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AI Dilemma in Schoolwork: Student Anxiety and Fairness Perceptions in AI Schoolwork Accusations

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Abstract

This qualitative study explored senior high school students' experiences of anxiety and perceptions of fairness when accused of using Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools in their academic work. Sixteen students from both public and private schools were purposively selected to provide in-depth insights into the emotional, cognitive, and social implications of AI-related accusations. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns and experiences. Findings revealed that students experienced intense shock, disbelief, anxiety, and self-doubt upon being accused of AI-assisted work. These emotional responses often led to decreased academic confidence, reduced motivation, heightened self-consciousness, and perfectionism, affecting their engagement and approach to learning. Regarding fairness, participants reported concerns about the lack of transparency, inconsistent application of rules, and minimal involvement in verification processes, which contributed to feelings of injustice and diminished trust in educational institutions. Students recommended clear communication, inclusion in discussions, and the use of reliable, multi-method verification approaches to ensure procedural fairness and mitigate anxiety. The study highlights the complex interplay between AI integration, academic integrity, and student well-being. It underscores the importance of transparent policies, supportive faculty communication, and AI literacy programs to promote both ethical AI use and psychological safety in educational settings. The results provide valuable implications for educators, administrators, and policymakers seeking to balance academic accountability with students' emotional and cognitive needs in the evolving landscape of AI-assisted learning.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence (AI), Student Anxiety, Fairness Perceptions AI-Related Accusations

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1. Introduction

The rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has significantly transformed the educational landscape, providing students with powerful tools for learning, research, and academic writing. However, alongside these benefits, concerns about academic integrity, ethical usage, and the psychological impact on students have emerged. Globally, studies have explored student perceptions of academic integrity in the context of AI-assisted work. Stone (2022) emphasized that students' understanding of academic integrity, along with the consequences of misconduct, affects their emotional responses and academic behavior. Similarly, Chan (2025) investigated students' perceptions of "AI-giarism," highlighting evolving understandings of academic misconduct in an era where AI-generated content is readily available. These findings indicate that the integration of AI in education is creating novel challenges regarding fairness, accountability, and ethical decision-making.

The use of AI content detection tools, such as those studied by Elkhatat, Elsaid, and Almeer (2023), and Turnitin's AI Writing Indicator evaluated by Salem et al. (2023), shows both the potential and limitations of technology in differentiating human- and AI-generated work. However, biases and inaccuracies in these detection methods, as demonstrated by Liang et al. (2023) and Hyatt, Rasband, and Browning (2025), may

inadvertently increase student anxiety and perceptions of unfairness, particularly among non-native English speakers or students whose work may be flagged erroneously. Roe, Perkins, and Ruelle (2024) further indicated that both students and academic staff experience uncertainty and stress regarding AI use in assessments, revealing the need for clearer policies and support systems. Gruenhagen et al. (2024) also highlighted that while students increasingly use chatbots to assist with assessments, concerns about academic integrity persist, demonstrating the tension between technological support and ethical compliance.

In the Philippine context, several studies have examined the intersection of AI usage, student perceptions, and ethical concerns. De Guzman, Tenedero, Gapas, and Deabanico (2024) found that both students and teachers experience anxiety regarding the use of AI tools in academic work, with concerns about ethical implications influencing willingness to adopt such technologies. Fabrique et al. (2024) explored senior high school students' awareness of AI ethics, noting that students tend to be cautious in using AI due to fears of academic dishonesty accusations. Secreto (2025) reported that high levels of AI dependence among tertiary students correlate with increased risk of misconduct, highlighting a critical need for policies that balance support with integrity. Villarino (2025) investigated AI integration in rural higher education, revealing that perceptions of AI's ethical use are shaped by limited guidance and inconsistent policies, while Buniel (2025) emphasized the impact of AI dependence on research productivity, with students expressing stress when navigating AI-assisted academic tasks.

Despite these insights, there remains a gap in understanding the direct emotional impact of AI-related accusations on students, particularly how such experiences influence anxiety and perceptions of fairness in schoolwork evaluation. While prior research has documented student attitudes toward AI and academic integrity, fewer studies have qualitatively explored the personal experiences and emotional responses of students who are accused of using AI inappropriately. This gap is crucial because student anxiety and fairness perceptions can affect learning motivation, engagement, and trust in academic institutions.

The goal of this study is therefore to explore and document students' experiences of anxiety when accused of using AI in their academic work and to examine their perceptions of fairness in how these accusations are handled. The research seeks to inform policies and practices that support ethical AI usage while mitigating negative emotional outcomes for students, ultimately fostering a more just and supportive educational environment.

2. Review of Related Literature

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into educational settings has sparked significant discourse globally, particularly concerning its impact on academic integrity, student perceptions, and emotional responses. A comprehensive review of international and Philippine studies reveals a multifaceted landscape, highlighting both opportunities and challenges associated with AI in education.

2.1 Student Anxiety and Emotional Responses to AI Accusations

International studies have highlighted that students often experience heightened anxiety and stress when accused of AI-assisted cheating. Stone (2022) found that such accusations can demotivate students and lead them to question their academic journey. Similarly, Ma (2025) observed that AI usage can exacerbate anxiety, especially among students with low learning adaptability. In the Philippine context, Asio and Suero (2024) noted that AI anxiety, self-efficacy, and self-competence significantly influence students' readiness to engage with AI tools. These findings underscore the need for supportive interventions to address students' emotional responses to AI-related academic integrity issues.

