

# Pre-Service Teachers' Experiences with ChatGPT: Toward Responsible AI Use in Teacher Education

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## ABSTRACT

The emergence of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools, such as ChatGPT, is reshaping how teachers and learners interact with content. While its use in teacher education is growing, little is known about how pre-service teachers experience, interpret, and utilize this tool during critical phases like practice teaching. This study explores the lived experiences, perceptions, and reflections of pre-service teachers in using ChatGPT for academic and instructional tasks. It aims to inform the development of an AI literacy program grounded in ethical and pedagogical principles for teacher education institutions. A qualitative descriptive-phenomenological approach was used, involving in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 25 fourth-year pre-service teachers from Tagoloan Community College during 2nd Semester SY 2024-2025. Braun and Clarke's (2023) thematic analysis framework guided data analysis to capture emergent themes. Participants reported diverse uses of ChatGPT, including academic writing support, lesson planning, research guidance, and content clarification. A central finding was the recognition of ChatGPT as a personalized learning companion, especially during periods of cognitive load or instructional planning. While most highlighted its role in enhancing efficiency, creativity, and confidence, concerns were raised about overreliance, diminished critical thinking, and ethical boundaries. Thematic findings reflected a balanced perspective, valuing ChatGPT's convenience while recognizing the need for responsible and reflective use. Based on these findings, the study recommends integrating a structured AI literacy and ethics program, AI-TEACH (Artificial Intelligence – Training for Ethical and Accountable Classroom Harnessing), into teacher education curricula. This initiative promotes digital competence, ethical awareness, and pedagogical innovation, contributing to inclusive and quality education as emphasized in Sustainable Development Goal 4.

## INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies has brought transformative changes to education, reshaping how teaching and learning are conceptualized and delivered. Among these technologies, ChatGPT, an AI-powered language model developed by OpenAI, has gained significant traction in academic settings for its ability to generate content, provide writing assistance, and support idea development (David & Maroma, 2025; Bongolto et al., 2024). Its accessibility has made it a widely used tool by students and teachers alike, including those in teacher education programs (Pesce & Blanco, 2024; Batucan et al., 2025).

For pre-service teachers, the integration of AI tools like ChatGPT into their academic routines offers practical benefits. It can assist in lesson planning, instructional material development, and academic writing, especially during the demanding period of practice teaching (Balatero et al., 2025; Bongolto et al., 2024). However, its use also presents challenges and ethical considerations, such as the risk of overreliance, concerns about originality and academic

integrity, and the absence of formal training on responsible AI use within the curriculum (Guarin et al., 2025; Alejandro et al., 2024; Relator et al., 2025).

Despite its growing presence, there remains a lack of in-depth understanding of how pre-service teachers engage with ChatGPT, particularly in the context of their professional preparation and teaching practicum (Gudelos, 2025; Guan et al., 2025). As teacher education institutions aim to prepare digitally competent and ethically grounded teachers, it becomes necessary to investigate the real-world experiences and reflections of future teachers who have used AI tools during their training (Lumanlan et al., 2025; Kayaalp et al., 2025). The Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework and Self-Efficacy Theory offer useful lenses to interpret how pre-service teachers integrate AI tools into their academic and pedagogical practices, reflecting both their technological fluency and confidence in instructional contexts.

This study explores the experiences, perceptions, and reflections of 25 fourth-year pre-service teachers who have completed their deployment in public elementary schools for practice teaching. By examining how they used ChatGPT in their academic and professional tasks during this important phase of teacher formation, the research seeks to uncover meaningful insights that will inform the development of a context-specific AI literacy program (Lima et al., 2025). The study ultimately aims to support the responsible and ethical integration of AI in teacher education, contributing to the broader goals of Sustainable Development Goal 4: Quality Education (Villareal et al., 2024).

Despite the growing presence of ChatGPT in educational settings, little is known about its practical use among pre-service teachers in community colleges in the Philippines. While existing studies have explored general attitudes toward AI in education, there remains a notable gap in localized, qualitative research that investigates how pre-service teachers in Philippine community colleges practically engage with ChatGPT during their fieldwork. This study addresses that gap by providing empirical evidence grounded in lived experiences within the teacher preparation context.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design, specifically using a descriptive-phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences, perceptions, and reflections of pre-service teachers regarding their use of ChatGPT during their academic coursework and practice teaching experiences (Creswell et al., 2007; Guan et al., 2025). Grounded in the philosophical tradition of phenomenology, this approach aims to understand the meaning and essence of participants' lived experiences without being clouded by the researcher's prior assumptions or theoretical impositions (Nernere & Kastuhandani, 2024).

