



**"EVERYONE IS USING IT, SO I STARTED TOO":
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES
ON LEARNING AND THE APPLICATION OF AI AT COLLEGE**

Vanessa Vargaⁱ,

Katarina Dadić,

Dora Brozović

Faculty of Croatian Studies,

University of Zagreb,

Borongajska cesta 83 d,

10 000 Zagreb,

Croatia

Abstract:

This study explores how university students in Croatia use artificial intelligence (AI) for educational purposes, focusing on the AI tools they use, how they learned about them, the ways they apply AI in their studies, and their overall perspectives on its use. Using qualitative semi-structured interviews with 24 students from various Croatian universities, the research found that ChatGPT is by far the most commonly used AI tool, followed by Perplexity and several specialized AI applications. Students primarily learned about AI through professors, classmates, and media. The findings show that students mainly use AI to support learning by summarizing texts, finding information and academic references, translating content, brainstorming ideas, and improving academic writing rather than completing assignments for them. Most participants viewed AI as a helpful tool that saves time, improves understanding of complex topics, and enhances productivity. However, they also expressed concerns about its limitations, including inaccurate information, weaker performance in technical tasks, and the potential negative impact on critical thinking, independent learning, and academic integrity. The study concludes that AI has become a normal part of students' academic lives but is generally viewed as a support tool rather than a replacement for independent learning. The findings highlight the importance of developing AI literacy in higher education by teaching students how to use AI responsibly, ethically, and critically while encouraging universities to provide clearer guidance on its appropriate use.

Keywords: AI, ChatGPT, education, higher education

ⁱ Correspondence: email vvarga@fhs.unizg.hr, kdadic@fhs.unizg.hr, dbrozovi1@fhs.unizg.hr

1. Introduction

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into higher education has sparked a wave of discussions that typically center on the technical capabilities of these tools. However, what often remains in the background is the actual perspective of those who use these tools the most: the students themselves. AI has not merely changed how students write term papers or write code. It has influenced their daily study habits as well as their perceptions of their own knowledge and academic integrity. To fully understand the phenomenon of AI within the academic community, it is essential to move beyond quantitative statistics and explore subjective experiences of students. Qualitative research is used when we want to explore and understand the meaning that individuals or groups attribute to a particular problem. It provides insight into processes, motives, and context that cannot be quantified with numbers (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Therefore, the main aim of this research was to examine how university students in Croatia use AI for educational purposes. Specify to determine which AI tools they use, how they learn about them, what are the ways they use them, and finally to see their own perspectives and thoughts on AI use.

Firstly, we need to look into the terminology used in this paper. When we talk about AI, we are referring to generative artificial intelligence or computer systems capable of creating new, original content (e. g., text, images, code, or sound) based on patterns they have learned from massive data sets (UNESCO, 2023). One example is ChatGPT, which offers numerous opportunities such as personalized learning, support in lesson planning and reduction of the workload of educators. Therefore, AI in education is not just about replacing humans with machines, but about creating personalized learning environments that complement human teaching and transform the role of the student from a passive recipient to an active co-creator of knowledge. AI can analyze students' performance data in real time and tailor instructional content to meet individual needs, thereby improving engagement and learning outcomes (Zawacki-Richter *et al.*, 2019). Also, AI is increasingly used to automate administrative and assessment tasks. Automated grading systems, particularly for objective and short-answer questions, reduce educators' workload and provide immediate feedback to students (Luckin *et al.*, 2016).

Despite its potential benefits, the integration of AI in education also raises significant ethical, social, and pedagogical concerns. Issues such as data privacy, algorithmic bias, and the potential dehumanization of learning environments have prompted ongoing debates among researchers and policymakers (Williamson & Eynon, 2020). The integration of such models brings significant challenges, primarily in terms of compromising academic integrity through cheating and plagiarism, which can weaken students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Additionally, risks related to data privacy, accuracy of generated information and lack of an emotional component in the teaching process are often highlighted (Mosaiyebzadeh *et al.*, 2023).

