

## **Pre-service Teachers' Use of ChatGPT and Acquired Moral Dissonance**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This study examines how 10 pre-service teachers from a teacher education institution in Manila integrate ChatGPT into their academic tasks and navigate the resulting moral dissonance. Through semistructured interviews, the findings reveal that while ChatGPT is employed for paraphrasing, organizing ideas, information retrieval, and simplifying complex concepts, it fosters dependency, diminishes critical thinking, and challenges academic integrity. The participants rationalized their reliance on AI due to academic pressures, workload, and perceived instructional inefficiencies, leading to ethical conflicts framed as convenience versus conscience, pressure versus principle, and innovation versus integrity. The study emphasized the evolving perceptions of authorship and academic responsibility, highlighting the need for AI literacy and ethical awareness in teacher education. Addressing these moral dilemmas is crucial in preparing future educators to balance technological advancements with ethical teaching practices, thereby ensuring the responsible integration of AI in education.*

**Keywords:** academic dishonesty, artificial intelligence, ChatGPT, moral dissonance, plagiarism

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## INTRODUCTION

Artificial intelligence (AI) has become an increasingly central topic in education, transforming teaching methodologies, learning processes, and academic assessments. AI-powered tools offer personalized learning experiences, automate repetitive tasks, and support academic research, making them an integral part of modern educational institutions (Rahman et al., 2023; Sok & Heng, 2023). However, alongside these advancements come ethical concerns, particularly with respect to academic integrity and the overreliance on AI-generated content. As institutions grapple with the challenges posed by AI, a balanced approach that maximizes its benefits while mitigating risks has become imperative (Huang et al., 2024).

Generative AI, such as ChatGPT, has rapidly gained popularity in education because of its ability to simplify academic tasks. However, its use requires careful consideration, as it presents several potential drawbacks, including risks of academic dishonesty, dissemination of false information, inaccurate assessments of student learning, and overreliance on artificial intelligence (Rahman et al., 2023; Sok & Heng, 2023). Consequently, the use of ChatGPT has become an ethical controversy in education, as students may exploit it to generate academic outputs, creating opportunities for academic misconduct instantly (Rosyanafi et al., 2023; Rudolph et al., 2023). While its capabilities support productivity and learning, they also raise ethical dilemmas, particularly in academia, where originality and intellectual responsibility are paramount.

For pre-service teachers, tertiary-level students training, and educators, the emergence of AI presents a unique challenge. As students, they utilize AI tools to complete academic tasks, but as future educators, they are expected to maintain academic integrity for their students. When they become educators in the future, they are expected to uphold academic integrity and serve as ethical role models for their students (Söylemez, 2023). However, as students themselves, they often face the temptation to rationalize academic dishonesty for certain reasons, such as alleviating heavy workloads or helping classmates, which some perceive as altruistic behavior (McClough & Heinfeldt, 2023; Romanowski, 2022). These conflicting motives can lead to moral dissonance—a psychological conflict arising when actions are incongruent with personal beliefs (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 2019).

This dual role creates moral dissonance, where personal beliefs about integrity conflict with the convenience of AI-assisted learning. Pre-service teachers often justify AI use due to academic pressures, heavy workloads, and perceived inefficiencies in traditional teaching methods (Alcalde-Fradejas et al., 2024). However, this normalization of AI dependency raises concerns about their preparedness to navigate and regulate AI use in their future classrooms.

This study aims to explore how pre-service teachers utilize ChatGPT in their academic tasks and the moral dissonance they experience as a result. This research

aims to explore the motivations, ethical conflicts, and justifications for AI use among pre-service teachers, and how teacher education programs can address these emerging challenges. Understanding these dynamics is crucial in developing institutional policies and training programs that promote ethical AI literacy and ensure that pre-service teachers are equipped to integrate AI responsibly into their professional practices. Critical discussions about this topic are highly relevant, as the adoption of emerging technologies, including AI, is expected to remain an increasing trend in teacher education institutions in the postpandemic era (Ramos et al., 2024). Ultimately, this contributes to broader discussions on academic integrity, digital ethics, and the responsible use of AI in education, offering recommendations for striking a balance between technological advancements and ethical decision-making in teacher preparation.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Artificial Intelligence in Education*

Artificial intelligence in education (AIED) has transformed teaching and learning by personalizing educational experiences and assisting educators with tasks such as content creation, assessment, and feedback (Rudolph et al., 2023; Sok & Heng, 2023). Generative AI such as ChatGPT offers both advantages and challenges in education. On the positive side, it provides instant access to knowledge, supports creativity, enhances productivity, and helps students improve their writing and critical thinking skills when used responsibly (Lin & Chen, 2024). It enables users to generate outlines, brainstorm ideas, and simplify complex concepts (Deng & Lin, 2023). Additionally, it reduces the workload for both students and educators by automating repetitive tasks. However, drawbacks include potential misinformation, overdependence, ethical concerns regarding academic integrity, and a diminishing capacity for original thought if students rely too heavily on AI-generated content. Its use raises concerns about academic dishonesty, misinformation, and overreliance on AI-generated content. Striking a balance between leveraging AI for educational benefits while mitigating its risks remains a key challenge for institutions and educators (Rahman et al., 2023).