2.2 Fairness Perceptions in AI-Related Academic Integrity

The efficacy and fairness of AI detection tools have been critically examined in various studies. Elkhatat et al. (2023) and Bin-Nashwan (2023) reported limitations in AI detection tools, including high false-positive rates, leading to unjust accusations of academic dishonesty. In the Philippine context, the study by Dolba (2025) also raised concerns about the impact of AI-generated outputs on student assessments. These findings suggest the need for reliable and accurate AI detection tools to uphold academic standards.

2.3 AI Detection Tools and their Impact on Students

The efficacy and fairness of AI detection tools have been critically examined in various studies. Elkhatat et al. (2023) and Bin-Nashwan (2023) reported limitations in AI detection tools, including high false-positive rates, leading to unjust accusations of academic dishonesty. In the Philippine context, the study by Dolba (2025) also raised concerns about the impact of AI-generated outputs on student assessments. These findings suggest the

need for reliable and accurate AI detection tools to uphold academic standards.

2.4 Faculty Communication Strategies and Student Perceptions

Faculty communication strategies play a crucial role in shaping student perceptions of AI-related academic integrity issues. Petricini (2025) found that faculty members predominantly rely on punitive approaches, which can create tensions between students and instructors. In contrast, studies in the Philippines by Masula (2025) and Robinos (2024) emphasized the importance of supportive and transparent communication strategies to address AI-related academic integrity concerns. These studies advocate for a shift towards more constructive and empathetic faculty-student interactions.

2.5 Student Perceptions of AI in Higher Education

Students' perceptions of AI in education are diverse and evolving. Campillo-Ferrer et al. (2025) and Lund (2025) found that students recognize the potential benefits of AI tools but also express concerns about fairness and academic integrity. In the Philippines, studies by Asio and Sardina (2025) and Zhai (2024) highlighted similar sentiments, with students acknowledging the advantages of AI while being wary of its implications for academic honesty. These findings suggest the need for comprehensive AI literacy programs to equip students with the knowledge and skills to navigate AI technologies responsibly. Klimova (2025) claimed that the integration of AI in higher education directly influences students' mental health, social interactions, and academic experiences, thereby shaping their overall well-being.

The reviewed studies collectively underscore the interplay between AI integration and academic integrity in educational settings. While AI offers significant potential to enhance learning experiences, it also presents challenges related to fairness, emotional responses, and perceptions of academic dishonesty. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach, including the development of transparent AI evaluation systems, the implementation of supportive faculty communication strategies, and the promotion of AI literacy among students. Fostering an environment that balances innovation with ethical considerations, educational institutions can harness the benefits of AI while maintaining the integrity of academic practices.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design, which was appropriate for exploring and understanding students' experiences, perceptions, and emotional responses regarding AI-related academic integrity issues. Descriptive qualitative research was effective in providing rich, detailed accounts of participants' perspectives, allowing the researcher to capture the nuances of how students experienced anxiety and perceived fairness when accused of using AI tools in their schoolwork (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Sandelowski, 2000).

By using this design, the study focused on describing the "what" and "how" of the phenomenon rather than establishing causal relationships. This approach enabled a deep exploration of students' lived experiences, providing insights into their cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses to AI-related accusations in academic settings.

The descriptive qualitative approach was also ideal for generating context-specific knowledge that could inform institutional policies, instructional strategies, and support mechanisms to address student anxiety, enhance perceptions of fairness, and promote ethical AI use in schoolwork. The findings provided actionable implications for educators, administrators, and policymakers in both local and international contexts.

3.2 Population and sampling

The participants of this study consisted of 16 senior high school students enrolled in both private and public schools. These students were selected purposively to ensure that they had relevant experiences with AI tools in completing their academic tasks and had either been accused or were aware of accusations regarding the use of AI in their schoolwork. Purposive sampling was appropriate for this qualitative study, as it allowed the researcher to intentionally select participants who could provide rich, detailed, and meaningful data about students' emotional responses and perceptions of fairness in AI-related academic integrity issues (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Palinkas et al., 2015; Etikan et al., 2016).

To ensure that the selected respondents were qualified to provide valuable insights into their experiences, several criteria were applied. First, participants were required to be senior high school students, ensuring that they were actively engaged in academic tasks where AI tools might be used. Second, they must have had direct experience with AI tools in completing assignments or projects, or had knowledge of accusations regarding AI-assisted work.

This criterion ensured that participants had practical and relevant experiences, allowing them to reflect meaningfully on the emotional and cognitive impact of AI-related accusations. Third, participants had to be willing to provide informed consent (and parental consent for minors) and participate in in-depth interviews, as the study required detailed personal reflections that only willing and engaged participants could offer.

3.3 Instrument

To gather in-depth and meaningful data on students' experiences, emotional responses, and perceptions of fairness regarding AI-related academic integrity issues, this study used a semi-structured interview guide as the primary research instrument. Semi-structured interviews are widely recognized in qualitative research for their flexibility, allowing the researcher to explore participants' responses in depth while maintaining consistency across interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Kallio et al., 2016; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed accounts of participants' experiences with AI tools, feelings when accused of using AI, and perceptions of fairness in the handling of such accusations. The instrument was validated by a panel of experts in educational technology and qualitative research to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment with the research objectives. Additionally, a pilot interview was conducted with two senior high school students (not included in the main study) to assess the clarity of the questions, refine the phrasing, and ensure that the instrument would elicit rich and comprehensive responses.