2. Literature Review

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is reshaping higher education. The rapid growth of these technologies has generated considerable scholarly interest, with researchers examining the implications for teaching and learning, student outcomes, academic integrity, and faculty roles (Crompton & Burke, 2023; Castillo-Martinez & Flores-Bueno, 2024). Crompton and Burke (2023) conducted a comprehensive review of AI across teaching, learning, and administration, noting that these systems can identify at-risk students and recommend timely interventions to improve achievement. Consequently, Sharples (2025) advocates for a holistic systems approach to integrating AI into educational ecosystems, arguing that isolated tool adoption without attention to the broader learning environment limits its transformative potential. Similarly, Melisa *et al.* (2025) highlighted that while AI enhances learning efficiency, intentional instructional guidance remains essential to prevent over-reliance and sustain the development of authentic critical thinking skills. Specifically, generative AI tools like ChatGPT have intensified debates about academic integrity. Synthesizing evidence on student wellbeing, collaboration, and learning quality, Abdallah *et al.* (2025) revealed a complex picture in that AI simultaneously supports and undermines authentic academic work. This tension often stems from a divergence in perceptions; Barrett and Pack (2023) explored the disconnect between student use of AI in academic writing and faculty expectations, finding that students and teachers hold markedly different views on what constitutes legitimate AI-assisted writing.

Challenging conventional policy responses, Luo (2024) argues that the prevailing focus on "originality" in academic integrity frameworks is too narrow, urging institutions to treat AI as a tool for learning rather than solely a vehicle for fraud. Conversely, Kooli (2023) warns that without adequate monitoring mechanisms, the risk of "fraud factories" producing AI-generated academic work at scale remains significant. Alongside academic integrity, broader ethical concerns and structural challenges have attracted growing attention, including algorithmic bias, data privacy, and unequal access. Castillo-Martinez and Flores-Bueno (2024) identified that while AI offers clear efficiency and time-saving benefits for research tasks, persistent concerns remain regarding rigor and quality. DeStefano, Hackney, and Moskal (2025) investigated these disparities, calling for unified institutional policies to address gaps in digital literacy and access. Furthermore, Storey *et al.* (2025) underscored that the rapid evolution of large language models creates compounding challenges for universities attempting to keep pace with technological change.

These shifts heavily impact faculty roles. Castillo-Martinez and Flores-Bueno (2024) noted that faculty members are frequently required to redesign assessments and develop new monitoring strategies, adding to their professional burdens. Barrett and Pack (2023) similarly found that faculty face considerable uncertainty regarding how to adapt their pedagogy. Compounding this, Moorhouse *et al.* (2023) reviewed AI assessment guidelines across top-ranking universities and found that most institutional

responses are reactive rather than proactive, leaving faculty without clear direction. Without adequate institutional training and guidance, faculty may use AI tools ineffectively or unethically (Liu & Jagadish, 2024). Despite these systemic challenges, empirical studies highlight strong pedagogical benefits, particularly regarding student motivation and personalized support. For example, Ali *et al.* (2023) found that ChatGPT strongly motivated language learners to improve reading, writing, vocabulary, and grammar. This aligns with broader literature evaluations; systematic reviews and SWOT analyses by Albadarin *et al.* (2024) and Zhu *et al.* (2023) confirm that AI's primary advantages lie in its scalability, efficiency, customizability, and capacity to provide personalized expert assistance. However, these benefits remain strictly bounded by inherent technical limitations. Scholars consistently warn of risks regarding misinformation ("hallucinations"), algorithmic bias, a lack of emotional intelligence, and an inability to fully comprehend context (Kalla *et al.*, 2023; Albadarin *et al.*, 2024; Zhu *et al.*, 2023). Ultimately, as Stolz, Winterburn, and Palmer (2024) critically argue, effective learning requires high student engagement and active human guidance; without it, student interaction with AI risks devolving into passivity, cognitive dependency, and deep-seated misconceptions.