While AI tools can enhance pedagogical practices by facilitating efficient learning, they also present ethical challenges, particularly in higher education. For example, universities in Hong Kong initially prohibited ChatGPT due to concerns about plagiarism and vague references but later reintegrated it after updating their ethical guidelines and improving AI literacy (Huang et al., 2024). This demonstrates the necessity of establishing institutional frameworks to balance AI benefits with academic integrity (Bradbury, 2022; Rosyanafi et al., 2023).

## *Moral Dissonance in the Use of Generative AI*

The discussion of AI in education heavily involves ethical concerns and debates. Moral dissonance arises when individuals experience psychological conflict between their actions and ethical beliefs (Te Brake & Nauta, 2022). In the context of AI use, students may recognize that relying on ChatGPT for academic tasks contradicts the principles of originality and academic honesty. This cognitive conflict often leads individuals to justify their actions by downplaying their ethical concerns, aligning behaviors with convenience, or comparing their actions to more severe violations (Barkan et al., 2015; Morvan & O'Connor, 2017).

The literature identifies four paradigms explaining moral dissonance: (1) the free-choice paradigm, where individuals justify unethical choices postdecision; (2) the belief-disconfirmation paradigm, which addresses resistance to information that contradicts existing beliefs; (3) the effort-justification paradigm, where effort expenditure leads to rationalizing unethical actions; and (4) the induced-compliance paradigm, in which individuals justify dishonest behavior under external pressure (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 2019). These paradigms provide a framework for understanding how students rationalize AI-enabled academic dishonesty.

In addition to these paradigms, moral dissonance is also influenced by environmental and social factors. Peer validation can reduce feelings of guilt, as collective dishonesty is often framed as necessary or altruistic (Shu et al., 2012). Research also shows that students perceive academic dishonesty as less severe than educators do, further normalizing such behaviors (Alcalde-Fradejas et al., 2024). Both intrinsic (e.g., low self-confidence, procrastination) and extrinsic (e.g., workload pressure) factors contribute to students' ethical decision-making (Vallespir Adillón et al., 2024). The implementation of honor codes and ethical guidelines has proven effective in mitigating academic dishonesty and fostering accountability (Stephens, 2017).

## *Use of AI among Pre-service Teachers*

The incorporation of generative AI and ChatGPT to accomplish teachers' academic routines, such as lesson planning, instructional material development, and quick information retrieval, has become an emerging practice. While these functionalities support learning, they also introduce risks related to misinformation, plagiarism, and overreliance (Lo, 2023; Lund & Ting, 2023). Overconfidence in AI-generated content without critical evaluation can compromise academic rigor and ethical responsibility (Huang et al., 2024).

As future educators, pre-service teachers are expected to maintain academic integrity and model ethical behavior. However, the tension between their role as students and their anticipated professional responsibilities complicates their

relationship with generative AI tools. This internal conflict, referred to as pedagogical dissonance, emerges when reliance on AI clashes with the ethical standards they are expected to embody (Bradbury, 2022). Understanding and addressing moral dissonance among pre-service teachers is essential in creating a responsible approach to AI use. Integrating AI ethics into teacher education can help future educators develop a coherent professional identity that aligns with both technological advancements and ethical standards (Huang et al., 2024).

### ***Implications for Future Teaching Practice***

Unresolved moral dissonance may influence how pre-service teachers integrate AI into their classrooms. Those who fail to reconcile ethical conflicts may either overrely on AI or avoid it altogether, limiting its potential in education (Lo, 2023). Therefore, teacher preparation should prioritize AI literacy and ethical engagement to ensure that educators critically evaluate AI's role in pedagogy and uphold academic integrity.

Although existing research explores AI use among students and educators, further analysis is needed within the specific context of pre-service teachers. Investigating their motivations, ethical dilemmas, and justifications for using AI can provide insights into shaping responsible AI integration in education. Preparing pre-service teachers to navigate these complexities will enhance their ability to foster ethical AI usage in their future classrooms.

There is a growing discussion about the use of AI in education, academic integrity, and moral dissonance. However, gaps remain in understanding how pre-service teachers, as both students and future educators, navigate the ethical challenges posed by the emergence of ChatGPT and other generative AI. Prior studies have focused on general student populations, but few have examined the unique tensions faced by pre-service teachers, who must reconcile their learning practices with their future professional responsibilities. This study aims to bridge the gap by examining the motivations, justifications, and ethical concerns surrounding the use of AI among pre-service teachers. This contributes to a deeper understanding of how institutions can develop policies and training programs that promote ethical AI integration while maintaining academic integrity.

