Engineering Educators Bringing the World Together
2025 ASEE Annual Conference & Exposition
Palais des congrès de Montréal, Montréal, QC • June 22–25, 2025 ASEE
Paper ID #49492

AI as a Catalyst for Transforming Higher Education: Enhancing Teaching Strategies and Student Outcomes

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Abstract

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is reshaping higher education by transforming teaching strategies and improving student outcomes. This paper explores AI's role as a catalyst for personalized learning, adaptive teaching methods, and data-driven decision-making. Integrating AI into curriculum design enables educators to create dynamic, student-centered environments catering to diverse learning needs. AI tools can automate administrative tasks, provide real-time feedback, and foster active learning, allowing instructors to focus on mentorship and complex problem-solving. The study highlights AI-enhanced analytics that offer insights into student performance and engagement, facilitating targeted interventions to boost retention and success rates. Preliminary results indicate that faculty engagement with AI has led to innovative course designs and improved teaching practices, while student interactions with AI tools have contributed to enhanced academic performance and equity in success across diverse demographics.

Our research also explores AI-driven pedagogical innovations aimed at inclusive and culturally responsive teaching. Data from participating faculty shows notable improvements in student engagement and learning outcomes. This paper outlines these findings, discusses implications for future practice, and highlights strategies for scaling AI integration across institutions to promote equitable learning environments.

This transformation not only benefits students by providing tailored educational experiences but also empowers educators to focus on fostering critical thinking and creativity. As AI continues to evolve, its role as a catalyst in higher education will undoubtedly grow, offering unprecedented opportunities for the advancement of teaching strategies and academic achievement. Despite the numerous benefits, challenges such as data privacy, ethical considerations, and the digital divide must be addressed to ensure equitable and effective implementation. Ultimately, AI has the potential to revolutionize higher education by making learning more efficient, inclusive, and adaptable to the needs of the learner.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, higher education, personalized learning, adaptive teaching, student outcomes, data-driven education.

Introduction

In recent years, the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into educational settings has captured significant public interest, eliciting both fascination and concern. According to Educause, while administrators and educators worry about AI undermining instructional quality, students have embraced AI tools like ChatGPT, appreciating their utility while remaining cautious about risks. This dichotomy underscores the complexity of AI’s role in education, where concerns coexist with opportunities to enhance classroom learning by fostering critical thinking and creativity.

With AI becoming common in tools like Microsoft Word, Google, and Grammarly, its integration into education is inevitable. This shift gained further momentum in October 2023 with the release of the White House’s Executive Order on the Safe, Secure, and Trustworthy Development

and Use of Artificial Intelligence [1]. Despite public apprehension, a report by the Stevens Institute of Technology and Morning Consult reveals that nearly half of the public trusts higher education institutions to manage AI responsibly, comparable to trust levels in healthcare organizations [2]. However, a survey by the EdWeek Research Center highlights a critical gap in educator readiness: while many recognize the importance of teaching AI-related skills, only 10% feel adequately prepared to integrate AI into their teaching practices [3]. This gap underscores the urgent need for educational professionals to adapt to AI's increasing presence in classrooms.

This paper examines the transformative potential of AI in higher education, focusing on its ability to drive innovations in teaching strategies and student outcomes. AI offers tools that enable personalized learning, adaptive teaching methods, and data-driven decision-making processes. Traditional educational models often adopt a one-size-fits-all approach, failing to address the diverse needs of individual learners. AI has the potential to revolutionize this paradigm by fostering dynamic, student-centered environments that accommodate varying learning styles and paces.

The study specifically explores the effectiveness of AI-driven pre-reading assignments in a Structural Analysis course, employing Generative AI tools like ChatGPT [13] to enhance student preparation for class discussions and engagement with complex material. By implementing AI-generated quizzes on key methods to find the deflection of different structural elements, this research investigates how AI can improve student understanding, participation, and learning outcomes. These findings align with broader trends in AI-driven curriculum development, pedagogy, and assessment [4] – [12], highlighting opportunities to create more personalized and engaging educational experiences, particularly in STEM fields.

Despite these promising advancements, the integration of AI in education is not without challenges. Data privacy, ethical considerations, and digital divide present significant barriers to equitable implementation [7] – [9]. Institutions must address these issues to harness AI's full potential while safeguarding fairness and inclusiveness.

