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Mexican youth on AI: Their visions of tomorrow

Jóvenes mexicanos ante la IA: sus visiones del mañana

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Abstract

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become increasingly embedded in the daily lives of young people, yet its educational, social, and ethical implications remain insufficiently explored in secondary school contexts in Mexico. This study examines the perceptions, levels of familiarity, frequency of use, and educational expectations regarding AI among Generation Z students enrolled in technical junior high schools. A mixed-methods exploratory design with quantitative dominance was employed. Data were collected through an online questionnaire administered to 560 students aged 11 to 15, combining closed-ended items with open-ended questions. Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively to identify general trends, while qualitative responses were examined through thematic analysis to capture interpretative categories related to students' views on AI. The findings reveal widespread exposure to AI technologies, accompanied by predominantly functional rather than conceptual understanding. Students expressed neutral or ambivalent perceptions regarding AI's impact on Mexico's future and employment, alongside frequent, often unreflective, use of AI-based applications. Despite these uncertainties, a majority demonstrated openness toward AI-related educational opportunities and identified education as the sector most likely to benefit from

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AI implementation. Qualitative results further revealed a dual discourse that simultaneously recognizes AI's usefulness and expresses ethical concerns related to dependency, creativity, and academic integrity. The study highlights the need for educational strategies that move beyond incidental interaction with AI toward structured, critical, and ethically grounded AI literacy. These findings contribute empirical evidence to ongoing debates on the responsible integration of artificial intelligence in secondary education within the Mexican context.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, education, Mexico, generation Z, student perceptions

Resumen

La inteligencia artificial (IA) se ha integrado de manera creciente en la vida cotidiana de las y los jóvenes; sin embargo, sus implicaciones educativas, sociales y éticas continúan siendo poco exploradas en el nivel de educación secundaria en México. El presente estudio analiza las percepciones, el nivel de familiaridad, la frecuencia de uso y las expectativas educativas relacionadas con la IA en estudiantes de la Generación Z inscritos en secundarias técnicas. Se empleó un diseño exploratorio de métodos mixtos con predominio cuantitativo. La información se recolectó mediante un cuestionario en línea aplicado a 560 estudiantes de entre 11 y 15 años, que incluyó reactivos cerrados y preguntas abiertas. Los datos cuantitativos se analizaron de forma descriptiva, mientras que las respuestas cualitativas se examinaron mediante análisis temático para identificar categorías interpretativas sobre las percepciones estudiantiles. Los resultados muestran una alta exposición a tecnologías basadas en IA, acompañada de una comprensión principalmente funcional más que conceptual. Las y los estudiantes manifestaron percepciones mayoritariamente neutrales o ambivalentes respecto al impacto futuro de la IA en México y en el empleo, así como un uso frecuente —en muchos casos poco reflexivo— de aplicaciones basadas en IA. A pesar de ello, se observa una amplia disposición hacia la formación en IA y una percepción de la educación como el ámbito con mayor potencial de beneficio. El análisis cualitativo evidencia, además, un discurso dual que reconoce la utilidad de la IA, pero también expresa preocupaciones éticas relacionadas con la dependencia tecnológica, la creatividad y la integridad académica. El estudio subraya la necesidad de diseñar estrategias educativas que promuevan una alfabetización en IA crítica, ética y contextualizada, más allá del uso incidental de la tecnología, aportando evidencia empírica relevante para el debate sobre la integración responsable de la inteligencia artificial en la educación secundaria en México.

Palabras clave: inteligencia artificial, educación, estudiantes de secundaria, percepción estudiantil, generación Z

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INTRODUCTION

Context and Rationale

At present, a technological transformation is underway, characterized by the progressive integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into human relationships, social behaviors, and institutional structures. This process has been interpreted as a new stage of social development, following the agricultural, industrial, informational, and connectivity waves described by Toffler, in which AI assumes a central role in the reorganization of social, educational, and productive life (Montgomery, 2016). Within this context, it becomes necessary to understand the phenomenon of artificial intelligence and to analyze its implications for everyday life.