The descriptive-phenomenological method is particularly appropriate for this study because it provides a structured way to explore how pre-service teachers make sense of their engagement with emerging technologies such as generative AI tools (Balatero et al., 2025; Gudelos, 2025). In this case, ChatGPT was used for various academic and instructional purposes, including lesson planning, generating learning materials, and clarifying content (David & Maroma, 2025; Bongolto et al., 2024). The method allowed the researcher to capture the subjective realities of participants in their own words, revealing how they internalize and interpret AI integration in the context of teacher education (Lumanlan et al., 2025; Alejandro et al., 2024).

To guide data analysis, Braun and Clarke's (2023) thematic analysis was employed as a systematic and flexible framework for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within the data. This method ensured transparency in theme development and enhanced the trustworthiness of the findings (Braun & Clarke, 2023; Pesce & Blanco, 2024).

To uphold reflexivity, the researcher engaged in ongoing reflective journaling throughout the data collection and analysis phases. This practice helped bracket prior knowledge and assumptions, allowing the participants' voices to remain central in the interpretation process. Reflexivity also supported ethical and interpretive integrity, especially given the researcher's dual role as a teacher and investigator.

Furthermore, the use of a descriptive-phenomenological approach was ideal in the context of Tagoloan Community College, where students navigate a blended learning environment. Their lived experiences with ChatGPT are shaped not only by academic demands but also by technological accessibility and evolving teaching modalities (Villareal et al., 2024; Lima et al., 2025). By exploring these dynamics through rich, first-person narratives, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how pre-service teachers engage with AI in meaningful, instructional ways (Relator et al., 2025; Kayaalp et al., 2025).

### **Participants and Sampling Technique**

The participants in this study were 25 fourth-year pre-service teachers from the College of Education at Tagoloan Community College, all of whom had recently completed their practice teaching in various public schools around Tagoloan, Misamis Oriental, for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Semester SY 2024-2025. These participants were selected using purposive sampling, a non-probability technique appropriate for qualitative research that seeks to obtain rich, in-depth insights from individuals with firsthand experience of the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell et al., 2007).

Purposive sampling was preferred over strategies such as maximum variation or snowball sampling because the study specifically aimed to include individuals with direct experience using ChatGPT for academic or instructional purposes. Inclusion criteria required that participants had completed their deployment as student-teachers for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Semester SY 2024-2025 and had used ChatGPT in academic tasks such as lesson planning or content development. Pre-service teachers who had not completed their practicum or had never used ChatGPT in an academic context were excluded.

The sample size of 25 was determined based on data saturation, in which no new themes or significant insights emerged from the data (Creswell et al., 2007). This number aligns with common sample sizes in descriptive phenomenological research and allowed for in-depth analysis while maintaining manageability (Braun & Clarke, 2023; Guan et al., 2025). All participants had meaningful engagement with ChatGPT in authentic educational settings, providing deep reflections that supported the study's aim of exploring responsible AI use in teacher education (Balatero et al., 2025; Bongolto et al., 2024; Gudelos, 2025).

### **Research Locale**

This study was conducted at Tagoloan Community College (TCC), a government-funded local community college higher education institution in Misamis Oriental, Philippines. The College of Education, one of TCC's leading academic programs, offers teacher education programs and serves students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. The institution has adopted a blended learning approach to address resource limitations and promote digital adaptability. This environment, where traditional instruction coexists with technology-enhanced practices, makes TCC a relevant and dynamic setting for exploring the academic use of generative AI

tools like ChatGPT among pre-service teachers (Balatero et al., 2025; Lima et al., 2025; Creswell et al., 2007).

### **Data Collection Procedure**

To gain rich, in-depth insights into pre-service teachers' experiences with ChatGPT, this study employed semi-structured interviews as the primary method of data collection. This approach allowed for flexibility in probing responses while maintaining a consistent structure across participants. Semi-structured interviews are particularly effective in phenomenological research, as they provide space for participants to articulate their lived experiences in their own terms (Creswell et al., 2007).

