

Article

Exploring the Experiences of College Students in Using ChatGPT as an Academic Support Tool: A Qualitative Study

Najera R. Umpar¹, Soraya R. Umpar², Trish Anne D. Magsino¹, Don Emmanuel L. Nolasco¹, & Daniel C. Abuton¹

¹National University, Philippines | ²Emilio Aguinaldo College Cavite, Philippines

Correspondence: umparjnajera@gmail.com

Abstract

The presence of AI-based chatbots such as OpenAI's ChatGPT has become more visible in academic spaces with the rising popularity of generative AI tools. Students can easily utilize AI to their advantage and this might create a scenario where faculty members are thrilled as well as anxious at the same time. To get a hold of the situation, college student perceptions and uses of ChatGPT in academic work are examined in this study. It mainly focuses on users' views, uses, experiences, moods, and moral reasoning. Ten students were purposively selected from various programs of study to take part in the semi-structured interviews that formed the research. The data collected was then analyzed for patterns and shared views using thematic analysis. Students had different opinions. Some students viewed GPT as a helpful tool for coming up with new ideas, checking grammar, and revising a lesson. Besides, the problem of AI reliance for information, false information, and the ethical issue of using AI-generated work for school purposes were also raised in the study. The research highlights the need for students' digital and ethical awareness. One of the recommendations made is for the institutions to draft guidelines, and organize training sessions so that students can make a reasonable and informed use of AI tools to accomplish their study goals.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, ChatGPT, Digital literacy, Academic Support Tool

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Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has significantly changed the manner in which students access information and complete their academic tasks. One of the main factors which brought about such a change is ChatGPT. ChatGPT, an OpenAI product, is a generative language model that comprises GPT-3 and GPT-4 stacks, and only human language is used as training data. This model can generate conversations that look like human ones and can also give the right answer to the question from any field of content. These features—writing, summarizing, and explanation—have made ChatGPT a very user-friendly tool for educational purposes (Rahaman et al., 2023; Javaid et al., 2023).

The finding of the most recent study is that the ChatGPT can improve the productivity of the learners mainly in the higher education context, where students are required to do complex writing tasks, heavy workloads, and meet deadlines (Kurban & Şahin, 2024). It is appealing to students since ChatGPT is easy to use and accessible, especially for those students who do not obtain high-quality education (Doleck & Memarian, 2023). The concept of AI tulad ng chatGOT is a component of the digital education ecosystem that is more beneficial in the long run (Chan & Hu, 2023).

Despite the advantages of ChatGPT, its use also raises important pedagogical and ethical questions. On the one hand, ChatGPT makes things easier and more efficient; however, some scholars warn that the use of AI tools can hamper independent thought, damage academic honesty, and limit critical cognitive skillsets (Evangelista, 2025). Owan et al. (2023) argue that there is a great distinction between using AI as a tool to support learning and using AI in place of learning. There is much concern that students will simply rely on AI solutions rather than staying engaged in their studies and their own intellectual contributions (Gerlich, 2025).

The appropriateness of the above mentioned becomes even more location-sensitive in the developing country context, such as the Philippines, where students face structural challenges like lack of academic resources, inconsistent digital literacy and language differences (Villaseñor, 2024). ChatGPT in these environments can serve as a valuable academic support or be an area of ethical dilemmas. Until this point, the application of the product has enabled students to access, review and complete academic tasks in a far more confident way. The risk however is over-reliance, and compromising the "support" element of AI and academic honesty to an indistinct line. As Estrellado and Miranda (2023) highlight, institutional and infrastructural parameters determines the parameters where AI is used and regulated in the local education context.

Though research on AI in education is steadily increasing, there remain few qualitative studies of student perspectives and experiences, especially in non-Western and other under-represented contexts. Most of the literature looks at AI adoption from institutional or pedagogical perspectives, while little is known about how students themselves have engaged with these tools in their studies (Fošner, 2024). Without exploring students' lived experiences, it is difficult to create ethical principles and supports for students that reflect actual student need. As generative AI becomes more commonplace in day-to-day learning contexts, it is essential to understand how students are framing their use, managing its limitations, and recognizing ethical or ethical issues.