The semi-structured interview format allowed for probing and follow-up questions, enabling participants to elaborate on their experiences and provide examples. This approach ensured that the data collected were both rich and nuanced, capturing the complexities of students' emotional and cognitive responses to AI-related academic integrity issues. Table 1 presents the instrument of the study:

Table 1. Instrument of the study.

Objectives	Interview questions	Participants
To explore students' experiences of anxiety when accused of using AI tools in their academic work.	1. What were your initial thoughts and feelings when you were accused of using AI in your schoolwork? 2. How did this experience affect your confidence and motivation in your studies? 3. What specific anxieties or worries did you encounter after the accusation?	Senior High School Students in different public and private secondary schools
To examine how students perceive fairness in the handling of AI-related accusations in schoolwork.	1. What is your perception of the fairness of the way schools or teachers handle AI-related accusations? 2. How do you think schools should verify or validate suspicions of AI use in academic work?	

3.4 Data Gathering Procedure

Participants for this study were selected through purposive sampling, focusing on students who had experienced or were accused of using AI tools in their schoolwork. Eligible participants were currently enrolled in high school or college, had prior experience with AI-assisted schoolwork, and were willing to participate in the study. Selected participants were contacted through school email or messaging platforms, and the purpose, procedures, and ethical considerations of the study—including confidentiality and voluntary participation—were explained. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants, and for minors, consent was also sought from their parents or guardians.

Interviews were scheduled at times convenient for the participants, either online or face-to-face, in a quiet and private environment. Semi-structured interviews, guided by prepared questions, lasted approximately 30–45 minutes each, allowing participants to freely elaborate on their experiences. With the participants' permission, interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accuracy. In addition, participants were invited to write short reflective narratives describing their emotions, perceived fairness, and coping strategies in response to AI-related accusations.

All audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, and reflective narratives were compiled, anonymized, and organized for analysis. Participants were contacted for follow-up questions or clarification of responses to ensure

the accuracy and completeness of the data. Finally, all collected data, including transcripts, recordings, and narratives, were securely stored on password-protected devices, and participant identities remained confidential throughout the study and in any subsequent publications.

3.5 Data Analysis

The study employed thematic analysis to examine the responses of students regarding their experiences and perceptions of AI-related accusations in academic work. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework, the researchers began by familiarizing themselves with the data through repeated reading of transcripts and written responses. Initial codes were then generated to capture meaningful features related to AI anxiety and fairness in accusations. These codes were collated into potential themes, which were reviewed, refined, and named to ensure they accurately represented the data set.

Thematic analysis was chosen for its flexibility and capacity to identify both explicit and latent meanings within participants' narratives. This process allowed the researchers to systematically uncover recurring patterns of anxiety and fairness perceptions that emerged across students' experiences. As Nowell et al. (2017) noted, thematic analysis not only provides rich, detailed accounts of data but also ensures trustworthiness through a structured and rigorous approach.

3.6. Ethical considerations

This study adhered to ethical guidelines to ensure the protection and respect of participants involved in the research process. Participants were fully informed about the study's purpose, procedures, and potential risks before consenting to participate. They were assured that their involvement was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without consequence. This approach aligns with the ethical principle of respect for persons, emphasizing the necessity of obtaining voluntary informed consent to protect participants' autonomy and decision-making capacity.

To safeguard participants' privacy, all personal identifiers were removed from the data, and pseudonyms were used in any reports or publications resulting from the study. Data were securely stored and only accessible to the research team. This practice is consistent with ethical standards that require the protection of participants' confidentiality to maintain trust and integrity in the research process.

Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, with no coercion or undue influence exerted on potential participants. They were informed of their right to decline participation or to withdraw from the study at any point without facing any negative consequences. This principle is fundamental to ethical research, ensuring that participants' involvement is based on free and informed choice.

The researchers ensured compliance with ethical standards and to protect participants' rights and welfare throughout the research process.

4. Results

Research Objectives 1. *To explore students' experiences of anxiety when accused of using AI tools in their academic work.*

Question No. 1. *What were your initial thoughts and feelings when you were accused of using AI in your schoolwork?*

1.1 Shock and Disbelief

10 out of 16 students initially experienced shock and disbelief upon being accused of using AI tools. This theme reflects the immediate cognitive and emotional reaction when students felt their integrity was questioned without prior warning. The sudden accusation often left students feeling confused, overwhelmed, and uncertain about how to respond, amplifying their stress levels. Students described feeling as though their effort and dedication were being dismissed, which created a heightened sense of vulnerability and insecurity. This reaction also indicates a lack of preparedness for AI-related academic scrutiny, revealing a gap in students' understanding of how AI policies are applied in schools.

Supporting Excerpts:

"I couldn't believe what I was hearing. I spent hours working on my essay, checking my grammar, and making sure my arguments were strong. When the teacher said it seemed like I used ChatGPT, it felt like all my effort didn't matter at all. I was frozen, not knowing if I should argue or just stay quiet, and it honestly felt like my hard work was being completely erased in one moment." — ***Student A***

"At first, I thought it was a mistake. I had no idea that using AI tools for checking grammar or getting suggestions could even be considered cheating. My heart started racing, and I felt this sudden panic because I didn't know how to explain myself. It was like the ground disappeared beneath me; I just wanted someone to understand that I really did my work on my own." — ***Student F***

1.2 Anxiety and Fear of Consequences

9 out 16 participants reported that they had intense anxiety and fear students felt about potential repercussions. Anxiety often manifested physically (e.g., sweating, shaking, rapid heartbeat) and mentally (e.g., racing thoughts, panic). Many students expressed fear of failing the assignment, receiving a disciplinary record, or facing distrust from their teachers. This emotional turmoil demonstrates that accusations of AI use can create a high-stress environment, affecting not only students' academic performance but also their psychological well-being. The anxiety was compounded for students who were unfamiliar with AI policies or feared being labeled dishonest despite their innocence.