Three open-ended guide questions were used to frame the interview sessions:

1. Experiences with ChatGPT – Can you share a specific experience where you used ChatGPT in your academic work, and describe how it helped or affected that experience?
2. Perceptions and Meaning-Making – What does using ChatGPT mean to you as a future teacher, and how do you make sense of its role in your learning?
3. Reflection and Acceptance – How do you feel about the use of ChatGPT in your education, and what impact do you think it has had on your development as a pre-service teacher?

These questions were carefully designed to align with the study's phenomenological aim, to explore how pre-service teachers experience, interpret, and integrate ChatGPT in their academic and instructional contexts. The open-ended format allowed participants to freely narrate their stories and perspectives.

To promote authentic and comfortable communication, participants were invited to respond in either Cebuano or English, depending on their language preference. This bilingual approach was intended to reduce response inhibition, support cultural relevance, and ensure the clarity of meanings, particularly in deep or emotional reflections.

All interviews were conducted in person, providing a more interactive setting that fostered rapport and allowed for observation of non-verbal cues. Each session lasted approximately 15–30 minutes. This duration was sufficient to gather rich and detailed narratives due to the focused nature of the questions, the familiarity of participants with the topic, and the comfort afforded by language flexibility. The balance between depth and brevity also minimized participant fatigue, supporting the collection of high-quality data within a manageable timeframe.

With informed consent, all interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accurate documentation. Participants were assured of confidentiality, and all identifiable information was removed during the transcription process. The recordings were then transcribed verbatim, preserving the original structure, language, and expression of the participants' narratives. Verbatim transcription is essential in qualitative studies, as it safeguards the authenticity of meaning-making and supports rigorous thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2023).

Finally, the transcripts were reviewed for accuracy and completeness before being subjected to thematic analysis using the framework of Braun and Clarke to identify patterns, meanings, and recurring themes across the data set.

### **Data Analysis**

The transcribed interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun & Clarke (2023). This method involved the following six steps:

1. Familiarization with the data through repeated reading of transcripts.

2. Generating initial codes by identifying significant phrases, patterns, or meanings in participants' responses.
3. Searching for themes by clustering related codes. Themes were prioritized based on three criteria: (1) frequency of occurrence across participants, (2) the strength and richness of the narrative (i.e., depth and detail in descriptions), and (3) the uniqueness or distinctiveness of certain experiences that revealed deep or underrepresented perspectives. This approach allowed the researcher to capture both widely shared patterns and meaningful divergences in pre-service teachers' engagement with ChatGPT.
4. Reviewing themes to ensure they accurately reflected the full data set and aligned with the study's objectives.
5. Defining and naming themes to clearly represent participants' core experiences in a coherent and descriptive manner.
6. Producing the final report by selecting vivid, compelling excerpts and connecting findings to the research questions and objectives.

Data were manually coded using printed transcripts and spreadsheet matrices (for example, Word and Excel) to systematically organize codes, group them under emerging themes, and ensure consistency in analysis. The prioritization process ensured that themes not only reflected common usage of ChatGPT but also captured critical insights into the participants' ethical awareness, instructional practices, and cognitive engagement.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, specific strategies were implemented:

First, member checking was conducted by returning the initial set of themes and their corresponding interpretations to the original participants. Each participant was provided with a summary of the themes that emerged from their own interview data. They were asked to review whether the interpretations accurately reflected their views and to suggest corrections or clarifications if necessary. This process ensured that the findings remained faithful to the lived experiences of the respondents and helped validate the accuracy of the researcher's interpretations (Creswell et al., 2007; Nernere & Kastuhandani, 2024).

Second, to further strengthen credibility, the themes were independently reviewed by a qualitative research expert with advanced training in thematic analysis and experience in conducting and evaluating qualitative research studies. This expert was given access to anonymized interview transcripts, the initial codes, and the developed themes. The expert examined the consistency between the raw data and the thematic structure and provided important feedback to refine and validate the coherence of the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2023).