This study seeks to do just that by examining Filipino college students' perceptions and uses of ChatGPT as part of their academic work. This study will interview attendees of a chatgpt workshop to explore students' lived experiences. The goal of this research is to better understand some of the advantages and concerns regarding ChatGPT and to examine how learners take advantage of the opportunities and risks of AI-mediated learning. Ultimately, this study contributes to the discourse surrounding the responsible application of AI in higher education within a more equitable and ethical context, in alignment with students' lived realities.

The main goal of this study is to explore how college students perceive and use ChatGPT in their academic work. Specifically, it aims to:

1. Identify common ways students use ChatGPT for school-related tasks;
2. Examine the perceived benefits and challenges of using ChatGPT;
3. Understand students' ethical reflections and concerns regarding AI use; and
4. Analyze how students decide whether to trust ChatGPT's responses.

Methodology

This study takes a qualitative approach using the phenomenological method to learn about students' lived experiences with ChatGPT. Qualitative methodologies were chosen for their effectiveness capturing the richness of student perspectives. Ten college students were recruited from various different academic programs (Business, Education, IT, Health Sciences) using purposive sampling methods. To qualify for participation in the study, participants had to currently attend a college or university in the Philippines and have used ChatGPT greater than five times for the purpose of education.

In a semi-structured manner, each formal interview session was conducted using MS Teams and lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. The interview guide was somewhat flexible to allow students to share their experiences, worries, and reflection

in their own way and in their own words; informed consent was taken prior to commencing each interview.

Interview transcripts were analyzed according to Braun and Clarke's (2006) themes which include Familiarization with data, Initial coding, Patterns of codes, and Key themes across all participant experiences.

Findings

The analysis of the interview data revealed four major themes that encapsulate students' perceptions, experiences, and concerns regarding the use of ChatGPT in their academic work.

Theme 1: ChatGPT as a Helpful Academic Support Tool

Furthermore, many participants liked the practicality of ChatGPT as a multi-tasking and convenient resource benefiting their learning process. It enables students to organize and understand the structure of their essays through helping them brainstorm ideas pertaining to a topic. It appears as a crucial assistant mostly for those students experiencing difficulties initiating their essays because of imminent deadlines. Again, it best functions as an ideal resource in shaping the coherence of created works as a complete piece with adequate use of grammar and sentence constructions.

Furthermore, students often utilized ChatGPT while assessing the quality of their grammar and language. It also assisted in the rectification of spellings and sentence structuring and the quality of their writings. ChatGPT assisting with their academic writing activities best applied to students with English as a second language. Furthermore, the participants highlighted the efficacy of the tool in elucidating information and clarifying concepts. The most commonly referenced attribute was ChatGPT's capability to streamline and condense intricate theories or lengthy texts. This function assists students in structuring their study materials or exam preparation when alternative resources are lacking.

Theme 2: Concerns about Accuracy and Misinformation

Many respondents indicated that ChatGPT was easy to use and possessed many strengths. However, for them, the reliability and correctness of the AI created great difficulties. They pointed out cases wherein the AI offered outmoded, incomplete, or completely inaccurate data, as well as instances wherein the AI proceeded confidently with faulty figures or deceptive sole explanations. They also challenged if the AI could be an honest depository of scholarly information from diverse areas. Respondents then

elaborated on speculative scenarios wherein they could have erred in their scholarly life if they relied only on ChatGPT without verifying certain results. In order to protect themselves from inaccurate data, they adopted strategies aimed at minimizing hazards. In order to ensure that the answers of ChatGPT were never always correct, I cross-checked them from other credible and scholarly sources like textbooks, class materials, online scholarly journals, or tutorial sites. This reflected their initiative towards the use of ChatGPT as an ancillary tool for scholarly tasks requiring precision or at least commonly acceptable data. Hence, they showcased their regard for scholarly correctness as well as their awareness of the limitations of ChatGPT.

Others stated that ChatGPT could be a suitable first resource or point of reference because, of course, checking other sources could be a tedious chore. Conversely, there were also those who argued that it wasn't a very credible resource per se because there was nothing that could be used to verify its claims.