The study of AI acquires particular relevance in national contexts such as Mexico, where its use has expanded progressively within universities and organizations, generating transformations in educational and labor processes. In this regard, understanding the perceptions of younger generations is essential, not only because they will interact most intensively with these technologies, but also because they will actively participate in shaping their future uses. The literature indicates that AI directly influences how work, education, and learning processes are conceived (May, 2024; Abbass, 2021).

From a generational perspective, various studies suggest that each cohort maintains a differentiated relationship with technology, shaped by the social and technological conditions of its developmental context. In particular, Generation Z is characterized by having grown up in highly digitalized environments, with continuous access to platforms and devices that incorporate artificial intelligence into everyday life (Chan & Lee, 2023). Unlike previous generations, this group has not experienced educational or social settings devoid of technologies such as virtual assistants, recommendation systems, or automated content generation tools.

Technical secondary education represents a pertinent context for analyzing these perceptions, as it combines general academic training with technology-oriented content aimed at developing practical skills. This type of institution prepares students both for the continuation of their studies and for their future entry into the labor market, making it especially relevant to explore how they interpret the use of artificial intelligence and its relationship with learning processes.

METHODOLOGY

Research Approach

This study employed a mixed-methods exploratory design with a quantitative-dominant approach, complemented by qualitative thematic analysis. The quantitative component was used to describe students' levels of familiarity, perceptions, and attitudes toward artificial intelligence through closed-ended survey items, while the qualitative component provided interpretive depth through the analysis of open-ended responses.

The design is exploratory in nature, as it seeks to identify patterns and tendencies in students' perceptions of artificial intelligence within an educational context where empirical evidence remains limited. Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively to establish general trends, whereas qualitative data were examined using thematic analysis to capture recurring meanings and interpretative categories emerging from students' responses. The integration of both components allowed for triangulation between numerical trends and students' subjective interpretations, strengthening the internal coherence of the findings.

Study Design

This study followed a mixed-methods exploratory design with quantitative dominance. Closed-ended survey items were used to describe overall trends in students' familiarity, perceptions, and attitudes toward AI, while open-ended responses were analyzed through thematic analysis to provide interpretive depth. The integration of both components supported a triangulated interpretation of the results.

Participants

The research was carried out in three public technical secondary schools in the state of Puebla, Mexico: Technical Secondary School 61 and Technical Secondary School 125, located in the municipality of San Martín Texmelucan, and Technical Secondary School 23, located in San Pedro Cholula. The sample consisted of 560 students aged between 11 and 15 years, enrolled in public technical secondary education.

Inclusion criterio: Students enrolled in secondary education, aged between 11 and 15 years, and attending exclusively public technical secondary schools were included.

Exclusion criterio: Students from private schools, from other educational systems, as well as from general or teacher-training (non-technical) secondary schools were excluded.

Sampling method: A non-probabilistic sampling method was used, based on the researcher's judgment.

Data Collection Instruments

An online questionnaire developed using Google Forms was employed. It consisted of nine items, seven of which were closed-ended questions and two open-ended questions. The design of the instrument was based on a prior review of the literature on youth perceptions and the educational use of artificial intelligence (Chan & Lee, 2023; Faverio & Tyson, 2023).

To ensure content validity, the instrument was reviewed by three experts in educational technology and research methodology, whose observations were incorporated to improve the clarity and relevance of the items. Subsequently, a pilot test was conducted with 30 students, which allowed for adjustments to the questionnaire prior to its final administration.

Procedure

The instrument was administered asynchronously. The questionnaire was distributed through the corresponding school supervision authorities. The data collection period lasted approximately one month, between June and July 2025.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was based on a triangulation process that integrated the empirical data obtained, the theoretical and experiential knowledge of specialized researchers, and the interpretation of the principal investigator, with the aim of strengthening the validity and reliability of the results (Hernández, Fernández, & Baptista, 2006).

