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AI and I: A Phenomenological Study of Senior High School Students' Experiences with Artificial Intelligence in Education (AIEd)

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Abstract

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is increasingly transforming educational practices by enhancing access to information, supporting personalized learning, and improving student engagement. However, despite its growing integration in classrooms, there remains limited understanding of how Senior High School students in local contexts experience and perceive the use of AI in their learning. This qualitative study employed a phenomenological approach to examine the experiences of Senior High School students in adopting Artificial Intelligence (AI) in education at North Valley College Foundation Inc. Specifically, the research evaluated student engagement with AI tools, the ways these technologies support learning, and their perceived impact on educational experiences. Data were collected through in-depth interviews (IDI) with five (5) participants and focus group discussions (FGD) with an additional five (5) participants, all selected via purposive sampling. The findings indicate that students use AI both as a source of knowledge and as a learning support tool that enhances understanding, task completion, and engagement. While participants recognized the benefits of AI in facilitating learning and improving efficiency, concerns were raised regarding credibility, ethical use, and potential overdependence. Despite the increasing integration of AI in education, few studies have investigated the lived experiences of Senior High School students in private schools in North Cotabato. This study addresses this gap by providing localized insights into students' perceptions and experiences with AI in education. The results contribute to the expanding body of research on AI in education and may inform future research and educational practices involving AI technologies.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence in Education (AIEd), student experiences, phenomenological research, senior high school students, learning engagement, ai-supported learning

INTRODUCTION

Artificial Intelligence (AI) refers to the development of computer systems capable of performing tasks traditionally associated with human intelligence, such as learning, reasoning, problem solving, and decision making. As technology advances, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become increasingly integrated into educational contexts. AI is transforming how students acquire knowledge, engage in learning, and complete academic tasks. Artificial Intelligence in Education (AIEd) offers opportunities for personalized learning and expanded access to information. Recent research highlights both the advantages and challenges associated with its use. Charles and Charles (2024) explored students' perceptions

of AI, noting its potential to support learning tasks and enhance educational experiences.

Conversely, Eden et al. (2024) emphasize that overreliance on AI tools may reduce opportunities for critical engagement and independent problem-solving. These contrasting perspectives underscore the need for further research into students' experiences and perceptions of AI in educational settings.
The implementation of the K-12 education system in the Philippines has facilitated greater integration of technology within learning environments, particularly among Senior High School students. Millora et al. (2024) found that AI tools such as ChatGPT can support student learning when used purposefully.

Similarly, Dida-Agun and Abarquez (2025) reported that students perceive AI as beneficial for learning lessons, organizing materials, and completing academic tasks. However, these studies primarily emphasize quantitative outcomes and general perceptions, with limited attention to students lived experiences, especially within private educational institutions in North Cotabato.

The use of AI in education is expanding; however, there is a lack of localized research examining how Senior High School students experience AI and its effects on learning, academic engagement, and ethical considerations. This study seeks to address this gap by investigating the experiences of Senior High School students at North Valley College Foundation Inc. in utilizing AI within their educational practices. Inc. in applying AI in their education. Understanding how students engage with AI is essential for assessing the impact of these technologies on learning practices and educational engagement. The purpose of this research is to examine how students utilize AI, the benefits they obtain, and the challenges they encounter throughout their educational experiences.

Research Questions. To explore senior high school students' experiences with Artificial Intelligence (AI) in learning, its impact on their education, and how AI tools support and enhance their learning, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the students' experiences in using Artificial Intelligence (AI) in their education?

2. How does the use of AI affect students' overall educational experiences, including their learning and its benefits?

3. In what ways do AI tools support and enhance students' learning?

Theoretical Lens. This study is anchored on Constructivism Theory (Jean Piaget), Sociocultural Theory (Lev Vygotsky), and Self-Directed Learning Theory (Malcolm Knowles) to explain AI's role in education. Constructivism highlights how students actively build knowledge through AI tools that support understanding and problem-solving. Sociocultural Theory explains how AI acts as a mediating tool that provides guidance, feedback, and collaborative support influenced by teachers, peers, and school practices. Self-Directed Learning Theory emphasizes students' ability to manage their own learning through AI by accessing information, practicing skills, and monitoring progress. Together, these theories suggest that effective learning occurs when AI supports active learning, social interaction, and learner autonomy while enhancing, not replacing, human interaction.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Students' Engagement with AI as a Learning Tool. Recent literature repeatedly demonstrates that artificial intelligence (AI) augments student engagement via individualized learning, immediate feedback, adaptive instruction, and interactive educational experiences. Research highlighted that AI-driven tools, including ChatGPT, intelligent tutoring systems, adaptive learning platforms, and chatbot assistants, enhance student motivation, engagement, and participation in academic activities (Maphalala & Ajani, 2025; Mojolou et al., 2025; Sasikala & Ravichandran,

2024; Younas et al., 2025). These technologies facilitate personalized learning requirements, enabling students to engage more significantly in classroom activities and enhance their educational experiences.