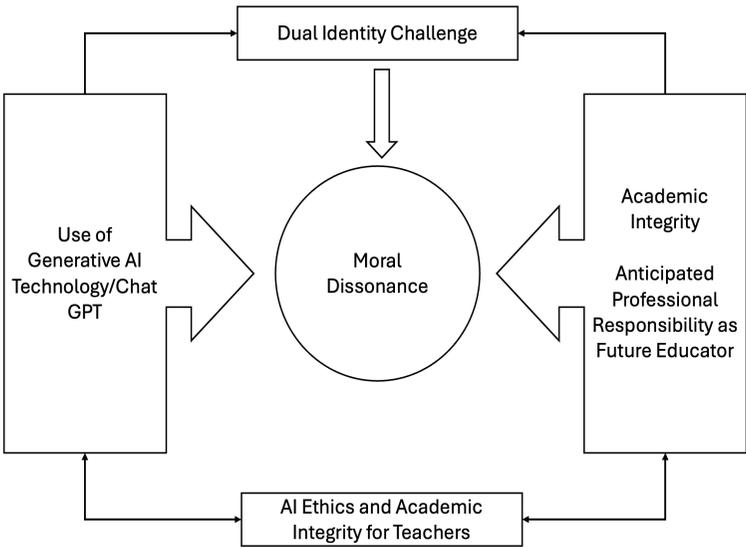
### ***Framework of the Study***

The study reinforces the literature on AI ethics and academic integrity while contributing insights into the specific experiences of pre-service teachers. Moral dissonance emerges as a key factor in shaping how pre-service teachers rationalize AI-assisted academic work. Moreover, prior research has indicated that academic pressures, institutional expectations, and evolving technological landscapes contribute to shifting perceptions of academic integrity (Alcalde-Fradejas et al.,

2024; Vallespir Adillón et al., 2024). However, this study expands the discourse by emphasizing the dual identity challenge faced by pre-service teachers, bridging the gap between the role of AI in academic success and its implications for professional ethics.

Figure 1 below shows the need for ethical AI ethics and academic integrity guidelines among teachers, including pre-service teachers, as a response to emerging generative AI technologies such as ChatGPT. This study used the concept of moral dissonance defined by various authors, such as Lowell (2012), Barkan, et al. (2015), and Te Brake & Nauta (2022). They derived this concept from the cognitive dissonance theory of Festinger (Morvan & O’Connor, 2017). This study serves as a framework for examining the perceptions and behaviors of pre-service teachers behind instances of academic dishonesty when they use ChatGPT. This theory fits the study perfectly because there is a dichotomy of being responsible for future educators who shape the moral development of learners, as well as being a student who can commit academic dishonesty. This gives us a glimpse of their values as teachers as well as how they deal with the moral and ethical conflicts they face in academics as these generative AI technologies become more prevalent. Investigating the connections between pre-service teachers’ use of ChatGPT, their academically dishonest behavior and their motivations for doing so will reveal how the acquisition of moral dissonance plays a role in situations such as this.

**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Study**



## RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a case study research design to examine the specific behaviors and experiences of pre-service teachers in using ChatGPT. This method enables an in-depth exploration of a context-specific phenomenon and offers insights into the implications of their actions related to the use of such an AI tool.

### Participants

The study involved 10 pre-service teachers enrolled at a teacher education institution in Manila, Philippines. The participants were selected through a convenience sampling method due to the challenges of recruiting individuals willing to address sensitive questions that might reveal potentially negative behaviors related to AI usage. To qualify for inclusion, participants had to be enrolled in a teacher education program, regardless of specialization, and actively use ChatGPT for academic tasks.

### Procedure

The participants were asked to complete an informed consent form to ensure that they fully understood the research objectives and voluntarily agreed to participate. The researchers adhered to the Data Privacy Act (DPA) and relevant research protocols to safeguard personal data throughout the study.

Data collection was conducted through semistructured interviews via a 10-item questionnaire validated by experts. The participants were given the choice between onsite or online interviews to accommodate their convenience and comfort. Each interview session was audio-recorded for 30-35 minutes.

The participants were also asked to provide samples of their academic work and ChatGPT usage history, including prompts and corresponding responses. All the collected data were securely stored in an encrypted Google Drive, which was accessible only to the researchers. To maintain confidentiality, all recordings and data files were permanently deleted upon the study's completion. Some words and phrases that could identify any information about the participants and their profiles were redacted in the presentation of the data.

The interview data were analyzed via thematic analysis to identify patterns and overarching themes in participants' responses following Stake's framework (Yazan, 2015). This involves the process of categorical aggregation of the data to find patterns through participants' reflections and experiences and direct interpretation of the aggregated data. Additionally, the provided documents were used to validate and corroborate claims regarding how ChatGPT was used for academic tasks.

## Measures

The researchers employed methodological triangulation, which involves the use of multiple methods to increase the validity of the data. Accordingly, interviews and content analysis of sample ChatGPT prompts and generated tasks provided a comprehensive depiction of the moral dissonance experiences reported by pre-service teachers when ChatGPT was used.

## RESULTS

### Pre-service teachers' use of ChatGPT in academic tasks

#### *Paraphrasing texts*

Pre-service teachers use ChatGPT as a tool for paraphrasing and refining their academic writing. Paraphrasing, as defined by Rogerson and McCarthy (2017), is the ability to capture the essence of a text and reframe it in a way that maintains the original meaning while integrating proper referencing. The participants reported using ChatGPT to enhance their writing by improving clarity, adjusting the tone to fit academic or creative contexts, and making their work more distinct from that of their classmates. This practice reflects an effort to refine their writing style and align with academic expectations.