ChatGPT proved extremely user-friendly for the majority of users, who could use it for an endless number of tasks such as learning. When brainstorming ideas related to a topic, it helps them understand how to structure and present their papers. This resource is also very helpful for individuals who are unable to start their essays early as they have too many responsibilities. Again, the same technology could be used by the same individual to refine the quality of their paper such that it is both grammatically accurate as well as coherent.

The students also resorted to ChatGPT to aid their grammar and language proficiency. This was extremely helpful while they rewrote essays, including constructing sentences, spell-checking, and enhancing structure. ChatGPT proved particularly helpful for students studying English as a second language because they could use the software for their essay-writing tasks. People liked the way the software could condense large notions or complicated notions by simplifying them. Quite often, users noted ChatGPT's summary of long texts or complex notions with surprising speed. This helped students summarize their study materials or revision papers when there were no other sources.

Theme 3: Risk of Overreliance and Reduced Critical Thinking

There were those who recognized that excessive reliance on ChatGPT is harmful, particularly when they were already strongly pressured at school, such as when they had much work simultaneously or were short of time. They acknowledged that ChatGPT compromised standards by cutting corners fast because that was an easier route by relying on AI. That made their study or analysis poor.

Others were frank that at times the degree of dependence prevented them from learning more about the course. They occasionally allowed ChatGPT to generate notions, plans, or encapsulations that prevent each individual from contributing more to the learning procedure, as opposed to actively reading the text or reflecting deeply upon it.

Once there was an option to use ChatGPT for fast answers and composition, there were users who reported that they felt "lazy" or did not wish to work out on complex thoughts. They recognized that such convenience made them worse at learning and practicing elementary academic abilities such as researching by themselves, composing original term papers, and thinking analytically.

Many of the users were motivated by the AI programs because they indicated that this tendency of sitting too far forward became greater when they were short of time or faced a choice of conflicting commitments. Some individuals were also concerned at the threat of losing the capacity for critical thought because at times they found that they were agreeing with ChatGPT automatically rather than thinking deeply about or analysing.

Theme 4: Ethical Reflections and Ambiguity

The more the discussions continued, the ethical problems of ChatGPT use became evident but intricate. The varying opinion of the respondents reflected that they had reservations regarding existing AI and plagiarism controversy. The varying opinions demonstrate that moral choices do not always become uniform nor universal when AI use occurs. They become situation-dependent and are made from an individual's standpoint of belief and experience.

Pretty large numbers of those who responded also indicated that they believed there were certain uses of ChatGPT that were nearly always morally acceptable. These included such things as spell-checking, idea-getting, or learning from the program. Those who responded likened them to familiar methods of assisting the student learner like the use of a teacher's guide, studying with other students in a study group, or referring to a grammar guide. Those who participated felt that these assisted them in learning but still allowed for individuality as well as the expression of their creativity.

Many of those who did answer also commented that they felt very strongly that it was unethical to answer personally or submit papers or solutions that were produced by computers with no actual editing or input by hand. Cheating and copying also were prohibited by school policies. Panel members were also very concerned that

overuse of materials created by AI will harm valuable principles like study ethics and personal responsibility.

The key thing for students to consider when deciding whether the use of AI is ethical is how valuable openness and intent are. Those who responded to the questionnaire indicated that the kind of blending is what makes exclusion of ChatGPT from learning situations acceptable. Using software in a manner that is ethically acceptable entails using software to make an individual student learn more and become more imaginative. But you could not use software to conceal that you did not originate an idea or substitute actual brainwork. The variation reveals intense flexible insight into the multifaceted threat that AI creates for academic dishonesty. Those who responded to the questionnaire indicated that it was difficult to transgress moral borders without institutional or cultural guidelines. Individuals made their respective choices, and sometimes they made different decisions about the usage of AI, and sometimes they made the other choice. That implies that there is a need for more discussion and explanation by schools.

Discussion

This study provides rich insights into the nuanced perceptions and lived experiences of Filipino college students using ChatGPT as an academic tool. The four central themes identified academic support, accuracy concerns, risks of overreliance, and ethical reflections are consistent with the broader discourse on the integration of AI in education, as supported by recent scholarly work.