Numerous studies conducted in the Philippines corroborate the beneficial correlation between the utilization of AI and student involvement. Investigations concerning senior high school and junior high school students demonstrated that the incorporation of AI enhanced participation, concentration, motivation, and academic engagement across various disciplines, including mathematics, life sciences, and Technology and Livelihood Education (Brigola, 2025; Gonzales & Nabua, 2025; Medrano et al., 2025; Pelegrino et al., 2025; Villaver & Cabigas, 2025). Students with a favorable perception of AI tools exhibited enhanced classroom engagement and superior academic achievement, indicating that AI-assisted instruction fosters active learning and learner independence.

A recurring theme in the literature emphasizes the responsibility of educators in optimizing AI-driven engagement. Educators who proficiently incorporate AI into their teaching via interactive activities, tailored support, and adaptive pedagogical methods foster more stimulating learning environments (Alejandro et al., 2024; Hatmanto et al., 2024). Research indicates that educators' acceptance, preparedness, and confidence in utilizing AI substantially affect the successful integration of these tools into classroom education.

Studies show that AI-enhanced learning environments improve students' confidence, motivation, and engagement by providing prompt responses, automated assistance, and personalized support (Mallillin, 2024; Pandawan et al., 2024; Prestoza & Banatao, 2024; Roca et al., 2024). AI-assisted learning helps reduce confusion, encourage participation, and support independent learning. However, researchers also highlight concerns related to ethical use, academic integrity, overdependence, and data privacy (Espartinez, 2025; Sasikala & Ravichandran, 2024; Younas et al., 2025).

Overall, the literature suggests that AI can greatly enhance student engagement and learning experiences when implemented responsibly with proper ethical guidance and teacher support.

Benefits of Using AI in Education. The literature widely recognizes AI as a transformative educational technology that enables individualized learning, adaptive training, and efficient academic support. Researchers note that AI improves the student experience by delivering personalized support, automated feedback, and tailored learning opportunities (Adil, 2025; Panjabi et al., 2024). AI-powered tools also streamline instruction by automating routine tasks and providing swift access to current learning resources (Anabo, 2025).

Another major theme in the literature is AI's role in improving students' academic skills, including critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, digital literacy, and self-directed learning (Alkhawaja et al., 2025; Holmes et al., 2019). Studies show that AI increases students' motivation, confidence, and engagement through rapid feedback and personalized learning experiences (Harry, 2023; Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2023); Santos & Umali, 2023). AI also enhances accessibility and inclusivity through tools such as grammar checkers, translation, text-to-speech, and reading aids, helping students learn more independently and effectively (International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE, 2023); Luna & Castillo, 2022).

In addition, AI supports career readiness by developing technological and digital skills needed in modern workplaces (Luckin et al., 2022; Rivera, 2023). However, researchers continue to raise concerns about plagiarism, misinformation, academic dishonesty, and overreliance on AI-generated content (Del Mundo, 2023; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2023).

Overall, the literature suggests that AI offers significant educational benefits, but its effective use requires ethical guidance, digital literacy, and balanced integration in education.

Students' Attitudes and Perceptions Toward AI in Education. The majority of research indicates that students' attitudes towards artificial intelligence (AI) in education are generally positive, though tempered by caution. Learners frequently regard AI as a valuable tool for completing academic tasks, conducting research, improving writing, and enhancing overall learning experiences (Jisc, 2025; Picton et al., 2025). Students appreciate AI for its convenience, accessibility, and capacity for immediate feedback and personalized support.

The literature shows that students are aware of both the benefits and risks of AI use in education. While they recognize AI as useful for learning and productivity, they also express concerns about overdependence, misinformation, plagiarism, reduced critical thinking, and academic dishonesty (Agarwal & Khattar, 2025; Balasa et al., 2025; Holland & Ciachir, 2025).

