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Artificial Intelligence in the Classroom: Opportunities, Risks, and the Ethics of ChatGPT

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Abstract: ***ChatGPT has rapidly evolved into a common tool among secondary students, raising new challenges for educators and policymakers. This review examines current open-access research on ChatGPT's integration into classrooms, focusing on its capacity to enhance personalization, access, and teaching efficiency. At the same time, concerns persist around misinformation, student overdependence, plagiarism, and AI bias. Rather than framing the question around permissibility, the article argues for responsible integration rooted in digital literacy, educational equity, and ethical safeguards.***

Keywords: ChatGPT in education; AI ethics; secondary schools; digital literacy; academic integrity

1. Introduction

Classrooms are rarely still for long. Chalkboards gave way to smartboards. Handwritten essays now live in Google Docs. Then, in late 2022, ChatGPT emerged - disrupting the balance once again.

For many secondary students, ChatGPT is less a futuristic invention than a handy study aid. Type in a confusing biology concept, and it explains it in plain English. Ask for help with essay structure, and it produces a scaffold in seconds. This immediacy has made AI more appealing than previous educational technologies.

But the very features that make ChatGPT attractive to students (speed, accessibility, adaptability) also alarm educators. Can we rely on an AI tool that occasionally generates fabricated information? Does using it hollow out critical thinking? Should students be punished for asking a chatbot the questions they might otherwise ask a teacher?

This article aims to evaluate current research on ChatGPT in secondary education, outlining both its educational promise and ethical dilemmas, with a focus on responsible integration into Australian classrooms.

To move beyond speculation, this article turns to a growing body of **open access research** on ChatGPT in education. What emerges is not a single answer but a map of possibilities, tensions, and future directions. Given the growing role of generative AI in educational settings, understanding its implications is vital for shaping informed, equitable, and ethical practices in classrooms.

How ChatGPT Supports Learning

Several studies point to the ways AI might democratise education. The *Frontiers in Education* review (2024) shows students using ChatGPT as a personalised tutor, asking for explanations until they make sense. For students without access to private tutoring, such immediate, conversational feedback can help reduce disparities in educational support.

Open reviews in *MDPI* journals suggest AI also improves **engagement**. When learning feels interactive, students tend to persist longer with difficult material. ChatGPT's ability to simulate dialogue and simplify language can re-spark interest, particularly for students who feel alienated from dense textbooks.

Another strand of research focuses on language learning. *Springer Open* studies highlight how non-native English speakers lean on ChatGPT to rephrase sentences or generate translations. In multicultural classrooms such as those across Melbourne, this function could help students feel included and confident in contributing.

Teachers, too, are experimenting. Some have used ChatGPT to draft lesson plans or practice exam questions, freeing time for more relational aspects of teaching (MDPI, 2024). These applications hint at AI as a **partner** rather than a threat.

Where the Risks Lie

Yet the risks are as striking as the opportunities. Accuracy remains the most obvious concern. *Semantic Scholar* reviews show how ChatGPT sometimes produces answers that are elegant and seemingly credible, yet incorrect "hallucinations" presented with unwarranted confidence. A student who accepts such an answer uncritically may walk away with a misconception.

Academic integrity is another fault line. In *ArXiv* preprints, researchers warn that ChatGPT can enable plagiarism, not through direct copying, but via large-scale paraphrasing that evades detection. Teachers face an uneasy choice: invest in detection, or redesign assessments entirely.

There is also the subtler issue of **overreliance**. A 2023 *ArXiv* study found students tended to accept ChatGPT's physics solutions without reflection. In the long run, it may weaken independent problem-solving, which is a core skill that schools aim to nurture.

Finally, questions of bias and equity loom. AI systems learn from vast datasets that include cultural prejudices. If these go unchallenged, students may receive biased or misleading information. Moreover, access to reliable internet and devices is not universal. In places where digital inequality already disadvantages students, AI could widen the gap.

2. Discussion

Towards Responsible Integration
The literature points to a common conclusion: **banning AI is ineffective**. Students will use these tools regardless, often outside the classroom. The more urgent task is to teach them how to use ChatGPT responsibly.

This means embedding **AI literacy** into the curriculum - teaching students to check answers against credible sources, to prompt strategically rather than passively, and to reflect critically on what AI produces. Teachers, too, require professional development to understand both the limits and the potential of these tools.

There are also **policy implications**. Schools must clarify expectations around AI use: when it is permitted, how it should be acknowledged, and what counts as misuse. Such transparency can reduce fear and confusion.

Perhaps most importantly, integration should be guided by **equity**. If only certain schools or students access AI tools confidently, existing inequalities will deepen. Ensuring that all students, regardless of background, learn how to engage with AI critically may be one of the most important educational challenges of the decade.

3. Conclusion

ChatGPT represents a transformative moment in educational practice, comparable to the advent of the internet or calculators. While it promises greater accessibility and engagement, its risks - especially around integrity and overdependence - must be addressed through critical literacy and ethical policy. The challenge for educators is not to restrict its use but to equip students with the skills to use AI tools responsibly and reflectively.

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