Supporting Excerpts:

"When I was accused, I felt like my chest was tightening and my palms were sweaty. I kept thinking about all the consequences — failing the assignment, getting detention, my parents finding out. I was so stressed that I couldn't concentrate on anything else the whole day. Every time I saw the teacher in class, my mind raced with thoughts like, 'Are they going to report me? Do they think I'm lying?' It was exhausting." — ***Student C***

"I couldn't sleep that night. My mind kept replaying the teacher's words over and over, and I felt like I had done something terribly wrong even though I hadn't. I kept imagining how everyone would treat me if they thought I cheated. The anxiety was so strong I felt sick, and I couldn't stop worrying about my grades and reputation." — ***Student H***

1.3 Self-Doubt and Questioning of Personal Competence

6 out 16 participants said that they had self-doubt, where students began to question their own abilities and the legitimacy of their work. Even those who were confident in their efforts felt their competence was undermined, leading to a crisis of self-efficacy. Students described feelings of inadequacy, guilt, and internal conflict, even when they had not used AI. This theme highlights the profound psychological impact of AI-related accusations, showing that such experiences can erode students' confidence and motivation. Additionally, this self-doubt can influence future engagement with academic tasks, creating hesitation to explore new tools or innovative learning strategies.

Supporting Excerpts:

"I started doubting myself. I kept thinking maybe my writing isn't strong enough, maybe that's why the teacher thinks I needed AI. I began questioning whether I'm actually capable of writing on my own, and it made me anxious about submitting anything in the future. Even when I did my best, I couldn't shake the feeling that I wasn't trusted." — ***Student B***

"Even though I knew I didn't cheat, the accusation made me question everything I did for that assignment. I kept replaying the work in my head, analyzing every sentence, thinking, 'Did I use something that made it look like AI?' It was exhausting and made me lose confidence in my own skills." — ***Student G***

Question No. 2. *How did this experience affect your confidence and motivation in your studies?*

2.1 Erosion of Academic Confidence

Around 13 out of 16 participants expressed that the primary effect of AI-related accusations was the erosion of academic confidence. Students reported feeling unsure of their abilities and hesitant to trust their own skills. This decrease in self-confidence often led to over-reliance on external tools or excessive self-editing to "prove" competence, which paradoxically increased stress. The accusation also caused students to question their past and future work, creating a lingering sense of inadequacy. The findings highlight that accusations, even if unfounded, can significantly undermine students' self-efficacy and sense of competence, affecting both short-term performance and long-term learning attitudes.

Supporting Excerpts:

"After being accused, I started doubting every paper I wrote. Even when I knew I did it all myself, I couldn't help thinking that maybe I wasn't capable enough. I spent hours re-checking sentences, trying to make everything perfect, but it just made me more stressed. I felt like I lost my confidence in what I could do on my own." —

Student D

"It really shook my confidence. Before this, I was comfortable submitting my assignments, but after the accusation, I felt like nothing I did would ever be good enough. I started second-guessing even small parts of my essays and became afraid to take risks in my writing." — ***Student J***

2.2 Decreased Motivation and Engagement

11 out of 16 participants highlighted that accusations of AI misuse often led to reduced motivation and engagement in academic activities. Students described feeling less inspired to participate, write, or take initiative due to fear of misinterpretation. The experience created a sense of futility, where effort seemed disconnected from recognition or reward. This disengagement may have broader implications, potentially affecting classroom participation, study habits, and long-term interest in learning. The findings emphasize the importance of fostering a supportive environment where students' effort is recognized and their autonomy respected.

Supporting Excerpts:

"I stopped putting my full effort into assignments. I thought, why bother working hard if my honesty will still be questioned? I started doing just enough to get by, and that really affected how I approached schoolwork in general." — ***Student E***

"It made me feel tired and unmotivated. Even tasks I normally enjoy, like writing or research, suddenly felt stressful and pointless. I started avoiding extra assignments and stopped volunteering for projects because I feared more accusations." — ***Student M***

2.3 Increased Self-Consciousness and Perfectionism

8 out of 16 students emphasized that another significant effect was heightened self-consciousness and perfectionism. Students described becoming hyper-aware of how their work might be perceived, often spending extra hours refining assignments to avoid any hint of AI assistance. While this behavior reflects a desire to restore credibility, it can also be mentally exhausting and counterproductive. This theme underscores the paradoxical impact of AI-related accusations: while aiming to ensure honesty, they may inadvertently induce anxiety-driven behaviors that hinder genuine learning and creativity.