3. Theoretical Background

The theoretical foundation of this study is grounded in the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), originally proposed by Venkatesh *et al.* (2003). UTAUT posits that user acceptance and technology usage behavior are driven by four core determinants: performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, and facilitating conditions. In an educational context, *performance expectancy* refers to the degree to which users (faculty or students) believe that integrating AI will enhance their academic or teaching outcomes. *Effort expectancy* denotes the perceived ease of navigating these AI systems. *Social influence* represents the extent to which individuals perceive that important peers or institutional leaders believe they should adopt the technology. Finally, *facilitating conditions* involve the structural, organizational, and technical infrastructure provided by the institution to support AI usage.

While the original UTAUT model accounts for individual demographic moderators such as age, gender, and experience, it notably omits macro-level cultural dynamics. However, empirical evidence suggests that technology adoption is as much a cultural phenomenon as it is a rational, individual decision-making process. Because technology is deployed within distinct institutional and societal environments, national and institutional cultures heavily dictate how these systems are communicated and internalized (Du and Lv, 2024; Im *et al.*, 2010; Sharma and Singh, 2024).

To address these macro-level dynamics and account for the temporal dimension of technology deployment, this study complements UTAUT with Everett M. Rogers' Diffusion of Innovations (DOI) Theory (2003). DOI explains how new ideas, practices, or technologies spread through a social system over time via specific communication

channels. Rogers (2003) categorized adopters into five sequential segments based on their innovativeness: innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards. According to DOI, the rate of this diffusion is dictated by five perceived attributes of the innovation: relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability (Dearing & Cox, 2018; Rogers, 2003).

4. Current Research

The main aim of this research was to examine how university students in Croatia use AI for educational purposes. Specify to determine which AI tools they use, how they learn about them, what are the ways they use them, and finally to see their own perspectives and thoughts on AI use. Semi-structured interviews with university students were conducted from March 11th to April 26th 2025. This research aimed to acquire answers from students regarding the main groups of questions. The first group of questions is designed to acquire data about the types of AI students use, the motives or reasons for their use, and general opinions on AI. The second group of questions is aimed at acquiring answers on the ways students use AI for academic purposes.

4.1 Recruitment, Sample, and Procedure

This research has the approval of the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Croatian Studies. The recruitment started on 25th February with students of Communications Studies at the Faculty of Croatian Studies, University of Zagreb, who were attending a class taught by one researcher. They were given an opportunity to participate and to be compensated with points in their class. In total, 12 of 40 students from that class decided to participate. For research purposes, students had to already have some experience with AI use. The first interview was conducted on March 11th. The second wave of students was recruited from Communications Studies at the Faculty of Croatian Studies, University of Zagreb, who were attending the same class. They were given an opportunity to recruit a participant and to be compensated with points in their class. In total, 12 students were recruited from other faculties and universities. The final sample includes 24 students (16 female students, 9 male students) average age of around 22.6 years. The majority of students study at the University of Zagreb; 12 are from the Faculty of Croatian Studies, 4 are from the Faculty of Economics and Business, 1 is from the Faculty of Political Science, 1 is from the Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computing, and 1 is from the Faculty of Humanities and Sciences. Others are from Zagreb University of Applied Sciences, University North, Effectus University, and Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences University of Split.

All students who participated in the research signed a consent form and were informed about the method of data collection and processing. Students were assigned a code to replace personal names. The conversations were recorded. After the transcript was created, the recordings were deleted, and the transcript was assigned a participant code. Researchers read the transcripts to determine what themes are reoccurring

according to the aims of the research. After the codes were defined, two researchers did the thematic analysis of the transcripts. A unit of analysis was one statement made by a participant. Because participants' responses often contained multiple ideas, a single statement could be assigned to more than one code where appropriate.

