coping Mechanisms Used with the Difficulties Faced in Using AI Tools. Students have been creative in managing AI-related problems, frequently resorting to peer learning, self-discovery, and faculty assistance. Schools can support these coping strategies by promoting peer study groups or technology-support clubs, where students can share and collaborate to address issues. Promoting help-seeking orientations and providing opportunities for mentorship further enable students to use AI responsibly and confidently.

Influence of Understanding AI's Limitations in Shaping Its Utilization Approaches. Awareness of the absence of context in AI's comprehension, inability to notice subtlety and failure to apply human judgment have resulted in

student behavior being more restricted and deliberate. Education systems and educators must cultivate critical debate of these limitations, not just technologically but also ethically and pragmatically. By gaining a clearer understanding of the constraints of AI, students are more likely to use it responsibly and carefully in their education.

Best Practices Developed to Maximize the Benefits of AI Tools in Academic Tasks. Best practices have been developed by students, like applying AI to generate the first draft, improving grammar and structure, or outlining. Organizations should gather and classify these student-established practices into official AI literacy programs, allowing future students to benefit from tested and proven procedures. Tasks that incorporate both AI use and student rewriting can be rich moments to demonstrate how AI should augment, rather than usurp, intellectual effort.

Recommendations to Other Students in Using AI for Academic Tasks. According to the findings, it is recommended that students use AI as a guide rather than as the ultimate authority. AI can be an excellent instrument for sparking ideas or outlining concepts but with critical thinking, verification, and adaptation. Students are also encouraged to seek advice from peers and instructors, fostering an open and ethical learning environment for deploying AI. By exercising judgment and responsibility, students may use AI without compromising the integrity and authenticity of their work.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The use of artificial intelligence (AI) in schools is both a fantastic tool and a significant dilemma. While AI is becoming a more standard tool that students can access to contribute value to school assignments, there are also concerns about overdependence and the devaluation of critical thinking. This study reveals the reality that while AI may make things more efficient and accurate, providing learners with customized experiences, there is apprehension regarding whether it can breed dependency and take away people's creativity. Given that such threats are involved, it is thus essential that teachers adopt methods that not only leverage the benefits accrued from AI but also highlight the importance of developing independent learning and intellectual honesty. Students must become proficient in AI, develop timely engineering skills, and cultivate critical thinking to adapt effectively to this technological shift. To achieve this, schools must truly integrate AI literacy into their curricula and encourage collaboration between students and teachers. By viewing AI as a tool that complements rather than replaces human cognitive abilities, teachers can maximize its benefits without compromising the development of essential intellectual skills. Overall, embracing this new technology requires constant observation and inquiry, calling for continuous questioning of AI's longterm impact on education.

6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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