These procedures, participant validation and expert review, ensured that the thematic analysis was conducted rigorously and that the results were grounded in the actual data. As a result, the findings of this study can be considered credible and trustworthy, offering meaningful insights into how pre-service teachers perceive and engage with ChatGPT as part of their academic experience (Guan et al., 2025; Balatero et al., 2025; David & Maroma, 2025).

Thematic analysis enabled the researcher to systematically interpret the depth and complexity of participants' reflections and how these can inform the development of an AI literacy program (Lumanlan et al., 2025; Kayaalp et al., 2025).

### **Ethical Considerations**

This research adhered to established ethical guidelines to ensure the protection of participants' rights, dignity, and well-being. This study adhered to the principles of the Declaration of

Helsinki and ethical standards for human subject research, ensuring that the research process upheld the values of respect, beneficence, and justice.

Since Tagoloan Community College does not have an institutional Research Ethics Board (REB) yet, the researcher sought and secured formal approval to conduct the study from the College Dean and the Vice President for Academic Affairs. These administrators reviewed the research objectives, methodology, and ethical safeguards before granting permission.

Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants. They were clearly informed about the purpose of the study, their right to voluntary participation, the option to withdraw at any stage without penalty, and the assurance of confidentiality and anonymity. Participants provided written consent, indicating their willingness to take part in the interviews and for their responses to be used in the study.

To further protect participants' privacy, all identifiable information was removed from transcripts, and pseudonyms or participant codes such as P1, P2, P3, and so on were used in the reporting of findings. Audio recordings and transcribed data were securely stored and accessed only by the researcher. These measures ensured that the research process was both ethical and respectful of participants' autonomy and trust.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### **Question 1. Can you share a specific experience where you used ChatGPT in your academic work, and describe how it helped or affected that experience?**

This study explored the lived experiences of pre-service teachers in using ChatGPT to support their academic and instructional tasks. Through thematic analysis using Braun and Clarke's (2023) framework, eight distinct themes emerged from participant responses, reflecting varied purposes, perceptions, and outcomes of their interaction with the tool.

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#### **Theme 1: Academic Writing and Grammar Assistance**

One of the most frequently cited uses of ChatGPT was for academic writing support. Pre-service teachers described using it to paraphrase, structure ideas, and improve grammar. For instance, P1 shared, "*ChatGPT is one of those AI tools where you can ask for information. It usually used it for paraphrasing paragraph and helps in improving words used.*" P22 added, "*ChatGPT helped me organize RRL, rephrase abstracts, vary sentence structure, and guide my thesis writing.*" These reflections show that ChatGPT served as an accessible academic aid that enhanced participants' writing fluency. This is supported by Balatero, Jayno, and Miranda (2025), who found that ESL pre-service teachers viewed ChatGPT as a useful writing scaffold that promoted clarity and coherence. Similarly, Bongolto et al. (2024) emphasize that ChatGPT enhances academic productivity, particularly in research composition and content generation among pre-service teachers.

#### **Theme 2: Lesson Planning and Teaching Resources**

Pre-service teachers used ChatGPT to generate ideas for lesson plans and teaching strategies. P2 stated, "*ChatGPT was actually a useful tool for giving interactive ideas/games.*" This highlights ChatGPT's role in supporting instructional creativity and differentiation, especially during practicum. David and Maroma (2025) found similar outcomes, noting that ChatGPT

supports pre-service teachers in developing age-appropriate teaching materials. Nernere and Kastuhandani (2024) also documented how teachers used AI tools to enhance lesson design.

### **Theme 3: Understanding and Explanation Aid**

Participants shared that they used ChatGPT for understanding complex academic content. As P6 described, *“My experience in using chatgpt in my academic was very helpful. When I'm so tired and I don't understand the topic to make an answer. Like definition, graphic and also the site I used for demonstration.”* Participant 7 said, *“Been a user of ChatGPT, but to be honest, it helped me in many ways especially during those times where I need more explanations about something and it quickly provide explanations which helped me understand.”* This demonstrates how ChatGPT functions as a learning support tool, especially in high-pressure academic contexts. Gudelos (2025) reported comparable findings, with pre-service teachers using AI tools to clarify difficult concepts and reinforce comprehension.