The two analyses were then compared, and inter-rater reliability was calculated. Only the data on which both researchers reached agreement were included in the final analysis. The inter-rater reliability between the two researchers was 90.3%, indicating a high level of agreement in the coding process. Overall, the researchers agreed on the coding of 439 units of analysis derived from participants' interview statements. The results are organized according to recurring themes in order to address the aims of the study. The codes for the type of AI were: ChatGPT, Perplexity, and Other. The codes for the source of learning about AI were: Professor and colleagues, media, and (3) other. The codes for the purpose of AI use in education were: learning, looking up information, looking up references, writing papers, text compression/summarization, translation, and other. Finally, participants' perspectives on AI were categorized as either positive or negative.

5. Results

To examine which artificial intelligence tools students use, the analysis identified three main themes: ChatGPT, Perplexity, and other AI tools. ChatGPT was by far the most frequently mentioned tool, appearing in 133 statements, followed by Perplexity with 17 statements and other AI tools, such as DeepSeek, with 20 statements. Participants consistently described ChatGPT as their primary AI tool. A smaller number of participants reported using more specific AI systems, such as Snapchat AI or tools integrated into Adobe software. This distribution suggests that students tend to rely on one dominant tool, while using others selectively depending on their specific needs. Several students also reported using other AI depending on their specific needs. For example, one participant explained that she uses multiple tools simultaneously: *"Mostly ChatGPT, Perplexity AI, and Snap AI. ChatGPT, the regular one, is free, and the other is Perplexity Pro. I installed it because my faculty had distributed a notice about 20,000 free licenses that we could use"* (female, 22, 15Z). Some students also reported paying for premium versions of AI services. As one participant stated, *"I have to admit, I have ChatGPT Pro, so I have this subscription on a monthly basis, and I share it with a colleague"* (female, 20, V7). One participant explained that he prefers certain tools for technical tasks, while using others for everyday questions: *"For example, now I mostly use DeepSeek for help before programming, because I've noticed it gives better results and the code makes more sense. I use ChatGPT more for personal things and personal questions, because it has a more natural way of talking"* (male, 22, V8).

Many participants reported first hearing about artificial intelligence through academic environments or discussions with colleagues. Professors and university courses played an important role in introducing students to AI tools. One participant described

how a university course sparked her interest: *"I first heard about ChatGPT from a professor's course 'Introduction to Artificial Intelligence', and then I decided to try it out of curiosity"* (female, 24, 9Z). Similarly, another participant explained that he initially learned about AI through discussions with fellow students: *"I heard about it a lot through media and the internet around 2023 when it started gaining popularity, and when I started studying, many of my colleagues were talking about it and using it, so I decided to try it myself"* (male, 23, V1). In addition to academic sources, some students reported learning about artificial intelligence through traditional media and social networks. One participant explained how exposure to media content led him to experiment with AI tools: *"I heard about it on television, and I kept seeing things about AI on my phone, how people use it. Then I decided to try it myself. I had to create a profile to log in, and the AI asked me to search something, so I searched, and that's how it started"* (male, 23, 05M).

5.1 Use of Artificial Intelligence for Academic Purposes

The thematic analysis also examined how students use AI tools in their academic work. The most common uses were studying and searching for information, each represented in 21 statements. Students also reported using AI for finding references (10 statements), summarizing texts (10 statements), writing academic papers (9 statements), translating texts (9 statements), and various other purposes (37 statements).

Many participants emphasized the usefulness of AI in generating ideas or structuring written assignments. For example, one student noted that AI can be particularly helpful during the early stages of writing: *"ChatGPT is great for writing essays — it's excellent for that"* (male, 20, VK3). However, participants also emphasized that they do not rely on AI to fully complete assignments. One participant clarified this distinction by stating: *"I don't mean writing a seminar paper in the sense that it literally writes it for me, but when I'm trying to come up with a concept or idea, what to focus on, then it gives me some guidance"* (female, 22, 1Z).

Another frequently mentioned use of AI was the summarization of academic texts. Students described AI as a tool that helps them process large volumes of information more efficiently. One participant explained: *"Mostly I use it as a tool that helps me process texts and assists with studying. I think I used it once to summarize a text"* (female, 20, VK11). Similarly, another student stated that *"ChatGPT helps summarize literature in that sense — not to write the whole paragraph for me, but to help extract key information"* (female, 22, 1Z). Some participants emphasized that they use AI selectively when dealing with complex materials. As one student explained, she uses AI *"only when I really need help with something, to narrow down some information"* (female, 21, 17Z).