In addition to stylistic improvements, Rogerson and McCarthy (2017) highlighted that students frequently use paraphrasing tools as a strategy to avoid detection by plagiarism software. While this approach may help circumvent plagiarism flags, it raises concerns about students' long-term writing development. Reliance on AI-generated paraphrasing may hinder the development of essential writing skills, as these tools do not provide explicit feedback on what was changed or guide students in learning proper paraphrasing techniques.

Pre-service teachers strategically adapt AI tools to meet academic expectations while maintaining a sense of originality in their work. Their use of ChatGPT demonstrates an intentional effort to refine writing quality, ensuring that their work meets institutional standards. However, it also raises questions about the balance between leveraging AI for enhancement and developing independent writing competencies.

#### *Searching information*

Pre-service teachers utilize ChatGPT as a search engine to quickly solicit answers to basic queries. ChatGPT assists them in gathering information for assignments, explaining specific theories, and validating certain concepts. The participants found ChatGPT to be more convenient than traditional search engines such as

Google, as it provides direct responses without requiring them to browse multiple websites. However, they acknowledged a key limitation: ChatGPT does not cite its sources correctly all the time, making it necessary to verify the accuracy of its responses. Some pre-service teachers stated that they cross-checked ChatGPT's information with other credible sources before incorporating it into their work.

This reliance on ChatGPT for information retrieval aligns with findings in the literature, which suggest that students often turn to AI-powered tools to streamline their academic workload (Aguilar, 2021). The efficiency offered by ChatGPT allows them to manage multiple tasks more effectively, reducing the time spent searching for information across various platforms. However, this ease of access raises concerns regarding information accuracy and academic rigor, as they tend to accept AI-generated content without critically evaluating its credibility.

### ***Organizing ideas***

Pre-service teachers frequently use ChatGPT to assist in organizing their ideas. They often brainstorm a variety of concepts in structuring their thoughts into a cohesive and logical sequence. Given this, pre-service teachers utilize ChatGPT to enhance the organization of their academic tasks to ensure that their work is systematically structured and well articulated. Additionally, ChatGPT facilitates the brainstorming process, as it provides users with a structured starting point that increases their confidence in initiating their work.

These findings align with the literature, which recognizes ChatGPT's significant role in generating text, drafting initial versions, organizing ideas, and summarizing information efficiently (Imran & Almusharraf, 2023; Lund & Ting, 2023). The tool's ability to streamline the writing process enables pre-service teachers to refine their articulation of ideas and improve the quality of their work. However, while ChatGPT serves as a valuable support tool, its influence on students' independent critical thinking and writing skills must be carefully considered. Encouraging a balanced approach to AI-assisted writing can help ensure that pre-service teachers develop both the structured thinking and original composition skills necessary for their future professional roles.

### ***Simplifying complex concepts***

Pre-service teachers use ChatGPT to simplify complex concepts related to their academic tasks. ChatGPT helps them breakdown difficult ideas into simpler, more comprehensible explanations, making it easier for them to grasp challenging topics. For them, this is particularly useful when engaging with dense reading materials such as journal articles and literary selections, including short stories and novels. The participants noted that ChatGPT not only clarifies concepts but also enhances their vocabulary by introducing them to unfamiliar words and

**Table 1: Pre-service teachers' use of ChatGPT in academic tasks**

| ChatGPT use        | Sample Prompt  | Sample AI-generated Response   | Description                                |
|--------------------|--|--|--|
| Paraphrase texts   | <p>can you write this in better way: Hi, [REDACTED], I can truly relate with doing whatever stuff that comes to my mind. That is why my sign to do something or try new things which has benefited me thus far. In addition, I truly agree with the quote you have shared. We will never escape the world we are living with if we continue to think and act the same way which connects to the second quote to watch what we are thinking because in the future that will be our action and eventually out destiny. That is truly a good food for thought to reflect upon. Thank you for this, [REDACTED]</p> <p>Thank you once again, [REDACTED]</p> | <p>Dear [REDACTED]<br/>I wanted to express how much I can relate to the idea of pursuing whatever comes to mind. It has been a sign for me to explore new things and take on different endeavors, which has proven to be beneficial in my life thus far. Additionally, I wholeheartedly agree with the quotes you shared. If we continue to think and act in the same way, we will never be able to break free from the confines of our current world. This connects well with the second quote, emphasizing the importance of monitoring our thoughts because they shape our actions and ultimately determine our destiny. It is truly a thought-provoking concept to reflect upon. I sincerely appreciate you sharing this, [REDACTED]</p> | Participant used ChatGPT paraphrase texts. |
| Search information | <p>suggest a literary text that can be used in teaching simple, compound, complex,</p>   | <p>One literary text that is often used to teach sentence structures, including simple, compound,</p>  | Participant asked ChatGPT to suggest       |