Ultimately, this paper provides an initial insight of AI's impact on higher education, offering actionable recommendations for future research and practice. By exploring the opportunities and challenges of AI integration, it highlights strategies for scaling its adoption across institutions to promote more inclusive, adaptive, and effective learning environments.

Methodology: AI-Driven Pre-Reading Assignments and Quizzes

Generative AI Utilization: For this study, Generative AI, specifically ChatGPT, was utilized to create pre-reading assignments that introduced key concepts, followed by multiple-choice questions to reinforce understanding. The content was meticulously reviewed by the course instructor for accuracy, clarity, comprehensiveness, engagement, and relevance to ensure alignment with the study's objectives.

- Accuracy: Ensuring that the information provided was correct.
- Clarity: Making sure the content was easy to understand and free from ambiguity.
- Comprehensiveness: Ensuring that all necessary information was included.
- Engagement: Creating content that was interesting and engaging for students.
- Relevance: Aligning the content with the course objectives and learning outcomes.

The assignments aimed to prepare students for in-class discussions, thereby enhancing their ability to engage, ask questions, and grasp the concepts more effectively.

Course Selection and Implementation: The methodology was implemented in a Structural Analysis course, chosen for its complexity and the need for a solid understanding of fundamental concepts. Five pre-reading assessments were developed, covering critical topics such as:

1. Fundamentals of Beam Deflections
2. Double Integration Method
3. Moment Area Theorem
4. Strain Energy Method (Castigliano's Theorem)
5. Force Method

These assignments were administered to students as online quizzes featuring multiple-choice questions.

Quiz Design: Multiple-choice questions (MCQs) were generated using ChatGPT based on the pre-reading content to assess students' comprehension. Each quiz varied in the number of questions, ranging from 5 to 10, depending on the complexity of the topic.

Results: Data Collection and Analysis

Pre-Reading Assessment Results: To assess comprehension, students' performance on the pre-reading assignments was analyzed. Table 1 summarizes the performance of participants in pre-reading assessments for various methods used in structural analysis to find deflections of structural elements such as trusses, frames, and beams.

Table 1. Summary of Pre-Reading Assessment Performance

Pre-Reading Assessment Title	**Number of Questions**	**Average Score**
Fundamentals of Beam Deflections	5	96%
Double Integration Method	6	92%
Moment Area Method	7	97%
Castigliano's Theorem	9	97%
Force Method	10	92%

The data included:

- Number of Questions: The total number of MCQs in each quiz.
- Average Score: The mean score achieved by students on each quiz.

Statistical Analysis: The average scores for these quizzes indicated a strong overall understanding, with scores ranging from 92% to 97%. Statistical analysis, including mean and standard deviation calculations, was performed to assess the effectiveness of the pre-reading assignments. The analysis included:

- Mean and Standard Deviation: Calculating the mean and standard deviation of quiz scores to understand the central tendency and variability.
- Comparison of Scores: Comparing scores across different topics to identify areas of strength and weakness.

Qualitative Feedback: In addition to quantitative data, qualitative feedback was collected from students regarding their experience with the pre-reading assignments. This feedback helped in understanding the impact of these assignments on student engagement and learning outcomes.

Impact on Classroom Interaction: The impact of pre-reading assignments on classroom interaction was observed. Key indicators included:

- Participation in Discussions: Measuring the increase in student participation during class discussions.
- Quality of Questions: Assessing the depth and relevance of questions asked by students during lectures.
- Active Engagement: Observing the overall engagement and interaction levels of students during classes.

Implementation of AI-Enhanced Teaching Strategies: Integration with Traditional Teaching Methods: The AI-driven pre-reading assignments were integrated with traditional teaching methods to create a blended learning environment. The methodology included:

- In-Class Discussions: Facilitating discussions based on the pre-reading assignments to reinforce understanding.
- Interactive Learning: Training students to use generative AI tools for creating interactive learning experiences.

Ongoing Monitoring and Adjustments: Continuous monitoring of student performance and engagement was conducted to identify areas for improvement. Adjustments to the pre-reading assignments and teaching strategies were made based on feedback and performance data.

Faculty Training and Support: Training sessions helped faculty members integrate AI tools effectively, covering topics such as AI capabilities, limitations, and data interpretation.

Ethical Considerations and Data Privacy: Data Privacy and Security: Ensuring data privacy and security was a priority. Measures were taken to protect students' personal information and academic performance data. These measures included:

- Anonymization: Anonymizing data to protect student identities.
- Secure Storage: Storing data in secure, encrypted systems to prevent unauthorized access.