Translation was also a commonly mentioned academic use of AI. Students reported using AI systems to translate academic terminology or foreign-language texts. One participant explained that this was particularly helpful in fields where many concepts are presented in English: *"A lot of technical terms are in English, and since I'm also learning French on the side, I use it mostly for translation of individual words"* (male, 23, V1). Another participant noted that AI has already begun to change perceptions of translation

work: *"Even though human translators still exist, I think people will start trusting artificial intelligence more for translation"* (female, 22, VK9). Students also reported using AI to translate between Croatian and English when working on academic assignments. As one participant stated, *"It helped me with translations from Croatian to English and vice versa"* (female, 22, 15Z).

Students also described using AI as a learning support tool when preparing for exams or studying difficult material. One participant explained that she uploads literature directly into the system to assist with studying: *"I insert that literature into ChatGPT and then transfer the text into a Word document, which I later study from"* (female, 22, 1Z). Another participant described using AI to clarify difficult concepts before exams: *"Before exams, when I have less time to research and find more literature, it explains certain things to me better and faster than I would understand on my own"* (female, 22, 10Z). However, some students indicated that they still rely on traditional search engines when studying. For example, one participant explained: *"For studying, I still prefer to use Google Search"* (female, 24, 9Z).

Participants also reported using AI systems to obtain information quickly when working on assignments or searching for literature. Several students highlighted the efficiency of AI tools in reducing the time required for research. One participant emphasized that AI significantly shortens the research process: *"The positive thing is that we can access a large amount of information at once — it really shortens the research time. Perplexity can even provide academic sources"* (female, 22, 15Z).

Another participant reported using AI occasionally when searching for literature for seminar papers: *"I use it about four or five times per semester when I need it to find literature for a seminar paper"* (female, 23, 4Z). At the same time, some students expressed concerns that relying too heavily on AI for information may negatively affect the learning process. One participant reflected on this issue by stating: *"We can reach information quickly, but I think it takes away from real learning"* (male, 22, 17M).

Beyond academic activities, participants also reported using AI in everyday life for activities such as cooking, interpreting health-related information, and solving practical daily problems. *"Mostly for personal purposes, to understand my emotions, so I could say it's a kind of psychologist."* (female, 22, 15Z), *"When I'm cooking, I can ask the AI assistant what to do next while I'm cooking."* (female, 21, 17Z).

5.2 Student Perspective on AI Use

The students' responses indicate that they generally hold a balanced view of AI, recognizing both its benefits and potential risks. Students expressed both positive and negative attitudes toward AI. Negative perceptions were identified in 76 statements, whereas positive perceptions appeared in 57 statements.

Many participants agreed that AI can make life easier, help solve a variety of problems, and provide significant support to people in the future: *"AI can make life much easier and help us solve various problems."* (female, 24, VK10), *"I believe AI will help many people*

in the future." (female, 20, V7), *"I'm fascinated by how accurate AI has become"* (female, 22, V2).

They also expressed admiration for the increasing accuracy and capabilities of AI technologies. However, students also acknowledged several concerns. One student explained that ChatGPT sometimes struggles with calculations: *"When we solve tasks in class our own way, it doesn't turn out well. When it comes to calculations, ChatGPT isn't really good for that. It's great for writing essays, though"* (male, 20, VK3). Another participant described a similar experience when attempting to solve geometry problems using AI: *"I tried asking it to draw a right triangle, and it gave some formulas and solutions, but it wasn't really accurate"* (male, 22, VK8).