Supporting Excerpts:

"Every time I write now, I triple-check everything. I'm constantly thinking about whether it looks like I used AI. I spend hours polishing my work, not because I want it perfect, but because I don't want anyone to accuse me again. It's mentally draining." — ***Student B***

"I became extremely cautious about every sentence I write. I avoid using complex vocabulary or phrasing because I'm afraid it might seem AI-generated. I know it sounds silly, but the fear really changes how I approach schoolwork." — ***Student H***

Question No. 3. *What specific anxieties or worries did you encounter after the accusation?*

3.1 Fear of Misjudgment and Misinterpretation

11 out of 16 participants reported that a prominent anxiety students reported was the fear of being misunderstood or unfairly judged. Being accused of using AI created a pervasive worry that teachers or peers would doubt their abilities and integrity, even when their work was genuinely original. This fear often extended beyond the specific assignment, affecting students' perceptions of future evaluations. Students became hyper-aware of how their work might be scrutinized, which increased tension and mental fatigue. The findings suggest that accusations, whether substantiated or not, can have a lasting emotional impact and may influence students' behavior across multiple academic contexts.

Supporting Excerpts:

"I kept worrying that my teacher would never believe me again. Even when I submitted other work, I felt they were judging everything I wrote as if I was cheating. It made me anxious every time I had to write something new." — ***Student A***

"I started feeling paranoid about how I was being perceived. Even classmates seemed to look at me differently, as if they thought I couldn't do anything on my own. That fear of judgment was constant and exhausting." — ***Student F***

3.2 Anxiety About Peer Perceptions and Social Stigma

In addition to academic concerns, 9 out of 16 students experienced anxiety related to peer perceptions and social

stigma. Being accused of using AI tools not only challenged their academic credibility but also affected their social standing among classmates. Some students reported feelings of embarrassment, shame, or fear of being labeled as dishonest. This social anxiety often compounded other stressors, leading to isolation, withdrawal from collaborative activities, and reluctance to seek help or guidance from peers. The findings suggest that AI-related accusations can extend their impact beyond the classroom, affecting *students' interpersonal relationships and overall well-being.*

Supporting Excerpts:

"After being accused, I felt humiliated and like I couldn't face my classmates the same way anymore. I worried that everyone was silently thinking I cheated, and it made me want to stay quiet and avoid group activities. Even when someone asked me for help, I felt hesitant to interact because I didn't want them to suspect me too." — ***Student B***

"I started avoiding group work completely. I was terrified that if I spoke up or shared my ideas, someone might think I didn't do it myself. I felt isolated because I wanted to participate, but the fear of being judged or labeled a cheater kept me away. It was painful because I used to enjoy teamwork and discussions." — ***Student H***

Research Objectives 2. *To examine how students perceive fairness in the handling of AI-related accusations in schoolwork*

Question No. 1. *What is your perception of the fairness of the way schools or teachers handle AI-related accusations?*

1.1 Perceived Lack of Transparency in Handling Accusations

12 out of 16 students reported that schools and teachers often handle AI-related accusations without clear explanations, leading to a perception of unfairness. Students felt that they were not adequately informed about the criteria used to determine whether AI was involved, nor were they given sufficient opportunity to explain themselves. This lack of transparency exacerbated feelings of injustice and distrust toward authority figures. The findings indicate that when processes are unclear, students' confidence in the fairness of the educational system decreases, potentially affecting their engagement and motivation.

Supporting Excerpts:

"I honestly felt like the teacher just assumed the worst about me without giving me a real chance to explain. They never showed us how they detect AI or what counts as AI usage. It felt like I was judged based on suspicion alone, which seemed really unfair." — ***Student D***

"I felt like there was a lot of secrecy. I didn't understand how the teacher came to the conclusion that I used AI. Not knowing what evidence they had or how they judged my work made me feel powerless and treated unfairly." — ***Student J***

1.2 Inconsistent or Unequal Application of Rules

7 out of 16 students reported observing inconsistencies in how AI-related accusations were applied, which contributed to perceptions of unfairness. Some students felt that rules were enforced selectively or differently across classes or teachers. Inconsistencies included differences in penalties, levels of investigation, or consideration of student explanations. This theme suggests that when procedures lack consistency, students may perceive bias or favoritism, leading to a sense of injustice and reduced trust in the fairness of institutional practices.

Supporting Excerpts:

"It seemed like some teachers believed their students by default, while others assumed guilt right away. When I was accused, I felt like I got the harsher treatment even though my work was completely original. That inconsistency really bothered me." — ***Student O***

"The rules aren't applied the same way to everyone. I saw a classmate accused of the same thing I was, but they were handled differently. I couldn't understand why there was such a difference, and it made me lose trust in the fairness of the process." — ***Student Q***

1.3 Desire for Fair and Supportive Resolution

Despite concerns about transparency and consistency, 5 out 16 students expressed a desire for fair and supportive approaches when handling AI-related accusations. Many felt that involving students in the discussion, explaining the evidence, and providing guidance on how to avoid misunderstandings would improve perceptions of fairness. This theme highlights that students value equitable, empathetic, and communicative approaches, which can

reduce anxiety and foster trust between students and faculty.

Supporting Excerpts:

"I wanted to be guided instead of punished immediately. Even just a conversation about how AI can be used responsibly would have made me feel like the teacher cared about fairness, not just rules." — ***Student L***

"I think fairness would be having a clear explanation of what counts as AI misuse and then letting students respond before deciding anything. Right now, it feels like they just judge first, which is stressful and unfair." — ***Student N***

Question No. 2. *How do you think schools should verify or validate suspicions of AI use in academic work?*

2.1 Emphasis on Clear and Transparent Evidence

10 out of 16 students expressed that verification processes should be based on clear, transparent evidence rather than assumptions or arbitrary judgments. They felt that when teachers do not provide explicit criteria or show the evidence behind their suspicions, students perceive the process as unfair and biased. Transparency in the verification process helps students understand how conclusions are reached, promotes trust, and reduces feelings of anxiety or victimization. Students suggested that schools should show the specific indicators or steps used to determine AI involvement, ensuring that accusations are not perceived as arbitrary.

