

*Research Brief*

## Friend or foe? Filipino Senior High School Student Views on the Use of ChatGPT in Composition Writing Classes

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**Abstract:** This study investigates the perceptions of Filipino senior high school students on the use of ChatGPT and other AI technologies in composition writing classes. Specifically, this study aims to identify the advantages and disadvantages of using ChatGPT and other AI technologies in writing classes, as well as to determine the level of acceptance of these tools among senior high school students. To achieve this goal, a descriptive qualitative research approach was employed, which involved conducting interviews with senior high school students in a private university in Manila, Philippines. The participants were asked about their experience using ChatGPT and other AI tools in writing classes, their perceptions of the usefulness of these tools, and their preferences in terms of teaching and learning writing skills. The findings of the study suggest that students have positive attitudes toward the use of ChatGPT and other AI technologies in writing classes. They perceive these tools as helpful in enhancing their writing skills, making the writing process more efficient, and improving the quality of their written outputs. However, some concerns were also raised regarding the potential limitations of these tools, such as the possibility of reducing creativity and critical thinking skills. Overall, this exploratory study provides valuable insights into the perceptions of senior high school students on the use of ChatGPT and other AI technologies in writing classes, which can inform future development and integration of AI tools in the educational setting.

**Key Words:** Artificial intelligence; writing; ChatGPT; learning; learning innovation; Asian learners.

## INTRODUCTION

Since the GPT-3 (Generative Pre-trained Transformer 3) also known as ChatGPT was launched in November of 2022, the AI chatbot developed by OpenAI has quickly garnered attention. A review completed by Zamfiroiu et al. (2023) revealed that 5,700 articles have been published on the topic from November 2022 to early 2023. Areas where interest in ChatGPT is high are medicine, writing, finance, and investments. The chatbot is especially lauded for its detailed responses and articulate answers but also criticized for its uneven factual accuracy.

Artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming many industries, and education is no exception. In recent years, AI has been making significant strides in the education sector, providing teachers and students with new ways to learn and teach. Understandably, AI is becoming increasingly popular in education because it can provide personalized learning experiences, automate administrative tasks, and enable better decision-making.

Expectedly, there is both trepidation and excitement in the academic community as demonstrated by the deluge of investigations and reviews on the subject. Clearly, if there are perceived benefits, there is also skepticism and foreseen challenges: Difficulty in evaluating ChatGPT-generated answers and texts; Ethical implications and potential biases; Plagiarism; Loss of creativity; ChatGPT being a barrier to improving learners' critical thinking and problem-solving skills; its inability to process visual information; and general misuse of technology (Raman & Watanobe, 2023; Subaveerapandiyan et al., 2023).

Generating text that is of relatively high quality in a fast and effortless manner has particularly raised various concerns. The impact that ChatGPT may have on take-home exams and essays, homework usefulness, and the possibility of AI-generated responses to discussion posts are among the concerns of faculty at many institutions. There is also a worry among many faculty that excessive monitoring of student work for possible AI usage may harm the learning environment and their relationships with students (Fournier, 2023) although as Yan et al. (2023) discovered, there exist fine-tuned large language models that can detect AI-generated essays with great accuracy.

Yan et al. (2023) observed how AI-generated essays are similar or different from human-written essays based on a set of typical prompts for a sample from a large-scale assessment. In their study, they also introduced two classifiers that can detect AI-generated essays with a high accuracy of over 95%. Interestingly, they found that State-of-the-art large language models can generate essays in response to writing prompts that are, in many aspects, indistinguishable from human-written essays for untrained readers and general-purpose automated scoring systems. However, AI-generated essays showed statistical anomalies compared to their human-written counterparts: there are no spelling and grammar mistakes in AI-generated essays.

In 2020, Lin and Chang developed a chatbot that helps teachers deliver writing instructions and reported on the potential of using a chatbot as the instructional supplement to teach writing, specifically thesis statements. It was found that 75% of the student participants felt that the chatbot helped them write a precise thesis statement and evaluate the quality of the thesis statement. More importantly, 79% of the students reported an enjoyable experience with the chatbot which suggests that integrating a chatbot with writing instruction might improve student learning-to-write engagement. On the other hand, Lai (2021) found that students placed more importance on personalized guidance and appropriate learning content provision while acknowledging that AI technology can be used flexibly in different fields and situations.