In the Philippine context, studies reveal that students are more likely to adopt AI technologies that are user-friendly and supportive of learning (Albano et al., 2025; Arasa, 2025), although challenges such as limited access, lack of guidance, and privacy concerns remain. Research also indicates that students with greater AI literacy and technological familiarity tend to have more positive attitudes toward AI integration (Caffaratti et al., 2025; Schiel et al., 2023).

Overall, the literature suggests that AI is viewed as a valuable educational tool, but responsible use and strong ethical guidelines are necessary for effective integration.

Impact of AI on Students' Academic Behavior and Performance. Research shows that AI significantly affects students' academic behavior, learning habits, and performance by supporting personalized learning, improving access to educational resources, and increasing motivation and engagement (Co, 2025; Vieriu & Petrea, 2025). Studies also reveal that AI tools such as ChatGPT enhance comprehension, critical thinking, writing skills, and overall academic achievement (Wang & Fan, 2025; Dingal et al., 2024; Mabborang et al., 2025). AI further influences how students retrieve information, complete tasks, and manage academic responsibilities (Alborme, 2025). However, challenges such as overdependence on technology, reduced human interaction, distractions, ethical concerns, and unequal access to technology remain significant issues (Alasgarova & Rzayev, 2024; Estrellado & Miranda, 20230; Lai et al., 2023).

These findings suggest that while AI can improve learning and academic performance, its effectiveness depends on responsible implementation, teacher guidance, digital literacy, and equitable access to technology.

Future Expectations and Recommendations for AI in Education. Recent studies show that AI is expected to significantly shape the future of education, requiring clear policies, ethical governance, and strong institutional planning (Stanford HAI, 2025). Researchers emphasize the importance of teacher training and technological readiness to effectively integrate AI into instruction (Ablin & Mediodia, 2025; Buyoc, 2024; Sibug, 2024).

In the Philippines, initiatives such as the Department of Education's AI Center and PAASCU ethical AI guidelines support responsible AI integration. Studies also recommend revising curricula to include AI literacy, digital skills, and future-ready competencies (Garzón et al., 2025; Jaramillo & Chiappe, 2024). Ethical concerns such as data privacy, academic integrity, and equitable access remain essential to maintaining human-centered learning (Muñoz, 2025; PAASCU, 2025). Overall, AI has strong potential to transform education through personalized and adaptive learning, provided that schools ensure ethical implementation, teacher support, and equal access to technology.

METHODS

Research Design. This study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of senior high school students using Artificial Intelligence (AI) in education. The design enabled the researchers to understand how students interpret and give meaning to their experiences with AI tools in academic settings. A qualitative approach was appropriate because it focuses on participants' perspectives, experiences, and behaviors rather than numerical data such as scores and grades (Tenny, Brannan, & Brannan, 2022). Likewise, phenomenological research emphasizes describing the essence of a phenomenon based on the experiences of individuals who have lived it (Neubauer, Witkop, & Varpio, 2019). Through this approach, the study gathered detailed insights into students' perceptions, attitudes, motivations, and experiences regarding the use and perceived effects of AI in the learning process.

Research Materials. The study used purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling method that selects participants based on relevant experiences and knowledge to gain deeper insights into the research problem (Palinkas et al., 2015). The participants consisted of ten senior high school students from North Valley College Foundation Inc. in Kidapawan City who had prior experience using AI. Consistent with Subedi (2021), qualitative studies may involve 1–20 participants depending on the depth of inquiry, making ten participants sufficient for this study. During the data collection process, the researchers used materials such as questionnaires, notes, paper, pens, audio and video recordings, cellphones for voice recording, and a camera for documentation.

Data Collection. The researchers first secured permission from the school principals of both the researchers and participants before conducting the study. Data were gathered through one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions with ten participants at North Valley College Foundation Inc. Five students participated in the interviews, while the other five joined the focus group discussion. Participants were informed about the study and asked for their consent and availability before scheduling the sessions. Research questions were prepared to guide the data collection process, and participants' responses were documented through notetaking and audio recordings to ensure accuracy. The recordings were transcribed and carefully reviewed for validation. To protect participants' comfort and confidentiality, they were allowed to use names of their choice during the study.