Supporting Excerpts:

"I think teachers should show exactly what made them think I used AI. If it's a tool or method that flags certain parts of my work, they should explain it clearly so we know it's based on something real, not just a feeling." — ***Student B***

"I want the school to be transparent. Maybe show us the AI detector reports or explain why a sentence seems suspicious. This way, we can understand the reasoning, and it wouldn't feel like an accusation out of nowhere." — ***Student K***

2.2 Incorporation of Student Involvement and Explanation

7 out of 16 students emphasized that verification should involve their active participation. They felt that being able to explain their thought process, show drafts, or provide evidence of original work would lead to a more just evaluation. The students viewed this collaborative approach as not only fairer but also supportive, as it allowed them to defend themselves while giving teachers a clearer picture of their academic integrity. This theme reflects the need for procedural fairness, where students are treated as partners in resolving potential AI-related issues rather than passive subjects of suspicion.

Supporting Excerpts:

"We should be part of the process. Teachers could ask us to explain how we wrote the work or show drafts. If they involve us, it feels more like solving a problem together rather than being punished." — ***Student H***

"It would help if teachers gave us a chance to prove that the work is ours. Like maybe explain the steps we took, or show rough drafts or notes. That way, it doesn't feel like they just judged us without hearing our side." — ***Student A***

2.3 Use of Reliable, Accurate, and Multiple Verification Methods

7 out of 16 students suggested that schools should use reliable and validated methods to verify AI use, rather than relying solely on a single tool or subjective judgment. They emphasized the importance of cross-checking AI detection results with human evaluation, peer review, and other supporting evidence to ensure fairness. Multiple verification methods reduce the risk of false accusations and promote confidence in the system. Students highlighted the danger of over-reliance on AI detection tools, which may produce false positives, suggesting that a combination of technological and human assessments would be ideal.

Supporting Excerpts:

"I think schools should not just trust the AI tool alone. They should also read the work, maybe ask questions, and check if it matches the student's usual style. That way, mistakes or false accusations are less likely." — ***Student L***

"Using more than one method to verify AI use would feel fair. Like combining AI detection reports, asking for explanations, and checking drafts. That would make it less stressful because it's not just one tool deciding everything." — ***Student I***

5. Discussion

The first objective of this study aimed to understand the emotional and cognitive reactions of students when accused of using AI tools in their academic work. The focus was on capturing the initial thoughts and feelings of students, particularly their experiences of anxiety, shock, and uncertainty. Understanding these reactions is critical because AI integration in education is relatively new, and students may not be fully aware of academic policies or the implications of AI use. Moreover, such accusations can affect students' emotional well-being, self-perception, and motivation to continue learning.

A dominant theme that emerged was shock and disbelief. This theme reflects the immediate cognitive and emotional response when students felt their integrity was questioned without prior warning. Students described feelings of confusion, vulnerability, and being overwhelmed, as though their hard work and effort were dismissed in an instant. The excerpts highlight how sudden accusations triggered intense stress, fear, and a sense of unfair treatment. This aligns with findings by Stone (2022), who noted that students accused of AI-assisted cheating often experienced heightened anxiety, stress, and feelings of demotivation due to the perception that their academic integrity was unfairly challenged. Similarly, Ma (2025) found that social anxiety in students could be exacerbated by external pressures, including unfamiliar evaluation mechanisms such as AI detection in assignments, leading to emotional distress and uncertainty. These studies confirm that students' shock and disbelief are natural responses when faced with AI-related academic accusations, emphasizing the need for clear communication and supportive measures from educators to mitigate anxiety.

Another prominent theme that emerged was anxiety and fear of consequences. This theme captures the intense physical and mental stress students experienced when accused of AI-assisted work. Participants described symptoms such as rapid heartbeat, sweating, panic, and racing thoughts, alongside worries about failing the assignment, receiving disciplinary actions, or being distrusted by their teachers. The emotional toll extended beyond academic concerns, affecting students' psychological well-being and daily functioning. This aligns with findings from Stone (2022), who observed that students facing accusations of academic dishonesty experienced heightened anxiety and fear, which could negatively influence their motivation and overall engagement in learning. Similarly, Asio and Suero (2024) emphasized that AI-related anxiety in students is often compounded by uncertainty regarding policies and a lack of familiarity with AI tools, which exacerbates stress and fear of negative repercussions. These studies suggest that clear guidance, supportive communication, and transparent evaluation policies are essential in mitigating anxiety related to AI accusations.

The third theme, self-doubt and questioning of personal competence. This theme reflects how accusations of AI use can erode students' confidence, even for those who were confident in their own work. Participants described feelings of inadequacy, guilt, and internal conflict, questioning whether their abilities were sufficient and whether their work could be trusted by teachers. This psychological impact demonstrates that AI-related accusations not only challenge perceived integrity but also affect students' self-efficacy, potentially influencing future engagement with academic tasks and willingness to explore innovative learning strategies. These findings are supported by Ma (2025), who highlighted that anxiety-inducing situations can trigger self-doubt and reduce students' confidence in their capabilities. Similarly, Stone (2022) noted that students accused of academic misconduct often internalize these challenges, leading to a crisis of personal competence and hesitancy to fully engage in learning activities. Addressing this issue requires educators to balance accountability with empathy, ensuring students are supported and reassured while maintaining academic standards.