Lin et al. (2021) discussed the effects of a STEM-based AI course on students' understanding of AI and examined its effects on students' awareness of ethical issues in AI. A positive correlation was found between students' AI literacy and their awareness of AI ethical issues. They found that learners with high AI literacy showed a higher awareness of AI ethical issues.

One of the most significant concerns is the potential of AI to "replace" human educators. While AI can automate many administrative tasks and provide personalized learning experiences, there is the veritable "elephant in the room" which is the question: Can it actually replace the human connection and empathy that is essential in teaching and learning? Educators play a vital role in helping students develop critical thinking, problem-solving, and social skills -- can A.I. replace this role? Or merely make the job of educators easier?

Instead of viewing the advent of ChatGPT as a threat or a crisis, Jamieson (2022) suggests a calmer, more open-minded approach: "AI is simply another tool that writers can use or misuse and that the discipline of composition should embrace. It provides in many ways the impetus we need to turn back to a focus on writing itself, informed by all of the other turns we have made but also by older work on revision and invention" (p. 154). Jamieson observes that one of the more pressing issues is that we let technology replace pedagogy because we have bought into the "crisis language" that says students will cheat if they have the chance. That same attitude led many faculty to accept the surveillance software used in the pandemic to monitor students as they took tests and exams. Such an attitude of mistrust, according to her, does not create a welcome learning environment for students, and it also represents a shift from teaching to policing that seems to go against the fundamental values of the discipline. What she suggests is that we approach students as willing participants in their own education who are not out to cheat at every turn, and that we educators learn how we can work with AI just as we learned to work with computers when they first entered the classroom.

Because ChatGPT is a very new technology that has the potential to revolutionize various fields, including education, there is a need to better understand its capabilities and limitations, as well as to ensure that it is developed and used in a responsible and ethical manner. Lo (2023) insists that immediate

action be taken to update the assessment methods and institutional policies in schools and universities. Instructor training and student education are also essential to respond to the impact of ChatGPT on the educational environment.

Despite numerous informative investigations on ChatGPT, there seems to be fewer studies describing the perceptions of students and how ChatGPT impacts them. Qualitative studies on students' perceptions of ChatGPT and other AI in learning writing are especially essential as they provide a deeper understanding of how students perceive and experience the use of these technologies in their writing classes. Quantitative investigations, while useful, may not capture the nuances of students' experiences and the reasons behind their perceptions. There is a need to explore the underlying factors that influence students' acceptance or rejection of AI technologies, as well as their thoughts on the benefits and limitations of these tools.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This exploratory study is guided by the qualitative descriptive method which aims to provide an initial description of the phenomenon under investigation.

The participants in this study include 20 Grade 11 students from a private university in Manila, Philippines who have had some experience with ChatGPT or other AI in their writing for academic purposes. They were selected using purposive sampling, based on their familiarity and experience with AI technology in education.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews which were conducted both face-to-face and online, depending on the preference of the participant. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

The following questions were asked during the interview: 1) What do you know about ChatGPT and other AI applications? What can they do? 2) Have you tried using any of them? For what task/s? Please describe in detail 3) Are you satisfied with the output? Why or why not? Please elaborate 4) What do you think are the implications of these apps on teaching and learning? And 5) What do you think are the implications of these apps on critical thinking and creativity?

Thematic analysis was applied to the coded data (i.e., the data were coded and categorized based on recurring themes and patterns. The analysis was conducted using a step-by-step approach to identify and interpret the themes that emerged from the data.

This study adhered to ethical principles and guidelines to protect the rights and privacy of the participants. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the interviews. Participants were assured of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. They are assigned pseudonyms to protect their identity and privacy.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The present study explored the views of senior high school students in the Philippines on ChatGPT and other artificial intelligence (AI) in the field of education specifically in composition writing courses. The responses to the interview questions elicited the following themes and quotes are provided for illustration purposes:

*ChatGPT and other AI as "idea/topic generator".* "Most of the participants view ChatGPT and other AI as being very helpful in generating topics or ideas for writing assignments. One student reported "using ChatGPT to give me ideas on making a vision statement for a group project. It was so hard to come up with ideas and ChatGPT was a good starting point." Another said that he uses it for "inspiration" and as a "springboard." One participant mused that "ChatGPT comes up with the coolest ideas. It's so awesome!" When asked if ChatGPT reduces creativity, one participant said "Sometimes it does. It makes me lazy. But most of the time I still come up with my own ideas that are better."