Data Analysis. The study used thematic analysis to collect, organize, and analyze the data. Interview and focus group discussion transcripts were repeatedly reviewed to gain familiarity and identify significant statements related to students' experiences with AI in education. These responses were coded, categorized, and synthesized into themes representing the participants lived experiences. To ensure validity and reliability, the interview guide was validated by experts in education and qualitative research. Ethical considerations were also observed by informing participants about the study's purpose, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and their right to withdraw at any time. Informed consent was secured before conducting the interviews and focus group discussions.

Ethical Considerations. The researchers sought formal permission from the management of the schools identified in the methodology by submitting a letter of request and obtaining the necessary approvals prior to the conduct of the study.

In adherence to the principle of beneficence, the researchers ensured that all materials and data used in the study were handled with strict security and confidentiality. The privacy of both the school management and the individual participants was safeguarded throughout the research process. All personal information obtained during in-depth interviews—such as names, age, address, and civil status—was treated with the utmost confidentiality and protected to prevent any potential harm or

adverse effects on the participants' personal lives.

Furthermore, in upholding the principle of justice, the researchers ensured that all individuals involved in the study were treated equitably and without discrimination from the beginning until the completion of the research. Participants' opinions, suggestions, and decisions were assessed objectively, free from bias or subjective judgment. This approach was implemented to maintain respect for all participants, avoid any form of offense, and ensure the generation of credible, accurate, and ethically sound research findings.

RESULTS

The researchers conducted an in-depth interview with the 5 senior high school students and a focus group discussion with another set of 5 senior high school students as participants. The participant's responses were recorded using an audio recorder through an Android phone to ensure that all the transcribed text was correct. The themes were determined by locating similar patterns in participants' responses, highlighted at least three times in the in-depth interview and at least two times in the focus group discussions, before finally being identified and named as themes.

Students' Experiences of Using Artificial Intelligence in Their Education

Theme I. Motivations for using AI in education. The first theme resulting from Research Question 1 was students' reasons for using artificial intelligence in education. The participants viewed AI as a practical and accessible support system that helps them manage academic pressures, learn challenging lectures, and execute school-related chores more quickly.

Participant 2 stated that, *"Nagsugod ko og gamit og AI katong nagsulod nako sa schoolworks, tapos kanang kulang sa time, pag kulang nako sa time or kanang mag-cramming na gud ko or kanang kailangan nako og tabang para ma-understand nako ang lessons, especially kanang dili siya masyadong ma-explain sa teacher na parang kana ganing AI nako siya"*

(Translation: I started using AI when I was having difficulties with my schoolwork and I lacked time. "Whenever I lacked time, I would cram, or when I needed help to understand lessons that weren't explained clearly by the teacher, I would use AI.)

Participant 3 also shared that, *"It made me start using it when I found myself struggling with schoolwork and could no longer handle pressure."*

Participant 4 and 5 also added that, *"I started using AI for me to better understand the lessons and make my schoolwork easier, due to curiosity and the need to make schoolwork easier and more manageable."*

"It made me start using AI because of time management, like for example our activities near their deadline, and I don't have to think about what to do, so that's why I'm using AI." (Participant 5)

Theme II. AI as a learning tool. The second theme was AI as a learning tool. Participants frequently praised AI as being useful in building comprehension, explaining things, summarizing courses, and guiding step-by-step. Students stressed that instead of relying on AI for answers, they would use technology to understand and learn by themselves. AI was seen as a readily available educational buddy that provides instant aid based on its own learning speed and requirements.

Participant 3 confidently stated, *"At first, I only used AI for quick answers or definitions. Over time, I learned how to use it better, like asking for step-by-step explanations, summaries, and ideas for*

projects. Now, I use it more responsibly as a learning support, not just for answers."

Participant 5 also added, *"Before, I only used it for answering, but now I also use it for explaining topics, reviewing lessons, and organizing ideas."*

Participant 9 and 1 also shared, *"AI is a helpful tool to make schoolwork easier and understandable; however, students should not rely on AI because it is not always correct". (Participant 1)*

"It gives me knowledge and more information about the things that I don't know." (Participant 9)

Theme III. Difficulties of using artificial intelligence in education. The third theme that emerged was the difficulties of using AI in teaching. While participants recognized the utility of AI in providing information and fulfilling academic duties, they noted certain limits. Concerns about the accuracy, credibility, and reliability of information were often cited. Participants also mentioned difficulties, such as limited access to some functionalities and differences in responses given by AI.