A significant theme identified was the erosion of academic confidence. Students expressed feelings of self-doubt and insecurity about their abilities, even when they had completed their work independently. This led to an over-reliance on external tools or excessive self-editing to "prove" competence, which paradoxically increased stress. The accusation caused students to question their past and future work, creating a lingering sense of inadequacy. This aligns with findings by Qu et al. (2025), who observed that students' use of AI tools for academic tasks can lead to feelings of guilt and self-doubt, particularly when they perceive their actions as dishonest or when they fear judgment from others. Similarly, Vieriu and Petrea (2025) highlighted that the integration of AI in education has transformed academic learning, offering both opportunities and challenges for students' development, including impacts on their self-confidence and academic performance.

Another prevalent theme was decreased motivation and engagement. Students reported feeling less inspired to participate, write, or take initiative due to fear of misinterpretation. This experience created a sense of futility, where effort seemed disconnected from recognition or reward. The findings emphasize the importance of fostering a supportive environment where students' efforts are recognized and their autonomy respected. This is consistent with the work of Wang et al. (2024), who found that students' willingness to engage in autonomous

learning is influenced by their perceptions of AI tools and the support provided by educational institutions. Additionally, Janfaza (2025) argued that the focus on AI cheating misses a larger issue: how students should be learning to use AI effectively. She emphasized the importance of clear, accessible guidelines and the need for teaching AI fluency in schools to reduce anxiety and foster responsible use.

The final theme identified was increased self-consciousness and perfectionism. Students described becoming hyper-aware of how their work might be perceived, often spending extra hours refining assignments to avoid any hint of AI assistance. While this behavior reflects a desire to restore credibility, it can also be mentally exhausting and counterproductive. This underscores the paradoxical impact of AI-related accusations: while aiming to ensure honesty, they may inadvertently induce anxiety-driven behaviors that hinder genuine learning and creativity. This is supported by the research of Silitubun (2023), who examined how AI support can affect students' self-confidence and academic performance, highlighting the complex relationship between AI use and student well-being.

A prominent theme was the fear of misjudgment and misinterpretation. Students described persistent worry that teachers or peers would doubt their abilities and integrity, even when their work was genuinely their own. This fear often extended to future assignments, creating a hyper-awareness of how their work might be scrutinized and resulting in mental fatigue and heightened stress levels. The psychological burden of feeling constantly under suspicion underscores the significant emotional toll of AI-related accusations. This aligns with studies by Stone (2022), who found that accusations of academic dishonesty can trigger anxiety, demotivation, and a sense of vulnerability in students. Similarly, Ma (2025) reported that social anxiety interacts with academic stressors, exacerbating students' fears when they perceive potential judgment or misinterpretation in their academic work.

Another key theme was anxiety about peer perceptions and social stigma. Participants highlighted that being accused of using AI tools not only challenged their academic credibility but also affected their social standing among classmates. Feelings of embarrassment, shame, and fear of being labeled dishonest were common, often leading students to withdraw from social interactions, group activities, or collaborative learning opportunities. This theme underscores how academic integrity concerns intersect with students' social and emotional well-being. These findings are supported by Campillo-Ferrer, López-García, and Miralles-Sánchez (2025), who emphasized that students' perceptions of AI-related accusations influence both their engagement in classroom activities and their relationships with peers. Additionally, Lund (2025) noted that social anxiety and fear of judgment can reduce students' willingness to participate in learning activities, potentially affecting academic performance and overall well-being.

The final theme identified of objective 1 was heightened self-consciousness and hyper-vigilance, where students became overly careful about how they presented their work and interacted with peers and teachers. Even small actions were scrutinized internally for signs of perceived impropriety. This hyper-vigilance often resulted in mental exhaustion, decreased spontaneity in learning, and reluctance to engage with unfamiliar tools or assignments. The phenomenon is consistent with research by Petricini (2025), who emphasized that punitive approaches by faculty can inadvertently increase students' anxiety and self-monitoring behaviors. Likewise, Chai (2024) found that perceived unfairness in academic evaluation leads students to overanalyze their work and second-guess their decisions, which can negatively affect motivation and creativity.

Objective 2 sought to examine how students perceive fairness in the handling of AI-related accusations in schoolwork. This objective is important because students' perceptions of fairness can significantly affect their trust in the educational system, motivation to engage in academic work, and overall psychological well-being. By exploring these perceptions, the study aimed to identify gaps in institutional practices and highlight opportunities for improving the handling of AI-related concerns in academic settings. Understanding students' experiences of fairness or unfairness provides valuable insights for policymakers, teachers, and administrators seeking to balance academic integrity with ethical, supportive educational practices.

The first theme, perceived lack of transparency, emerged strongly reporting that schools and teachers often handled AI-related accusations without clear explanations. Students indicated that they were not informed about the criteria used to detect AI, nor given adequate opportunity to present their side of the story. This lack of transparency fostered feelings of injustice, distrust, and powerlessness, reducing students' confidence in institutional fairness. Similar findings were reported by Chai (2024), who noted that students' perception of opaque evaluation processes can exacerbate feelings of anxiety and skepticism toward authority figures. Likewise, Campillo-Ferrer et al. (2025) highlighted that unclear policies and communication about AI detection create confusion and reduce students' trust in academic fairness.