ChatGPT as Academic Support

New studies demonstrate that AI programs are excellent at assisting with grammar checking, summarizing, and thinking (Budiyono, Marzuki, Pudjaningsih, Prastio, & Maulidina 2025). ChatGPT has benefited students. ChatGPT facilitates children doing more by relieving some of the pressure of writing and preparing for school. It also provides them with an opportunity of getting personalized academic assistance that they could not receive or afford previously. It is particularly beneficial for those learners who do not have a lot of time, do not know much about utilizing language, or who could not easily access the conventional classroom materials. One study by Adiguzel, Kaya, and Cansu (2023) indicates that AI may foster egalitarian learning by providing swift assistance at a distance, perhaps enhancing both classroom learning and independent learning experiences. Due to this, ChatGPT is not only a resource that facilitates the completion of work of learners but also facilitates them easily fulfilling the requirements of their schoolwork.

However, the paper justifies that AI is also another tool that will never replace fundamental learning abilities (Holmes, Bialik & Fadel 2019). Filipino users of the ChatGPT also feel the same way; the tool is useful but never a replacement for actual interaction. Further, the argument emphasizes that instructors are supposed to integrate AI technologies within their teaching to guarantee active learning, assistance, and analysis rather than allowing users to use them individually.

Concerns about Accuracy and Misinformation

ChatGPT is beneficial while learning but for learners there is concern regarding the correctness and reliability of the information that ChatGPT offers. This concern is a result of an issue shared by large language models like ChatGPT referred to as the phenomenon of the "hallucination" of the AI. Hallucination happens when an AI provides information that seems accurate but is inaccurate, confusing, or incomplete (Chelli, Descamps, Lavoué, Trojani, Azar, Deckert, Raynier, Clowez, Boileau & Ruetsch-Chelli 2024). Another big issue is that it is not easy for learners to use ChatGPT as an information provider if they do not first cross-reference the source of the information.

The students used old, wrong, or confusing answers, which shows the problem with how helpful it is for AI to give quick answers and how risky it is for that information to be wrong. This uncertainty could make the quality of the students' work lower because they might make mistakes or misunderstand something when they do not have the time or resources to think about the AI's answer carefully. Just like Walter (2024) warned, this could mean that while AI gives information quickly and easily, it might also have small mistakes that less-informed users could miss. What was most interesting, however, was how aware the volunteers were of the risks. Many people said they compared or checked ChatGPT's answers with more reliable sources, like textbooks, course materials, and study databases. This shows that students are doubtful about the technology itself and do not want to accept knowledge from AI without questioning it. Another study by Ofosu-Ampong, Acheampong, Kevor, and Amankwah-Sarfo (2023) found similar results. They found that students often check AI's reliability before accepting its information.

So, the emphasis we place on verification complements a wider learning discussion that values both the use of human monitoring and of AI-using technologies. Researchers like Swiecki, Khosravi, Chen, Martinez-Maldonado, Lodge, Milligan, Selwyn, and Gašević (2022) explain that although AI has the promise of making learning very easy by providing individuals with fast access to a large variety of different types of information, individuals who use AI programs need to be cautious

and use their critical thinking abilities to decide upon and make sense of these programs. In a similar manner, Allen and Kendeou (2023) made use of the same type of argument. They also placed a great deal of value on the development of trust in digital knowledge by creating good AI training programs. That the individuals involved in this study were subject to ChatGPT was measured and provides a good illustration of this type of blending of the need to use AI with the need to verify things yourself.

In addition, these same issues of accuracy also raise the same question of whether recourse to AI tools at school will change the manner in which students study and think about knowledge. One good way of gaining a deeper insight of digital information could be obtained by checking and verifying materials created by AI more regularly. This could end up making students savvier users of the technologies over the decades (Yim & Su 2025). But confusion or doubt could be generated by that amongst students if they are not sure if the AI tools that they are guided towards are trustworthy. It will be extremely essential by Bećirović, Polz, and Tinkel (2025) for there also to be a balance between trust and suspicion such that will end up allowing students to gain the capabilities that they require if they are able to handle learning environments that integrate AI.