### **Theme 4: Time-saving and Convenience**

Several participants highlighted ChatGPT's efficiency in helping them complete tasks. P8 remarked, *“I used ChatGPT quite many times, but only as a last resort- especially if the task is a bit too hard. AI is definitely very easy to use and user friendly. It makes hard tasks easy because it will give you the answer you need.”* This practical benefit aligns with findings by Guarin et al. (2025), who emphasized ChatGPT's role in streamlining workloads and saving time for pre-service teachers in blended learning environments.

### **Theme 5: Thesis and Research Support**

ChatGPT was also used for thesis writing and research planning. P21 shared, *“I used ChatGPT to research topics and generate ideas for my thesis. It helped me organize my thoughts and provided valuable insights, saving time and improving my writing. ChatGPT's assistance enabled me to focus on analysis and critical thinking, enhancing the overall quality of my work.”* This aligns with Batucan et al. (2025), who noted that ChatGPT assists in topic development and research structure among pre-service mathematics teachers.

### **Theme 6: Academic Shortcut or Last Resort**

Some students admitted to using ChatGPT as a last-minute tool to meet deadlines. P25 revealed, *“Katong time nga naay pasahon tapos murag pila nalang ka oras deadline maong ang GPT akong gipa answer [That time when there was something to submit and the deadline was just a few hours away, so I let GPT answer it for me].”* Such accounts raise ethical concerns. Pesce and Blanco (2024) caution that while ChatGPT offers convenience, it may also encourage academic shortcuts when not used responsibly.

### **Theme 7: Limited Perception of Use**

A minority expressed skepticism about ChatGPT's academic value. P5 stated, *“For me ChatGPT cannot help my academic work... we must have our knowledge based on facts, book and MELCs...”* Alejandro et al. (2024) similarly observed that some pre-service teachers still prioritize traditional learning materials due to concerns over AI-generated content's reliability.

### **Theme 8: General Positive Impression**

Some participants shared a general appreciation for ChatGPT. P4 summarized, *“ChatGPT makes learning easy and accessible especially for us students.”* This reflects the broader positive reception of ChatGPT as a transformative learning companion, as reported by Relator et al. (2025) and Lumanlan et al. (2025).

## **Question 2. What does using ChatGPT mean to you as a future teacher, and how do you make sense of its role in your learning?**

This study explored how pre-service teachers perceive and make sense of their use of ChatGPT in the context of becoming future teachers. Using Braun and Clarke's (2023) thematic analysis, six distinct themes emerged, reflecting a wide range of attitudes, both embracing and cautious, toward AI integration in teacher education.

### **Theme 1: ChatGPT as a Teaching and Learning Aid**

Many participants viewed ChatGPT as a practical tool for enhancing teaching creativity and lesson preparation. P1 stated, "*As a future teacher, you can always make use of any AI tool to enhance and improve your creativity and activities.*" Likewise, P25 shared, "*Para nako isip future teacher, ang ChatGPT usa ka tabang sa pagkat-on ug paghimo og lesson plans... [For me, as a future teacher, ChatGPT is a helpful tool for learning and creating lesson plans].*" This perspective supports the findings of David and Maroma (2025), who noted ChatGPT's role in enriching pedagogical design, and Nernere and Kastuhandani (2024), who found that teachers used it as a creative assistant for instructional material development.

### **Theme 2: Efficiency and Productivity**

Pre-service teachers appreciated ChatGPT for helping them manage their workload efficiently. P3 remarked, "*It's a tool to help me accomplish my work as soon as possible.*" This aligns with Guarin et al. (2025) and Bongolto et al. (2024), who reported that pre-service teachers use ChatGPT to streamline academic tasks and teaching preparation, particularly under time constraints.

### **Theme 3: Balanced and Ethical Use of AI**

Some participants stressed the importance of ethical and mindful use. P7 reflected, "*ChatGPT is very useful and easy to access but as a future teacher, we need to control ourself. Dli dapat natu e asa ang tanan [We should not rely on it for everything].*" P11 added, "*Using ChatGPT means embracing a powerful tool... while importantly evaluating its limitations and ensuring ethical and responsible use.*" These reflections show a growing sense of digital responsibility, echoing the findings of Relator et al. (2025) and Lumanlan et al. (2025), who emphasized the need to integrate AI ethics into teacher education curricula.