The second theme, inconsistent or unequal application of rules. Participants observed that some teachers handled

AI accusations differently from others, leading to a perception of bias or favoritism. Variations included the severity of penalties, investigation procedures, and consideration of students' explanations. Such inconsistencies undermined trust in institutional fairness and created a sense of vulnerability among students. This aligns with findings from Lund (2025), who emphasized that inconsistent enforcement of academic integrity rules increases students' perceptions of injustice and can diminish their engagement with learning. Petricini (2025) also argued that when students perceive unequal treatment, it heightens stress and reduces motivation, which may inadvertently affect academic performance.

The third theme, desire for fair and supportive resolution, emphasized the importance of equitable, empathetic approaches. Students expressed that involving them in discussions, clarifying evidence, and providing guidance on responsible AI use would improve perceptions of fairness. This theme highlights that students value constructive communication, guidance, and inclusion in decision-making processes rather than punitive measures alone. Similar findings were reported by Asio and Sardina (2025), who suggested that transparent and supportive faculty communication fosters trust, reduces anxiety, and encourages responsible engagement with academic tools. Additionally, Stone (2022) argued that addressing students' concerns empathetically helps balance the enforcement of academic integrity with the preservation of psychological well-being.

The first theme, emphasis on clear and transparent evidence, stressed the importance of evidence-based verification. Students reported that when teachers rely on assumptions or provide vague explanations, the process feels arbitrary and unfair. Transparency ensures that students understand the basis of suspicions and builds trust in the system. Chai (2024) similarly highlighted that students perceive fairness when evaluation criteria are explicitly communicated and supported by tangible evidence. Stone (2022) also found that transparency in academic integrity investigations reduces anxiety and improves students' acceptance of outcomes, even when mistakes or AI involvement is detected.

The second theme, incorporation of student involvement. Participants believed that giving students the opportunity to explain their thought process, share drafts, or provide evidence of original work would result in a fairer evaluation. This collaborative approach reflects procedural justice, where students are treated as active participants rather than passive subjects of suspicion. Campillo-Ferrer et al. (2025) support this notion, noting that involving students in integrity investigations increases their sense of fairness and reduces feelings of helplessness. Similarly, Asio and Sardina (2025) highlighted that students' ability to explain and validate their work contributes to trust and lowers anxiety in academic contexts.

The third theme, use of reliable and multiple verification methods, stressed the importance of combining technological tools with human evaluation. Students were concerned about false positives from AI detection tools and advocated for cross-checking results through peer review, teacher assessment, or other evidence. Lund (2025) found that reliance on a single AI detection system can lead to unwarranted stress, while integrating multiple methods promotes fairness and accuracy. Similarly, Petricini (2025) emphasized that balanced approaches, combining human judgment with technological verification, enhance confidence in academic integrity processes. This theme underscores the need to prevent false accusations while ensuring that AI monitoring is credible and equitable.

6. Conclusion

This study aimed to explore senior high school students' experiences of anxiety when accused of using AI tools in their academic work and to examine their perceptions of fairness in how such accusations are handled. Through in-depth interviews with sixteen students from both private and public schools, the research captured rich, nuanced insights into the cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions of AI-related academic accusations. By focusing on students' lived experiences, the study highlighted how these accusations affect not only their academic confidence and motivation but also their overall well-being and trust in educational institutions. The research achieved its goal by systematically analyzing the data to identify emergent themes that reflect both the emotional responses and evaluative judgments of students regarding AI-related concerns.

The findings reveal that AI-related accusations evoke significant psychological and social challenges for students. Experiences of shock, disbelief, anxiety, fear of consequences, self-doubt, and hyper-vigilance were prominent, underscoring the deep emotional impact of feeling unfairly suspected of academic dishonesty. Moreover, the study showed that accusations influenced students' academic behaviors, leading to decreased motivation, increased perfectionism, and heightened self-consciousness, which may affect their future engagement and willingness to explore innovative learning strategies. On the other hand, students' perceptions of fairness were strongly shaped by transparency, consistency, and opportunities for involvement, highlighting that procedural

justice and supportive communication are critical in maintaining trust and mitigating anxiety. Verification methods that are reliable, evidence-based, and inclusive were deemed essential by participants to ensure fairness while reducing the risk of false accusations.

Based on the results, it is recommended that schools develop clear, transparent, and consistent policies regarding AI use in academic work. Educators should provide explicit explanations of evaluation criteria, involve students in discussions when suspicions arise, and utilize multiple verification methods that combine both human judgment and AI detection tools. Doing so can enhance procedural fairness, foster students' trust in institutional practices, and support their psychological well-being. Additionally, integrating AI literacy and responsible tool usage into the curriculum may help students navigate academic expectations with greater confidence and reduce anxiety associated with accusations.

In conclusion, the study suggests that addressing AI-related academic integrity concerns requires a balance between accountability and empathy. Accusations, even when justified, carry profound emotional and cognitive consequences for students. By adopting transparent, consistent, and supportive approaches, schools can uphold academic standards while protecting students' confidence, motivation, and social-emotional health. Future research could explore longitudinal effects of AI-related accusations, investigate teachers' perspectives on fairness and detection methods, and examine interventions that promote responsible AI use alongside student well-being in educational settings.

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