*ChatGPT and other AI as "tutor."* A participant described ChatGPT as being similar to a "tutor" who "checks" her work for grammar and other mechanics. Another reported using ChatGPT in writing together with Grammarly, an online "writing assistant." One participant said that she feels confident when using ChatGPT in her writing tasks because it shows me what I can do to make my paper better." The majority of the participants admit to the convenience of being "assisted" by ChatGPT but also insisted that they are fully aware of its limitations.

*ChatGPT as a fitting response to modern life.* All of the participants described ChatGPT as being "modern" and "high-tech" and that AI is the closest we are to the "things that only happened in sci-fi films that we only used to watch." "It's something that is available and accessible to us students, so we think that's definitely a good thing." "We need all the help we can get because studying is not easy -- there are so many papers to write and so many tasks to accomplish in very little time." "It just makes students' lives a little bit easier, like all other technology." "Computers have existed for a long time -- this is just a more advanced version. Like a robot that helps with academic tasks." "ChatGPT and many others like it will be developed in the future and they are here to stay. We just need to make use of them in ethical ways."

*Possible Harm caused by ChatGPT.* Many of the participants are aware that ChatGPT and other AI that assist with writing have the potential to be "abused." One mentioned that "people using ChatGPT to write essays for them are being unethical. Unless they use it to form a base of ideas, using ChatGPT to do one's academic work is disingenuous. However, since the app is free, there's still no stopping people from using it unethically, even if it's morally questionable." Another participant expressed concern that "ChatGPT could potentially be harmful in the academic field because it hinders the growth of students."

Several of the participants are concerned that ChatGPT will make teachers "paranoid" that students are always using it to write their papers and assignments

for them. "Our teachers always remind us not to use it, and that we will be caught if we do. I don't think that's fair. Technology exists for us to use and make our life easier. We just need to know our limits and practice academic honesty" one participant observed. One student even went so far as to argue that "teachers should keep up with the times. There will be more advanced writing tools and technology in the future. It's the reality."

*Role of the user.* The majority of the participants stressed the critical role of the user and verbalized that "it is important to know the right questions to ask or how to ask the questions, so you get the answers or ideas that you need." One participant observed "If you don't know what you are doing and ask vague questions, you will also get vague answers. You also have to think for yourself -- it won't do it for you." "ChatGPT is a tool -- it does not replace the human mind" says another participant. "It actually helps me think critically because I tend to question the writing that is generated by ChatGPT. I even laugh at the inaccuracies sometimes" admitted one student.

The responses of the participants showed that they generally have a positive perception of ChatGPT and other writing AI. They acknowledged the usefulness of these tools in assisting with writing tasks, especially when they are unsure of the correct grammar or word usage. However, some of them expressed concern that using these tools may lead to overreliance and reduce their own critical thinking and writing skills. Others felt that these tools may not fully capture the nuances of language and may not be suitable for more complex writing tasks. Overall, the participants appreciated the assistance provided by ChatGPT and other writing AI but recognized that it should not be relied on solely for their writing needs. The most interesting view is that of students who believe that teachers should adapt to technology instead of resisting it. Understandably, no technology used to exist that threaten the very concept of teaching and learning (in the traditional sense), but the current generation seems to think that it is possible (and beneficial) if educators work with technology (specifically AI like ChatGPT) by revitalizing their lesson plans and teaching strategies.

The results of this exploratory investigation highlight the importance of balancing the benefits of AI writing tools with the need for human critical thinking and creativity in the writing process. It also raises some very important issues regarding teacher-student relationships, trustworthiness, and academic integrity.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

In conclusion, ChatGPT is generally viewed positively by students as a helpful tool for learning and problem-solving. However, students are also aware of its limitations and recognize that it cannot do everything. While ChatGPT's abilities are impressive, it is important to remember that it is a machine and therefore cannot replace human knowledge and expertise. Overall, students appreciate ChatGPT as a useful resource, but they understand that it should be used in conjunction with other learning methods to maximize its benefits.

Moreover, the qualitative descriptive method provides a useful approach to explore the views of students on ChatGPT and other AI in education, specifically at this time when much about the phenomenon is still relatively unknown. The findings of this study hope to contribute to a better understanding of the role of AI in education and provide insights for the development and implementation of AI technology in education. Future investigations would do well to describe the perspectives and experiences of teachers as well.

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