Some believed that frequent reliance on AI could reduce their own critical thinking and problem-solving skills. They were particularly worried about the impact of AI on younger generations, suggesting that children may become less intelligent if they depend on AI to complete homework and writing tasks instead of developing these skills independently. Additional concerns included the possibility of AI replacing human workers, reducing the value of human-created work when AI assistance is involved, and the potential for AI to be abused or misused. Overall, the findings suggest that while students appreciate the advantages of AI, they remain aware of its ethical, educational, and societal challenges; *"I think AI makes me use my own brain less than I used to., I'm worried that AI could make people less intelligent, especially children who may stop doing their own homework and writing."* (female, 22, 14Z), *"AI may replace humans and their work."* (female, 24, 09Z).

6. Discussion

The primary objective of this study was to examine how university students in Croatia use AI tools for educational purposes, identifying the specific tools they adopt, their channels of technological discovery, and their overall perspectives on AI integration. The findings suggest that AI is deeply embedded within students' academic and everyday routines. However, its role is strictly perceived as supportive rather than substitutive. Students predominantly approach AI as a practical, accessible, and time saving tools for writing support, text summarization, translation, information retrieval, and conceptual clarification. However, while students use AI, their operational knowledge is highly centralized. They continue to default to the most famous, generalized conversational AI tools because they simply do not know about the existence or unique capabilities of specialized academic alternatives. This finding highlights a critical educational gap. Without intentional institutional intervention, students may continue to use generalized AI instead of specialized tools. Consequently, there is an urgent need for higher education institutions to move past reactive bans and actively teach comprehensive AI literacy. Curriculums should introduce students to an expanded ecosystem of specialized tools, instructing them on which platform to select based on the unique demands of their academic tasks.

A prominent finding of this research is that students engage with AI through a heavily instrumental lens. They use AI to optimize efficiency. In the context of the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), this behavior is a direct expression of high-performance expectancy; students adopt the technology because they recognize its immediate utility in enhancing their academic output. From the perspective of the Diffusion of Innovations (DOI) Theory, this aligns with the perceived attribute of relative advantage over traditional research methods. This instrumental approach matches the global trends identified by Albadarin *et al.* (2024), where ChatGPT frequently functions as a virtual assistant or writing aid rather than a replacement for independent study. In the Croatian higher education context, AI does not serve as a surrogate teacher, but rather as an administrative and cognitive assistant that facilitates access to information. The qualitative data also suggest that AI becomes particularly valuable for text overload and uncertainty. Students reported turning to ChatGPT when they required simplified, accelerated explanations of dense concepts. This structural behavior supports the assertions of Ali *et al.* (2023), who noted that ChatGPT can positively mediate learning motivation and self-efficacy by rendering daunting academic tasks more manageable and less frustrating.

Interestingly, the way in which Croatian students learned about AI is through formal academic structure. While casual social media exposure and peer circles were frequently mentioned, a significant number of participants reported that university professors and colleagues were their primary channel of introduction to AI. This finding modifies traditional assumptions regarding the social influence construct of UTAUT. The institutional authority of faculty carries significant weight in shaping technology acceptance. When professors intentionally introduce these tools in courses, it sparks legitimate curiosity and legitimizes the technology as an acceptable cognitive aid. This underlines the fact that faculty are uniquely positioned to shape how the digital generation transitions from casual, potentially problematic AI usage to ethical, rigorous, and highly effective academic co-creation.

Crucially, the participants in this study were not passive or uncritical consumers of AI outputs. This empirical behavior reflects the theoretical warnings issued by Kalla *et al.* (2023) regarding the systemic vulnerabilities of AI, including data hallucinations, embedded biases, and a fundamental lack of contextual comprehension. The fact that students actively adjust their level of trust based on the nature of the task suggests a highly developed layer of digital literacy. This critical distance relates directly to the broader pedagogical debate surrounding whether AI interfaces facilitate genuine learning. Stolz, Winterburn, and Palmer (2024) argue that AI cannot independently provide meaningful education because they lack authentic human understanding, discernment, and truth-seeking intent. The current study offers empirical support for this position. Students did not characterize AI as an independent source. Rather, they viewed it as a mechanism for simplification of existing knowledge. Some participants explicitly stated the concern that fast access to information could take away from real learning. This reinforces the framework of Stolz *et al.* (2024), who stated that while AI can optimize the

administrative and structural processes of learning, authentic comprehension remains completely dependent on the student's individual intellectual effort, baseline prior knowledge, and active critical reflection.