Risks of Overreliance and Reduced Critical Thinking

They are very advanced. One feature of AI software is that it makes things faster and easier than ever before. These are both appealing and useful qualities. If you use ChatGPT to get ideas, write text, or summarize text, you might accidentally stop improving basic academic skills. Some of these skills include analytical thinking, reflective judgment, and connecting what you know. These are all important parts of learning and intellectual growth that are more advanced in adults (Mahapatra, 2024).

Participants' comments say that using ChatGPT for a long time makes people less interested in studying well and finding new solutions to problems. According to Shah and Asad (2024), this is another concern in education research: how AI is used in classrooms could influence students' ability to think independently, as relying on AI may make them less self-sufficient.

Furthermore, such dependence puts it in doubt that learners will be able to acquire knowledge in an AI-dominated world. It becomes increasingly impossible to differentiate student creativeness from assembly work because of increased usage of AI in learning processes and instruction (Kopp & Gröblinger 2024). That is because conventional notions of scholarly integrity and personal competence become increasingly obscure.

Ethical Reflections and Ambiguity

There is great controversy brewing across the world over adopting AI in the classroom, specifically over issues of fairness and honesty in academics (Bin-Nashwan, Sadallah, & Bouteraa 2023). Students, intelligent as they are, are left confused about what is true. Their views on how AI should be adopted range from enormously negative to extremely positive. Just as enthusiastically, teachers, groups of educators, and politicians from around the globe have had a range of confused feelings about the issue.

Most respondents did state that acceptability of the use of such tools as ChatGPT depended upon the circumstances of use, the intent, and clarity of the circumstances. Current scholarship (Veisi, Bahrami, Englert & Müller 2025) cautions against blanket bans or laws over AI use. This cautious approach corresponds with that view. Instead of requiring models that resonate within given circumstances over given timeframes, given diverse uses of AIs as well as their very different learning environments within which they operate, such models recommend student policies that balance off the pros of utilizing the AIs as learning tools against the values of scholarly diligence and honesty.

For example, students found it was okay and even helpful to utilize ChatGPT to check their language, come up with ideas, or as a way to learn more. Chia et al. (2024) said that using these tools was like asking a friend or a paper professor for help in studying and improving their work without losing its originality. It was highly awful to turn in essays or answers that the computer made instead of your own thoughts or knowledge, just as cheating or plagiarism in school (Malik et al. 2024).

The students notice the difference because it indicates that they comprehend that AI is there to assist them with their tasks rather than replace them. Because this is a confusing ethical dilemma, there is a need for schools to establish fast guidelines regarding the use of AI. Currently, numerous learners in countless learning institutions do not understand what is acceptable and what is not when they use AI for assistance, thus they use AI with varying approaches and could exploit its use (Çela et al. 2024). Establishing straightforward guidelines concerning that which is acceptable and that which is not regarding such AI software could enable learning institutions to lower confusion.

Conclusions

This paper enlightens the way learners from a university perceive and utilize ChatGPT as an educational resource. They appreciate its potential of assisting them

with practical activities such as ideation of concepts, enhancing their linguistic proficiency, and getting assisted by it with memory consolidation. However, simultaneously they also understand its potential harm very well. Other than that, there also lie social issues if someone resorts to cheating while learning, propagates misinformation, or excessively leans on machine learning. Each of these problems highlights why utilizing generative AI as an educational resource might not be such a great idea.

From these findings, we have to appropriately steer the student towards the acquisition of responsible use of software that is produced by AI while enhancing their ability of critical thinking. Further, we also have to educate the student on ethical consideration concerning the understanding of when an individual is permitted to use AI software towards their academic pursuit and when an individual is not.

Learning centers will need to create and implement some standards for the use of appropriate AI. Students will know how to use appropriate AI tools appropriately, will know what they are doing when getting these results from these tools, and will be honest about their work by doing this kind of assignment. In the end, the two-horn approach will make AI learn better and break less often.

Conflicts of Interests

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest related to this research.

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