| ChatGPT use    | Sample Prompt                | Sample AI-generated Response   | Description  |
|----------------|------------------------------|--|--|
|                | compound-complex sentences.  | complex, and compound-complex sentences, is the short story "The Gift of the Magi" by O. Henry. This classic story is not only engaging but also provides clear examples of different sentence structures.   | literary texts that can be used to teach sentence structure.                   |
| Organize ideas | Create a theme for the story | Theme: [Redacted]<br><br>In [Redacted], a central theme emerges that explores the consequences and dangers of the relentless pursuit of absolute equality. The story depicts a dystopian society where the government enforces an extreme form of equality by handicapping individuals with above-average abilities. This theme is characterized by:<br><br>1. Oppression in the Name of Equality: The narrative highlights the paradoxical nature of a society that, in its pursuit of equality, resorts to oppressive measures. The handicaps imposed on individuals, whether physical or mental, symbolize the sacrifices made in the name of uniformity.<br><br>2. Suppression of Individuality: The story | Participant used ChatGPT to generate ideas for organizing a sequence of ideas. |

| ChatGPT use | Sample Prompt | Sample AI-generated Response  | Description |
|-------------|---------------|---|-------------|
|             |               | <p>underscores the negative impact of extreme egalitarianism on individuality and personal expression. Handicaps suppress unique talents and characteristics, leading to a homogenized society where everyone is forced into conformity.</p> <p>3. Inherent Inequality of Forced Equality: Despite the government's efforts, a subtle form of inequality persists. The Handicapper General and the authorities become a privileged class with the power to enforce their version of equality, further emphasizing the inherent flaws in attempting to create a perfectly equal society.</p> <p>4. Struggle for Freedom and Individualism: The character of Harrison Bergeron becomes a symbol of resistance against the oppressive system. His brief rebellion reflects the human instinct to resist conformity and the desire for freedom and individual expression.</p> <p>5. Satirical Critique: The theme incorporates satire to critique the extremes of egalitarianism. The exaggerated handicaps and absurd measures taken by the government serve as a satirical commentary on the potential consequences of taking the concept of equality to its extreme.</p> |             |

| ChatGPT use     | Sample Prompt   | Sample AI-generated Response   | Description  |
|-----------------|---|--|--|
| Simply Concepts | <p>shallow quite dumb question that actually is intriguing and part of daily life research topics for this</p> <p>focus on ginhawa and integrate the constructs</p> <p>would you expound this</p> | <p>Certainly! Let us delve deeper into each research topic:</p> <p>46. [REDACTED]</p> <p>Investigate how Filipinos perceive and experience emotional well-being in the digital age, exploring the impact of social media, online interactions, and digital practices on their sense of [Redacted]</p> <p>47. [Redacted] in Traditional Family Dynamics: Examine the interplay between [Redacted] and traditional Filipino family structures, exploring how self-related beliefs, Filipino wellness practices, and the concept of shared identity (Kapwa) contribute to emotional well-being within familial contexts.</p> <p>48. Cultural Rituals for Emotional Resilience [Redacted]:</p> <p>Explore the emotional and psychological effects of traditional Filipino rituals, ceremonies, and practices on individuals' sense of [Redacted], examining how cultural activities foster emotional resilience and well-being.</p> <p>49. [Redacted] in Community Activities: Investigate how the concept of [Redacted] influences emotional connections and well-being</p> | Participant asked ChatGPT to simplify a complex concept. |

| ChatGPT use | Sample Prompt | Sample AI-generated Response  | Description |
|-------------|---------------|---|-------------|
|             |               | <p>in community-based activities, exploring the role of shared identity in fostering a sense of unity and Ginhawa in collective endeavors.</p> <p>50. [Redacted] with Modern Stressors: [Redacted] to cope with modern stressors, considering the influence of self-related beliefs, emotional impact awareness, and spirituality in shaping individual responses to contemporary challenges.</p> <p>In essence, these research topics aim to provide a nuanced understanding of [Redacted] by examining its manifestations in various aspects of Filipino life – from digital interactions to family dynamics, cultural rituals, community activities, and coping mechanisms in the face of modern stressors. This approach integrates multiple constructs to offer a comprehensive exploration of emotional well-being deeply rooted in [Redacted].</p> |             |

terminologies. Moreover, it provides better word choices, allowing them to articulate their ideas more precisely and improve the overall readability of their written outputs.

In addition to simplifying content, ChatGPT plays a significant role in vocabulary development. It aids pre-service teachers in understanding and applying advanced English words, facilitating their ability to communicate ideas effectively. The literature supports this, emphasizing the impact of AI-driven tools in shaping language use, sentence construction, and contextual meaning adaptation (Lin & Chen, 2024; Rafique et al., 2024). ChatGPT serves as a valuable linguistic resource, helping pre-service teachers refine their writing by offering precise word suggestions and enhancing clarity. However, while ChatGPT assists in simplifying content, it is crucial to ensure that students develop independent analytical skills and do not become overly reliant on AI-generated explanations.