Ethical Use of AI: Ethical considerations were addressed to ensure the responsible use of AI in education. This included:

- Transparency: Being transparent with students about the use of AI tools and how their data would be used.
- Fairness: Ensuring that AI tools were used in a way that promoted fairness and inclusivity.
- Bias Mitigation: Taking steps to identify and mitigate any potential biases in AI-generated content and assessments.

By following this methodology, we aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of AI-driven pre-reading assignments in enhancing student engagement and learning outcomes. The findings provide valuable insights into the potential of AI to transform higher education and offer practical recommendations for educators and institutions looking to integrate AI into their teaching practices.

Discussion

The integration of AI-driven pre-reading assignments and quizzes into the Structural Analysis course showcased the transformative potential of AI in enhancing student engagement, comprehension, and overall academic performance. The data from the pre-reading assessments revealed consistently high scores across all topics, indicating that students were able to grasp complex concepts more effectively when introduced through AI-generated content. This finding aligns with the growing body of research suggesting that personalized and adaptive learning environments, facilitated by AI, can significantly improve educational outcomes.

One of the most notable impacts of the AI-driven pre-reading assignments was the increase in student participation and interaction during lectures. By reviewing key concepts before class, students were better prepared to engage in discussions, ask insightful questions, and collaborate with peers. This active engagement not only enhanced the learning experience but also fostered a deeper understanding of the material, as students were able to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application.

The use of AI in creating personalized learning experiences also addressed diverse learning needs and preferences. The adaptability of AI tools allowed for the customization of content, making it accessible and engaging for a wide range of students. This inclusivity is particularly important in higher education, where student demographics are increasingly diverse. By catering to individual learning styles and paces, AI-driven assignments helped create a more equitable learning environment.

Moreover, the integration of AI-enhanced analytics provided valuable insights into student performance and engagement. By analyzing data on quiz scores, participation, and feedback, educators were able to identify areas where students were struggling and implement targeted interventions. This data-driven approach to teaching enabled a more responsive and adaptive educational experience, ultimately leading to improved retention and success rates.

However, the implementation of AI in education is not without its challenges. Data privacy and ethical considerations must be carefully addressed to ensure that student information is protected and used responsibly. Additionally, the digital divide remains a significant barrier, as not all students have equal access to the technology and resources required for AI-driven learning. To maximize the benefits of AI in education, it is crucial to develop strategies that address these challenges and promote inclusivity.

The study also highlighted the importance of faculty training and support in the successful integration of AI tools. Educators must be equipped with the knowledge and skills to effectively use AI in their teaching practices. This includes understanding the capabilities and limitations of AI, as well as being able to interpret and act on the data generated by AI-enhanced analytics. Ongoing professional development and collaboration among educators can help ensure the successful and sustainable integration of AI in higher education.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates the effectiveness of AI-driven pre-reading assignments in improving student preparedness, engagement, and learning outcomes in a Structural Analysis course. By leveraging Generative AI tools like ChatGPT to create content that aligns with course objectives, students were able to achieve a deeper understanding of complex topics and actively participate in class discussions. The consistently high quiz scores and observed increase in classroom interaction highlight the value of this approach.

Integrating AI-powered resources into education could enhance the teaching and learning experience, offering a scalable method for fostering academic success. The benefits of AI in education include personalized learning experiences, data-driven decision-making, and increased student engagement. These advantages not only enhance individual learning outcomes but also contribute to the creation of more inclusive and equitable educational environments.

However, the successful implementation of AI in higher education requires careful consideration of data privacy, ethical issues, and the digital divide. Strategies must be developed to ensure that AI tools are used responsibly and that all students have access to the necessary technology and resources. Additionally, ongoing faculty training and support are essential to maximize the potential of AI in education.

As AI continues to evolve, its role as a catalyst in higher education will undoubtedly grow, offering unprecedented opportunities for the advancement of teaching strategies and academic achievement. By addressing the challenges and leveraging the benefits of AI, educators and institutions can revolutionize higher education, making learning more efficient, inclusive, and adaptable to the needs of the learner. This paper provides valuable initial insights and practical approach for the integration of AI in education, paving the way for a future where AI-driven innovation transforms the learning experience for all students

Limitations and Future Work

This study focused on implementing generative AI in a single course over one semester, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future work will focus on further integrating AI tools and continuing data collection to support a more robust comparative analysis.

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