### **Theme 4: Caution and Dependence Concerns**

A few participants expressed concern that overreliance on ChatGPT may hinder original thinking. P13 shared, "*Hindi dapat always na gamitin ito. [It should not be used all the time.]*" This sentiment is consistent with Pesce and Blanco's (2024) findings, which highlight the tension between efficiency and autonomy in AI use among pre-service teachers.

### **Theme 5: Creativity and Important Thinking Development**

Several pre-service teachers noted that ChatGPT fosters creativity and deeper thinking when used meaningfully. P21 summarized this well: "*Using ChatGPT means leveraging technology... It helps me think importantly and creatively...*" This theme aligns with Batucan et al. (2025) and Alejandro et al. (2024), who found that AI can support higher-order thinking and innovative teaching practices among future teachers.

### **Theme 6: ChatGPT as a Personalized Learning Partner**

Some participants described ChatGPT as a valuable learning companion. P22 gave a rich reflection: "*Ang paggamit nako sa ChatGPT nagpasabot nga nag-evolve na gyud ang paagi sa pagkat-on ug pagtudlo... ChatGPT helps me become more independent and curious... not a*

*replacement for important thinking... but a support system that can guide, clarify, and inspire.*" This highlights how students reconceptualize AI as a partner in their growth, not just a tool. Lima et al. (2025) and Guan et al. (2025) similarly found that AI tools foster learner autonomy and strengthen professional readiness in teacher education.

**Question 3. How do you feel about the use of ChatGPT in your education, and what impact do you think it has had on your development as a pre-service teacher?**

To understand the emotional and professional reflections of pre-service teachers regarding ChatGPT, their responses were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2023) thematic analysis. Seven major themes emerged, reflecting both positive reception and mindful caution about the tool's influence on their development as future teachers.

**Theme 1: Helpful for Academic Productivity**

Participants commonly described ChatGPT as a helpful tool in accomplishing school tasks. P3 shared, "*Well it helped me accomplish a lot of school works,*" while P4 emphasized, "*Chat GPT really helps us future teacher. In terms of making or crafting lesson plans and by seeking information that is fast.*" ChatGPT contributed to learners' academic efficiency and instructional readiness. This aligns with David and Maroma (2025), who found that ChatGPT streamlines workload and enhances lesson planning. Bongolto et al. (2024) likewise identified its supportive role in guiding pre-service teachers through complex academic tasks.

**Theme 2: Important and Responsible Use of ChatGPT**

Several participants highlighted the importance of using ChatGPT with intention. P1 warned, "*It must ONLY be used to enhance and improve, not for total dependency...*" while P21 reflected, "*I'm also mindful of its limitations and potential biases, which has taught me to approach technology with a discerning and deep perspective.*" Such reflections show emerging digital ethics among future teachers. This supports Lumanlan et al. (2025) and Relator et al. (2025), who emphasized the value of responsible AI use in teacher education programs.

**Theme 3: Boost in Creativity and Important Thinking**

For some, ChatGPT was seen as a thinking partner that inspired creative and cognitive engagement. P2 explained, "*Since ChatGPT offers ideas, it allows me to make those ideas more meaningful... improves my important-thinking skills.*" This theme aligns with findings from Batucan et al. (2025) and Alejandro et al. (2024), which show AI tools encourage deeper reflection, innovation, and problem-solving in academic contexts.

**Theme 4: Limited or Negative Impact**

A few respondents were more important. P5 stated, "*As a future teacher, I cannot say that it helps me a lot because we have a book to use and MELCs to follow.*" This cautious stance suggests a preference for traditional learning tools or possibly a lack of familiarity with AI use. It echoes Gudelos (2025) and Pesce and Blanco (2024), who observed skepticism toward AI among some pre-service teachers with limited exposure to the technology.

**Theme 5: Ethical Concerns and Overreliance**

Some participants voiced concern about overdependence. P8 remarked, "*ChatGPT might be somewhat unethical since some use it as an escape... It can be used as a reference.*" Similarly, P13 admitted, "*I feel happy... but I also feel bad sometimes... we should not rely... especially ChatGPT.*" These comments reflect a balanced awareness of ChatGPT's double-edged role. Guarin et al. (2025) and Nernere and Kastuhandani (2024) noted similar concerns about the risk of diminishing learner autonomy and academic integrity due to AI misuse.