### **Pre-service teachers' perceived behavior related to academic dishonesty when using ChatGPT**

#### ***Dependency on ChatGPT***

Pre-service teachers acknowledged their growing dependency on ChatGPT and recognized that it did not aid them in developing critical thinking skills. They admitted that they often accept ChatGPT-generated content without thoroughly examining its accuracy or validity. This reliance has led some participants to describe a sense of helplessness or powerlessness when attempting to complete tasks without AI assistance. Others emphasized that while they use ChatGPT as a tool to stimulate their thinking and productivity, they ensure that it does not fully replace their effort. However, frequent dependence on AI often results in procrastination and a preference for shortcuts, which hinder their ability to develop essential academic skills and professional competencies.

This shift in motivation—from intrinsic (self-driven engagement in learning) to extrinsic (dependence on AI for academic performance)—reflects a concern regarding the reliance on AI. Instead of actively engaging in analysis, evaluation, and synthesis of information, students become passive learners who prioritize efficiency over intellectual effort. This aligns with findings from Mhlanga (2023), who argues that overdependence on AI tools can diminish students' problem-solving abilities and reduce meaningful engagement in the learning process. Furthermore, excessive reliance on ChatGPT may limit opportunities for peer collaboration and hinder the development of essential communication skills necessary for human interactions.

### *Academic disinterest*

Academic disinterest refers to a lack of engagement and motivation in learning activities (Rind, 2002). The participants reported that using ChatGPT decreased their motivation and interest in academic tasks, particularly for assignments they found tedious or uninteresting. Many admitted to resorting to AI-generated content without thoroughly reviewing or modifying it, as long as the output met the required length and word count. This tendency to prioritize task completion over deep engagement suggests a diminished perception of intellectual effort and personal investment in academic work.

The literature supports these observations, indicating that reliance on AI tools can discourage critical thinking and lower students' motivation to study independently. Hamid et al. (2024) argued that since ChatGPT provides instant answers, it may reduce students' willingness to engage with complex ideas or conduct in-depth research. Additionally, participants cited inadequate support from their professors as a contributing factor, perceiving that their professors do not thoroughly assess learning tasks. This aligns with findings from Sahin and Yuksel (2021), who highlight that ineffective teaching practices can lead to student disengagement and ethical lapses. These results emphasize the need for educators to play an active role in guiding AI use, ensuring that students remain critically engaged rather than passively relying on automated solutions.

### *Moral conflict*

Pre-service teachers experience significant moral conflict when ChatGPT is used for academic purposes. Many view its use as a form of academic dishonesty that contradicts their ethical values. Some participants, despite recognizing its moral implications, admitted to engaging in AI-assisted academic work due to practical pressures, such as heavy workloads and tight deadlines. This tension illustrates the duality in their identity—as students, they seek efficiency, but as future educators, they are expected to uphold academic integrity.

The participants reflected on the guilt and discomfort associated with using ChatGPT in ways that they perceived as unethical. Some recounted past strong stances against academic dishonesty, only to find themselves compromising due to external pressures. They acknowledged the irony of teaching students about integrity while engaging in behaviors they previously condemned. This internal conflict aligns with the concept of moral dissonance, in which individuals experience psychological tension when their actions contradict their ethical beliefs (Joseph et al., 2024). Furthermore, normalizing these compromises can desensitize pre-service teachers to ethical breaches and potentially weaken their moral foundations as future educators. If unaddressed, this pattern may result in a gradual

erosion of ethical standards, reinforcing the cycle of moral disengagement in academic and professional settings.

## **Pre-service teachers' acquired moral dissonance when using ChatGPT**

### ***Convenience versus conscience***

Pre-service teachers experience moral dissonance when they use ChatGPT for academic tasks and recognize its convenience while also being aware of the ethical concerns associated with it. ChatGPT allows them to save time, especially in situations where academic tasks accumulate rapidly. The burden of heavy workloads, coupled with poor time management and difficulty in understanding complex concepts, leads students to seek efficient solutions to ease their academic responsibilities (Aguilar, 2021). Some participants stated that ChatGPT helps them automate repetitive tasks, making their workload more manageable. They justified its use by emphasizing the sense of relief and comfort they experience, reinforcing the idea that completing tasks efficiently outweighs concerns about academic dishonesty (Bansah & Darko Agyei, 2022; McClough & Heinfeldt, 2023).

The increasing dependence on AI for academic work has raised concerns about diminished critical thinking and reduced student effort. Some of them admitted that ChatGPT assisted them in alleviating academic pressure, particularly when they felt unmotivated or overwhelmed. The automation of tedious tasks reflects a desire to minimize the cognitive load, prioritizing convenience over learning. This shift in perspective leads to moral dissonance, as students rationalize their reliance on AI by focusing on the comfort and ease it provides rather than confronting the ethical implications. Pre-service teachers cope with dissonance by justifying their actions as necessary responses to overwhelming academic demands rather than deliberate ethical breaches.

### ***Pressure versus principle***

Academic pressure is a key factor that drives pre-service teachers to use ChatGPT for task completion. This is characterized by feelings of tension, stress, and expectations imposed by family, institutions, and society (Luo et al., 2023). The participants expressed that despite understanding ethical concerns, they often turn to ChatGPT due to external pressures, such as strict deadlines and demanding coursework. This practice has become the struggle between upholding ethical values and meeting institutional expectations.