Participant 1 shared that, *"Sometimes it makes me feel guilty because when I'm answering schoolwork, my own brain must function and not AI. In this case, I also feel a little dumb sometimes."*

Participant 2 agreed that *"The difficulties that I have experienced are that some of the answers are not fully accurate, and some are not related to the topic that I am researching. There are also times when you have to pay for you to research without limits."*

Participant 6 also shared, "*For me, like sa Chatgpt limited lang siya so kailangan mo magbayad para unlimited ang imong pag search sa mga ano nimo activities."*

(Translation: For me, like ChatGPT, it is limited, so you have to pay to search for your activities unlimitedly.)

Effects of the Use of AI in Students' Overall Educational Experiences

Theme I. Lessens Academic Stress. The first essential theme that emerged from Research Question 2 was that AI lessens academic stress. Participants described AI as a supportive tool that helps them manage academic demands by providing quick access to explanations, information, and guidance needed to complete school tasks. Students acknowledged that differences in learning pace, academic workload, and personal responsibilities often create pressure and stress. In response to these challenges, AI becomes a convenient and accessible resource that assists them in balancing time, understanding lessons, and maintaining academic performance.

Participant 2 shared that, *"AI improves learning by making information easier to access and understand, making education more accessible, efficient, and less stressful."*

Theme II. Effects of the Use of AI on Students' Overall Educational Experiences. The second theme demonstrated that artificial intelligence has a considerable effect on students' educational experiences in terms of learning, academic performance, and participation in school activities. AI was perceived by participants as a useful tool in education, which enhances access to information, aids in problem-solving, and offers individualized support for diverse learning needs. These functions assist the students in finishing their academic tasks more effectively and grasping the teachings better.

Participants 1 and 5 shared, *"It makes academic stress less, and it really saves time when AI is used. Especially sometimes when the lessons from the teachers aren't*

understandable, so you search it on AI's because you couldn't understand at school." (Participant 1)

"Timesaving, better understanding of lessons, improved writing, and easier research." (Participant 5)

Participants 3 and 4 also added, "*If you have something you don't understand, AI can make it understandable. If you have a quiz or exam and you need to summarize a lot of information, AI can summarize it, and in a minute, it's already summarized." (Participant 4)*

"It helps me because it makes me familiarize the words that I can't understand." (Participant 3)

Theme III. Improve students' academic performance and output. The third theme that emerged was that AI increases students' academic performance and output. The participants said that AI helps them learn lessons, organize their ideas, and accomplish academic requirements better. This help led to better outputs, higher scores, and more confidence in performing school duties.

Significantly, it has a positive effect, as shared by Participant 3, *"AI has helped improve my academic performance and help me understand lessons better, which results in better quizzes, activities, and written outputs."*

Students particularly liked that AI could explain and lead them in ways tailored to their personal learning techniques and pace.

Participant 4 shared, *"Yes, it enhances my academic performance. Because sometimes when you have an idea and you don't know how to organize it, I use AI to organize, like asking for guidance on how to make the idea whole." (Participant 4)*

Participants 1 and 8 also added, *"I observed when I started using AI, is that I'm more motivated to complete academic tasks." (Participant 1)*

"Using AI, it also improved my grades." (Participant 8)

Theme IV. Passivity in Learning. The fourth theme that emerged from Research Question 2 was that AI may encourage passivity in learning. Participants highlighted the educational benefits of AI but also voiced worries about overreliance on these tools.

Participant 2 shared, *"I think AI is beneficial for learning because it helps you answer anything." (Participant 2)*

Participants 4 and 6 were aware that relying on AI-generated answers and outputs could diminish their ability to think critically, solve problems on their own, and apply their own learning in academic settings.

"It helped me fix grammatical errors in my essays." (Participant 4)

"It's beneficial because it makes my life easier." (Participant 6)

These results are consistent with the findings of Alasgarova and Rzayev (2024), who suggested that although AI can promote motivation and learning through tailored support, inappropriate use of AI can have a detrimental effect on autonomy and surface learning.

Ways AI Tools Enhance and Support Students' Learning

Theme I. Accessible Information Source. The first essential theme that emerged from research question 3 was that AI as an accessible information source. The participants consider AI as a useful tool that gives them instant access to the essential information, saving them a lot of time searching through various sources.