Finally, while the study focused primarily on academic use, an unexpected and compelling secondary finding emerged regarding the boundaries of AI utility in the private sphere. While a minor subset of students reported using ChatGPT's conversational interface for personal dilemmas, with some even colloquially comparing it to a psychologist. However, students maintained an explicit boundary between informational utility and emotional authenticity. Human relationships were consistently categorized as uniquely meaningful and structurally superior. This distinction directly mirrors the theoretical boundaries outlined by Kalla *et al.* (2023) regarding AI's total lack of emotional intelligence and genuine empathy. Even when students appreciated a more "natural" conversational cadence in advanced models, they did not anthropomorphize the technology or mistake its algorithmic fluency for genuine human connection.

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the sample consisted of only 24 university students, the majority of whom were enrolled at the University of Zagreb. Although participants represented several different faculties and institutions, the sample was relatively small and not fully representative of the broader Croatian student population. Consequently, the findings cannot be generalized to all university students. Second, the research relied on qualitative semi-structured interviews. While this approach provided rich insights into students' experiences and perceptions, it is inherently based on self-reported data, which may be influenced by recall bias or social desirability. Students may have underreported practices that could be perceived as academically inappropriate or overstated responsible AI use. Future research should include larger and more diverse samples from multiple universities and countries to improve the generalizability of findings. Mixed-methods research combining qualitative interviews with quantitative surveys would allow researchers to examine both the depth and prevalence of AI use among students.

7. Conclusion

Overall, this research suggests that AI is becoming normalized in the lives of university students in Croatia, especially as a supportive educational tool. The findings show that AI, especially ChatGPT, has become an important part of students' daily and academic routines. Students most often use AI as a practical tool that helps them write, summarize texts, translate content, find information, and better understand complex academic materials. In this sense, AI is primarily experienced as a source of efficiency, convenience, and support. At the same time, the findings suggest that students do not use AI uncritically. Although they recognize its usefulness, they are also aware of its limitations, especially when it comes to inaccurate information, technical tasks, and the possibility that overreliance on AI may reduce deeper learning and independent thinking. The findings highlight the need for further research on student AI use in different disciplines

and for clearer educational guidelines that would support responsible, critical, and ethically informed use of artificial intelligence in higher education.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

About the Authors

Vanesa Varga is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication Sciences at the Faculty of Croatian Studies, University of Zagreb. She earned her PhD in Information and Communication Sciences from the University of Zagreb in 2020 and has interdisciplinary academic training in communication studies, croatology, and museology. Her research focuses on artificial intelligence in education, digital media, social media, digital literacy, and the impact of technology on children and young people. **Katarina Dadić** is an Associate Professor and Head of the Department of Educational Sciences at the Faculty of Croatian Studies, University of Zagreb. She received her degree in Sociology and Pedagogy from the University of Zagreb in 2006 and earned her PhD in Pedagogy in 2015. Her research focuses on childhood pedagogy, parenting pedagogy, sociology of education, media and childhood, intercultural education, and the impact of digital technologies on education and child development. She has led and participated in numerous scientific projects, presented her work at national and international conferences, and published extensively in the fields of pedagogy and educational sciences. Her expertise in educational research and child development provides a strong foundation for studies examining the role of artificial intelligence and digital technologies in higher education.

Dora Brozović is a graduate student in Communication Studies at the Faculty of Croatian Studies, University of Zagreb, where she is currently completing her MA degree, specializing in Public Relations. She holds a BA degree in Communication Studies and Sociology also from Faculty of Croatian Studies, University of Zagreb. Her academic and professional interests include artificial intelligence, digital communication, public relations, social media, and digital marketing. Alongside her studies, she currently works as a Marketing Assistant, where she is involved in social media management, marketing

communication, content creation, and external communication. Her previous experience includes working in public relations, influencer marketing, and project management.

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