Vallespir Adillón et al. (2024) reported that students' desire for academic success can push them toward dishonest practices, as they prioritize achieving high grades over academic integrity. This aligns with participants' responses, where they acknowledged that while using ChatGPT may contradict their values, it often results in academic benefits. Additionally, the competitive nature of academic environments influences pre-service teachers' perceptions of morality and integrity (Latorre et al., 2023). The pressure to perform well and meet expectations can lead students to compromise their ethical principles and justify their actions as necessary for academic survival. This phenomenon reflects moral disengagement, where students attribute their behavior to external

circumstances, thereby reducing their personal responsibility for engaging in academic dishonesty (Stephens, 2017).

### ***Authorship versus attribution***

Academic integrity is traditionally measured by a student's ability to demonstrate original thought in their work. However, pre-service teachers expressed conflicting views on the concept of authorship when AI-generated content was used. While academic standards emphasize that originality stems from a writer's independent knowledge and articulation (Utami et al., 2023), some participants argued that they retain authorship over AI-assisted work because they provide the prompts that guide ChatGPT's responses. Others stated that minor modifications to AI-generated text, such as restructuring sentences or rewording phrases, were sufficient to claim originality.

This justification enables pre-service teachers to reduce the guilt associated with using AI tools for academic writing. They perceive ChatGPT as a collaborative aid rather than an external content generator, and they reshape the notion of authorship to fit their moral perspective. Studies indicate that individuals often reinterpret AI-generated content as coauthored when they actively contribute to the input process (Fabro et al., 2024). This aligns with Rae (2024), who discusses how students navigate the complexities of ownership and originality when integrating AI into academic work. The moral dissonance involved is related to ethical debates surrounding AI-generated content and its implications for academic authorship and intellectual ownership.

### ***Innovation versus integrity***

The participants expressed that using ChatGPT can be beneficial if it is used responsibly and ethically. They suggested that AI tools contribute to technological advancement and that their frequent use of ChatGPT supports the development of emerging technologies. Some participants justified their reliance on AI by asserting that embracing AI innovations is inevitable and that learning to adapt is essential for future educators. They also claimed that by engaging with AI tools, they contribute to the evolution of technology, regardless of whether their usage aligns with academic integrity.

This "greater good" justification is a common rationalization strategy, allowing students to reframe ethically ambiguous actions in a morally acceptable light. Barkan et al. (2015) describe this phenomenon as self-serving altruism, where individuals justify misconduct by arguing that their actions contribute to greater societal benefits. However, the normalization of ChatGPT as an academic aid raises concerns about academic dishonesty, as pre-service teachers continue to bend their moral principles to accommodate their actions.

Despite recognizing the moral implications of their actions, participants still engaged in practices that conflict with their moral beliefs. Their reflections revealed a tendency to justify academic dishonesty rather than holding themselves accountable. This resonates with moral dissonance and ethical flexibility, wherein individuals restructure their moral reasoning to align their actions with their desired outcomes.

**Table 2: Pre-service teachers' use of ChatGPT and acquired moral dissonance**

| Codes and Sample Verbatim Responses  | Subthemes  | Themes  | Description  |
|--|--|---|--|
| <p>“Because for me, when there are prompts, that is when my brain functions to start writing my own composition.”</p> <p>“AI tools push us to become lazy and dishonest. The authenticity of our work starts to vanish.”</p> <p>“When I was a kid, I truly hated it. There was an instance when I got into a fight with the principal because I tried to poke the eye of my classmate because he was copying from me. When the time comes, you will be one of those people who have no choice because you also need to do it.”</p> | <p>Dependency on ChatGPT</p> <p>Academic disinterest</p> <p>Moral conflict</p> | <p>Theme 1: Perceived behaviors related to academic dishonesty</p>            | <p>Pre-service teachers exhibit dependency and often accepting AI-generated outputs without scrutiny, which hinders their critical thinking and problem-solving skills. They reported diminished academic interest, as they use ChatGPT for tasks they find tedious, prioritizing task completion over meaningful learning. This behavior creates moral conflict, as they develop tension with the ethical implications of using AI while striving to maintain their roles as future ethical educators.</p>  |
| <p>“Using ChatGPT is more convenient; that is why pre-service teachers can commit academic dishonesty using it. Especially when they're overwhelmed with tasks like that.”</p>   | <p>Convenience <i>versus</i> conscience</p>                                    | <p>Theme 2: Acquired moral dissonance when using ChatGPT in academic task</p> | <p>Pre-service teachers experience moral dissonance when using ChatGPT due to the conflict between the convenience and their ethical beliefs. They justify their use of AI by citing academic pressure, heavy workloads, and the desire to meet deadlines which force them to prioritize convenience over academic integrity. This moral dissonance leads them to rationalize their actions, with some claiming that their modified AI-generated content still qualifies as original work, hence reducing the guilt associated with academic dishonesty.</p> |

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The study illustrates the duality of pre-service teachers' engagement with ChatGPT: while they recognize its utility in enhancing efficiency and accessibility, they simultaneously experience moral dissonance due to ethical issues related to academic dishonesty and integrity. This tension creates a fundamental contradiction—pre-service teachers, who are expected to uphold and model academic integrity, also rationalize behaviors that compromise it.