### **Theme 6: Increased Confidence and Motivation**

Others found that ChatGPT boosted their confidence and motivation. P12 shared, “*Dako gyud siya natabang sa ako... makatabang sa ako labaw na kung magpadayon gyud ko pagka maestra [It has really helped me... especially if I continue becoming a teacher].*” P22 added, “*It made me more confident and curious.*” This suggests that ChatGPT supports self-efficacy, a finding affirmed by Lima et al. (2025) and Guan et al. (2025), who linked AI tools with enhanced preparedness and professional identity among future teachers.

### **Theme 7: Overall Positive Impact**

Many participants expressed deep gratitude and overall satisfaction. P7 reflected, “*ChatGPT has a huge part of my journey... I'm truly grateful for ChatGPT.*” P23 summarized, “*It is multi-faceted... when used properly, it's a great help.*” The general sentiment is that ChatGPT has become a trusted educational companion. This perception is consistent with Balatero et al. (2025) and Kayaalp et al. (2025), who advocate for integrating AI tools in teacher education as a sustainable, competence-building strategy.

### **Overall Synthesis**

This study provides a holistic and deep understanding of how pre-service teachers engage with ChatGPT as part of their academic journey and professional formation. The thematic findings reveal that ChatGPT has become a deeply embedded tool in the educational practices of future teachers, shaping how they approach learning, teaching preparation, and instructional innovation (David & Maroma, 2025; Guan, Zhang, & Gu, 2025).

Across all three research questions, a strong trend of pragmatic use is evident. ChatGPT is primarily seen as an academic support system, helpful in writing, grammar correction, idea generation, lesson planning, thesis structuring, and time management. This reinforces its perceived role as a personal learning companion, especially under conditions of academic pressure and cognitive fatigue (Balatero, Jayno, & Miranda, 2025; Bongolto et al., 2024; Batucan et al., 2025). These experiences are largely framed within a constructive-utilitarian perspective, where the tool serves as a bridge between effort and efficiency (Guarin et al., 2025).

In terms of perception and meaning-making, pre-service teachers generally express an openness to integrating AI into educational practice. However, this is tempered by a growing awareness of the ethical boundaries and potential risks of overdependence, such as diminished creativity, academic dishonesty, or erosion of important thinking (Pesce & Blanco, 2024; Alejandro et al., 2024). Participants emphasized the importance of responsible use, aligning with global calls for AI ethics in education (Lumanlan et al., 2025; Relator et al., 2025).

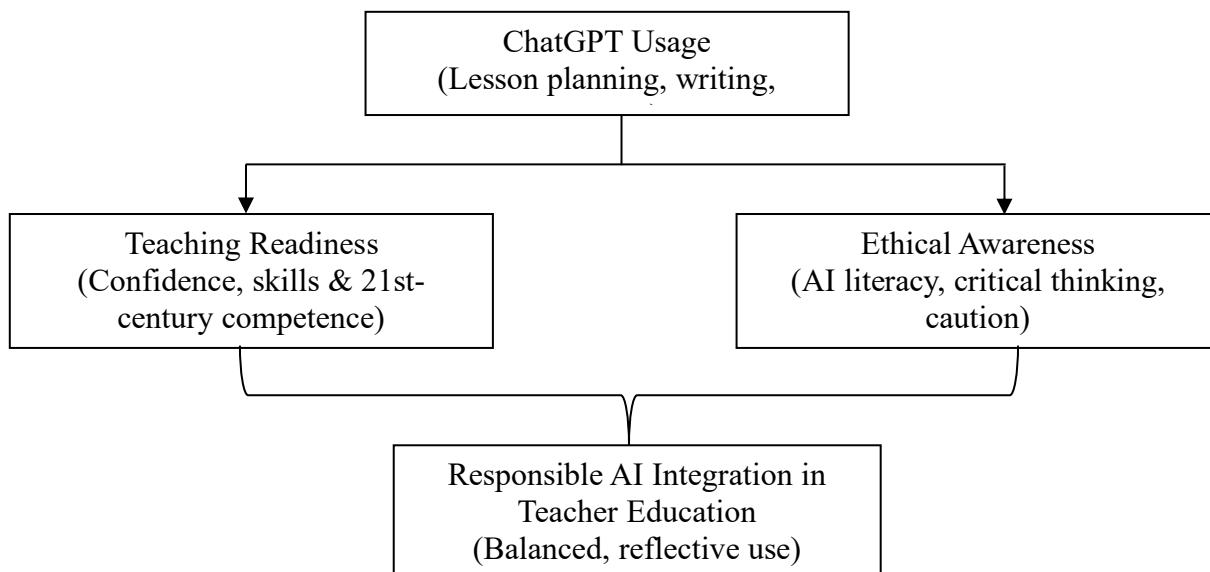
Furthermore, ChatGPT is not merely viewed as a technological convenience, but as a transformative catalyst that enhances creativity, promotes independent learning, and fosters motivation (Batucan et al., 2025; Kayaalp, Durnali, & Gökbüyük, 2025). For many, it supports the development of 21st-century teaching competencies, contributing to their evolving teacher identity and professional confidence (Guan, Zhang, & Gu, 2025; Lima et al., 2025). Still, a minority expressed skepticism or reported limited benefits, citing a preference for traditional resources or challenges in comprehension, highlighting diverse levels of AI literacy and readiness (Gudelos, 2025; Villareal, Amamangpang, & Cabiles, 2024).