Participants 1, 2, and 3 felt, "AI has made it easier and faster to collect information, which has helped them to handle schoolwork better.

"AI makes learning more convenient because I can access it anytime using my phone or device, especially when I need quick help with homework or review." (Participant 1)

"Convenient sya kay katu accessible sya anytime basta naa rakay load and then naa kay signal." "It's convenient because it's accessible anytime if you have a signal or load." (Participant 2)

(Translation: AI is more convenient because it is accessible anytime.)

Participant 5's experience shows that accessibility and convenience are among the main reasons why students adopt AI in their learning activities.

"Helpful kaayo sya kay katu ganing mga naay kuan gudd nga bisag i-search nimo siyas google dili nimo sya masyado gud masabtan kanang medyo complicated pa sya kaysa sa pag mag AI ka mas mag kuan gudd kumbaga kanang mag precise gudd siya, ang explanation. So helpful kaayo siya."

(Translation: It's very helpful because, like when you have something to search for, and you can't completely understand it because it's a little complicated, compared to when you use AI, the explanations are more precise.)

These findings support Co (2025), who stated that AI enhances personalized learning and access to information. This study further shows that students view accessibility as an important factor influencing their learning experiences and academic engagement. The results indicate that students continue using AI because they see it as a useful and efficient tool for meeting academic demands. Overall, AI plays an important role in supporting learning by providing accessible information, personalized assistance, and flexible learning opportunities.

Theme II. AI as a guide for students. The second theme was AI as a learning guide. Participant 5 highlighted that effective learning is not just about material, but also about assistance on how to absorb and implement the lessons.

"Yes, I use AI for independent learning because it allows me to study at my own pace and review lessons anytime, even without a teacher present." (participant 5)

Participant 4 also added, *"AI provides explanations, examples, summaries, and practice help, making studying more interactive and easier to manage."*

Moreover, participant 3 liked the AI for its explanations, step-by-step guidance, individualized help, and instant feedback that helped them learn.

"Yes, AI helps me learn faster by explaining topics step-by-step and giving examples that match my level of understanding."

The results indicate that students view AI as an adaptive educational companion that augments classroom teaching. AI allows kids to learn autonomously, but still with the right support that is appropriate to their needs and speed of learning. The results are consistent with the findings of Tahir (2024), who reported that AI improves academic conduct and performance via adaptive learning and automated assistance system.

Theme III. Innovating AI in education. The third theme was developing AI for teaching.

Participants 5 and 3 recognized the value of using AI to facilitate learning, but also pointed out areas that need to be improved, such as accessibility, legitimacy, ethical use, and supervision.

"I recommend that AI use should be guided by teachers and schools with clear rules on ethical use. This helps them develop real knowledge and skills." (Participant 5)
"There should be guides for students to support and use AI responsibly to avoid dependence on learners." (Participant 3)

Participant 1 underlined that AI should be a tool to boost creativity, critical thinking, and understanding, not a replacement for students' work and independent learning.

"I recommend AI to be used responsibly, that it should be used like a guide, not just copy everything that it provides. We should also learn to understand that we should not abuse it to the point that even our own opinions are affected, and we should not rely on AI to answer our every question."

The findings show that students recognize both the benefits and limitations of AI in education and emphasize the need for responsible and guided use. Consistent with Alborme (2025), students' use of AI is influenced by concerns about reliability, dependence, and critical thinking. This study highlights students' suggestions for improving AI integration, particularly through ethical use and balanced reliance on technology. The results also support the study's theoretical framework, showing that students continue using AI because of its usefulness, accessibility, and adaptability, while understanding that it should promote meaningful learning rather than dependence.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight the transformative role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) as both a cognitive and practical support tool in the learning experiences of Senior High School students. Participants consistently described AI as a readily accessible resource that enhances understanding, simplifies complex concepts, and supports efficient completion of academic tasks. These results align with existing literature suggesting that AI promotes personalized learning and increases academic engagement by providing immediate feedback and adaptive support. Notably, students' motivations for using AI were shaped by academic pressures, time constraints, and gaps in instructional clarity, indicating that AI functions as a supplementary mechanism that compensates for limitations in traditional classroom instruction. This reinforces the idea that AI is increasingly becoming embedded in students' learning routines as a responsive and flexible educational aid.