Pre-service teachers employ ChatGPT primarily for paraphrasing, idea organization, information retrieval, and simplifying complex concepts. However, these uses are accompanied by cognitive and ethical conflicts, particularly as participants justify AI reliance owing to academic pressures, time constraints, and institutional inefficiencies. This aligns with the induced-compliance paradigm, wherein individuals alter their moral stance to alleviate internal conflict rather than confront ethical transgressions.

A critical insight emerging from this study is that moral dissonance is not merely an incidental byproduct of AI adoption but also a structural issue within teacher preparation programs. The tensions between convenience and conscience, pressure and principle, and innovation and integrity illustrate how AI disrupts traditional academic values. Without deliberate ethical reflection, continued AI reliance may erode pre-service teachers' ethical reflexivity, which may influence how they later shape the norms in their professional roles.

Furthermore, the normalization of AI-assisted academic work among pre-service teachers suggests a shifting perception of authorship, originality, and academic responsibility. The blurring of boundaries between AI-generated content and independent intellectual effort indicates a redefinition of what constitutes academic integrity in the digital age. This shift presents a complex ethical dimension, where pre-service teachers must reconcile their role as students to meet institutional demands with their future responsibility as educators upholding academic standards. These insights contribute to the discourse on academic integrity and digital ethics and demonstrate that AI's integration into education is not only a question of functionality but also an evolving moral framework.

However, it is important to acknowledge that the generalizability of these findings may be limited by the small sample size drawn from a single teacher education institution. This approach may not fully capture the varied ethical perspectives and AI usage patterns across different cultural, institutional, and disciplinary contexts. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported behaviors introduces the potential for social desirability bias, where participants may present their AI usage in ways that align with perceived academic and ethical expectations. While these limitations frame the scope of interpretation, they do not diminish the

significance of the study's insights into how pre-service teachers navigate AI-induced moral dissonance.

## IMPLICATIONS

To address the challenges posed by AI use in teacher education, TEIs need to develop structured policies and pedagogical frameworks that explicitly define ethical AI use. Given the moral dissonance experienced by pre-service teachers, AI literacy should be introduced not only as an auxiliary skill but also as a core component of teacher preparation. Institutions must establish clear ethical guidelines and policies that differentiate between responsible AI use and academic dishonesty. These policies should articulate acceptable AI-assisted practices, set academic integrity standards, and introduce accountability measures. Additionally, integrating academic integrity training that presents real-world ethical dilemmas related to AI can help pre-service teachers critically reflect on their roles as future educators.

Beyond policy implementation, TEIs should integrate AI literacy and digital ethics into teacher education curricula to ensure pre-service teachers develop an in-depth understanding of AI implications. Coursework may include training on responsible AI use, authorship ethics, AI bias awareness, and the impact of AI on teaching and assessment. Pre-service teachers must be equipped with the skills to assess AI-generated content critically, recognize its limitations, and distinguish between AI-enhanced learning and overreliance that undermines intellectual development. This knowledge will not only enhance their academic integrity but also prepare them to navigate AI's role in classroom instruction.

Another critical consideration is the need for authentic and AI-resistant assessment strategies to reduce the risk of AI-induced academic dishonesty. Traditional assessments that rely on written outputs may inadvertently encourage AI misuse, making it necessary to adopt alternative evaluation methods that emphasize critical thinking and applied knowledge. Oral examinations, real-world problem-solving tasks, and collaborative projects can encourage meaningful learning while minimizing AI dependency. These assessment models ensure that pre-service teachers develop deep learning skills, critical engagement, and ethical responsibility in their academic and professional practices.

Faculty preparedness in guiding AI integration is very important. TEIs must invest in professional development programs for teacher educators to ensure that they are equipped with strategies to incorporate AI ethically in their teaching methodologies. Faculty members should receive training on how to model responsible AI use, design AI-resistant assessments, and facilitate discussions on academic integrity in AI-assisted environments. TEIs can establish a culture where ethical AI use is modeled and reinforced throughout teacher training programs if faculty are competent in AI pedagogy.

At the individual level, pre-service teachers must develop ethical self-regulation and academic integrity awareness. Self-reflection activities, peer discussions, and mentoring programs can encourage them to critically evaluate their AI use and address moral dilemmas. Promoting personal accountability through academic integrity pledges, honor codes or ethical commitment statements may also help reinforce their understanding of the long-term consequences of AI misuse in both academic and professional settings. This approach ensures that they transition from students using AI for convenience to educators modeling responsible AI integration in classrooms.

Finally, given the rapid evolution of AI technologies, institutions must continuously review and adapt AI policies and practices. Research on AI literacy programs should explore their long-term impact on pre-service teachers' professional ethics and instructional strategies. An evidence-based approach to policy development will allow TEIs to proactively address emerging ethical concerns and technological shifts while maintaining a commitment to academic integrity.

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