These patterns resonate with earlier findings on pre-service teachers' digital self-efficacy and online learning readiness after the pandemic, which revealed high proficiency in technology integration but varying degrees of readiness in time management and communication skills (Quiño & Potane, 2023). This parallel suggests that the effective and ethical engagement with

AI tools like ChatGPT is grounded not only in access and exposure but also in the digital self-efficacy that pre-service teachers developed during post-pandemic transitions to online learning.

The findings reflect a balanced but optimistic outlook: ChatGPT is valued for its practicality, but there is also an emerging digital maturity among pre-service teachers that highlights the need for important engagement, ethical awareness, and guided integration of AI tools in teacher education programs (Creswell et al., 2007; Braun & Clarke, 2023). The study strongly suggests that teacher education institutions must incorporate structured AI literacy and ethics training to ensure that future teachers harness such tools with both creativity and caution (Lumanlan et al., 2025; Kayaalp, Durnali, & Gökbüyük, 2025).

To better illustrate these findings, the conceptual diagram below synthesizes the key elements of the study:



**Figure 1. Conceptual Diagram: Pre-Service Teachers' Engagement with ChatGPT**

This model illustrates that ChatGPT usage influences both teaching readiness and ethical awareness, which in turn inform a responsible approach to AI integration in the field of education. The relationship is dynamic: the more pre-service teachers engage meaningfully with the tool, the more they recognize its value and limitations, thereby deepening both their instructional competence and ethical sensibilities.

## CONCLUSION

This study revealed that ChatGPT has become a significant academic and instructional support tool for pre-service teachers. Through their lived experiences, the participants described ChatGPT as a personal learning companion, providing assistance with academic writing, lesson planning, research tasks, and content clarification. It also offered convenience and boosted their motivation, efficiency, and confidence as future teachers.

However, participants also demonstrated growing digital maturity by acknowledging potential drawbacks, including the risk of overreliance, diminished creativity, and ethical concerns about academic integrity. Their reflections indicate that while ChatGPT is viewed positively, its responsible and informed use is essential. Notably, this dual awareness of both its value and its

limitations highlights the need for the formal integration of AI ethics and literacy into teacher education programs.

While the findings offer valuable insights, as a qualitative study with a purposive sample, findings are context-specific and not broadly generalizable. As such, results may not be generalizable across all pre-service teacher populations. Future research may consider a mixed-methods or longitudinal approach to evaluate the long-term impact of AI integration in teacher training. In particular, the proposed AI-TEACH program would benefit from pilot testing and quantitative validation to assess its effectiveness in improving AI literacy, ethical awareness, and pedagogical competence.

Generally, this study underscores the transformative potential of generative AI tools like ChatGPT in preparing future-ready teachers. It supports Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) by advocating for AI integration that is ethical, reflective, and empowering. By contributing to teacher preparation in under-resourced, technology-diverse contexts, the study fosters inclusive and adaptable AI integration practices that align with global educational priorities.

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