Despite these advantages, the study also revealed critical concerns regarding the use of AI in education, particularly in relation to credibility, ethical use, and overdependence. Participants expressed awareness of the risks associated with relying too heavily on AI-generated outputs, including reduced critical thinking, diminished independent learning, and exposure to inaccurate information. This dual perception—recognizing both benefits and risks—suggests that students are not passive users of technology but are capable of critically reflecting on its implications. However, the emergence of "passivity in learning" as a theme points to a potential shift in learning behavior that warrants attention. While AI enhances efficiency and productivity, it may also inadvertently encourage surface-level engagement if not guided properly. This finding underscores the importance of balancing technology use with pedagogical strategies that promote higher-order thinking skills and learner autonomy.

Furthermore, the study emphasizes the need for structured guidance and institutional support to ensure the responsible integration of AI in educational contexts. Participants recommended the establishment of clear ethical guidelines, teacher supervision, and AI literacy development to maximize benefits while minimizing risks. These insights highlight the crucial role of educators and school administrators in shaping how AI is

utilized within the learning environment. The findings suggest that effective integration of AI goes beyond accessibility; it requires intentional design, policy support, and learner training. Additionally, the localized nature of this study contributes valuable context-specific insights, particularly in underrepresented private school settings in North Cotabato. Overall, the results underscore that while AI holds significant potential to enhance learning, its impact is contingent upon responsible use, pedagogical alignment, and the development of critical digital competencies among students.

Conclusion. This study demonstrates that senior high school students view artificial intelligence (AI) as both a supportive and transformative educational tool. Based on interview and focus group data, three key findings emerged.

First, students primarily use AI due to academic pressure, limited time, and difficulty understanding lessons. This indicates that AI adoption is driven by both cognitive needs (learning support) and psychological needs (stress reduction and convenience).

Second, AI is widely perceived as a learning aid that enhances comprehension, improves academic output, and supports independent study through explanations, summaries, and organization of ideas.

Third, students recognize significant limitations of AI, particularly regarding accuracy, credibility, accessibility restrictions, and potential overreliance, which may lead to reduced critical thinking and passive learning behaviors.

Overall, the findings suggest that AI improves accessibility, academic efficiency, and performance, but its benefits are balanced by risks related to dependency and misinformation. Students continued use of AI is therefore shaped not only by its perceived usefulness but also by their awareness of its limitations and the need for responsible use.

Recommendation. The study's findings indicate that teachers should use artificial intelligence as a supplement to learn, not as a substitute for teaching. Educators should encourage creativity in learning activities that involve students in critically assessing and authenticating AI-generated outputs, so students learn higher-order thinking skills rather than become dependent on automated replies. Teachers are also encouraged to help students use AI to learn concepts, organize their ideas, and explain their lessons, while also stressing the importance of autonomous thinking and academic integrity.

School administrators and curriculum authors are encouraged to explicitly establish institutional norms that promote the responsible and ethical use of AI in education. This includes designing AI literacy programs that equip students with critical skills such as effective prompting, fact checking, and assessing the authenticity of material generated by AI tools. Moreover, schools should incorporate AI awareness into their current digital literacy programs to minimize overreliance and academic misuse, and to encourage a balanced incorporation of technology in classroom learning.

It is suggested that legislators and educational authorities establish clear policies to ensure the safe, equitable, and regulated use of AI in academic contexts. Policies like this can establish clear expectations for the ethical use of AI and include provisions that facilitate access to trusted, approved AI platforms, especially to mitigate gaps in access to technology among students. Additionally, there is a need to invest in professional development programs for instructors to increase their competency in AI-supported pedagogy and responsible digital education.

Finally, students are advised to use AI in a controlled and responsible manner, as a learning aid rather than a primary source of answers. "AI should be used to deepen understanding, review lessons, and generate ideas but students should be doing independent study and critical thinking." Students are also encouraged to validate AI-generated knowledge using relevant academic sources to ensure correctness and reliability, striking a balance between technological help and human intellectual growth.

Conflict of Interest. The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Artificial Intelligence use. The researchers did not utilize any artificial intelligence (AI) tools in the conduct, analysis, or writing of this study. The only software used was Turnitin, which was employed solely for plagiarism checking.

Ethics approval statement. Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Research Office and the Quality Assurance of North Valley College Foundation Inc. prior to data collection. The study adhered to ethical principles involving voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity of respondents.

Data Availability statement. The dataset will be available upon request from the corresponding authors of this study.

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