Responses to closed-ended questions were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) for exclusively contextual purposes. Open-ended responses were examined through thematic analysis, which made it possible to identify emergent categories based on the opinions expressed by the students. The interpretation of qualitative findings was conducted consensually.

among the researchers through discussion and comparison of the identified categories, as a strategy to enhance interpretive validity.

Ethical Considerations

This research was conducted in accordance with ethical standards for studies involving minors in educational settings. Prior to data collection, formal authorization was obtained from the participating schools. Ethical approval for the study was granted by the school supervisor, who acted as the institutional authority responsible for overseeing the research process. Given the non-interventional nature of the study and its alignment with regular educational activities, review by a formal ethics committee was not required.

Informed consent was obtained from parents or legal guardians of all participating students, and assent was obtained from the students themselves. Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed that they could decline or withdraw at any stage without any academic or personal consequences.

No personally identifiable information was collected. All data were gathered anonymously and used exclusively for academic and research purposes. The study respected the principles of confidentiality, autonomy, and protection of participants' rights and well-being throughout the research process.

DEVELOPMENT

The specialized literature defines artificial intelligence as the ability of computational systems to perform complex activities that have traditionally required human cognitive processes, such as reasoning, decision-making, and content generation (May, 2024). From a complementary perspective, Abbass (2021) argues that AI can be understood both as the automation of cognition and as a social and cognitive phenomenon that enables machines to integrate into human contexts through the exchange of information.

In recent years, generative artificial intelligence has gained prominence due to its increasing use in educational and communicative applications, relying on deep learning models and neural networks capable of processing natural language and generating diverse forms of content (Çayak, 2024). Within the educational field, several international studies have examined university students' perceptions of AI use, highlighting both its potential as an academic support tool and the challenges associated with its institutional and pedagogical integration (Ka, 2024; Christ-Brendemühl, 2024; Amani & Maslihatul Bisriyah, 2025).

However, research focused on younger populations remains limited. Some studies indicate that Generation Z students maintain a daily relationship with technologies based on artificial intelligence, although they do not always possess a deep conceptual understanding of how these systems function or of their long-term implications (Chan & Lee, 2023). In the Mexican context, this gap is even more pronounced, as most existing studies focus on higher education levels or on contexts other than secondary education.

This landscape underscores the need to generate empirical research that analyzes the perceptions of technical secondary school students in Mexico regarding the use of artificial intelligence, in order to provide relevant information for examining its integration into educational processes.

The expansion of artificial intelligence use in educational and digital environments has generated growing interest in understanding how students interpret its presence and its impact on learning processes. Although the international literature has documented university students' perceptions of

AI and its academic applications, empirical evidence focused on younger populations remains scarce, particularly at the secondary education level and in contexts such as Mexico (Ka, 2024; Christ-Brendemühl, 2024; Amani & Maslihatul Bisriyah, 2025).

Research problem

Several studies indicate that Generation Z maintains a daily relationship with technologies based on artificial intelligence; however, this familiarity is not always accompanied by a deep understanding of how these technologies function or of their educational and social implications (Chan & Lee, 2023). In the educational context, this situation raises questions regarding how students perceive the use of AI, its influence on learning, and its potential impact on future scenarios. The absence of systematic research in technical secondary education in Mexico limits the understanding of these perceptions and hinders the development of evidence-based educational strategies.

In this sense, the research problem focuses on the need to analyze how technical secondary school students perceive the use of artificial intelligence, considering their everyday experience with these technologies and their relationship with learning processes, within an educational context where AI is becoming increasingly visible.

Objectives and Research Questions

The general objective of the study is to investigate students' perceptions and opinions regarding the use of artificial intelligence in future scenarios.

Based on this general objective, the following main research question is proposed:

- What is students' perception of the use of artificial intelligence in a future scenario?
- Complementarily, the study is guided by the following specific research questions:
- How do young people perceive the effects of artificial intelligence?
- What are young people's opinions regarding the impact of artificial intelligence on learning?

These questions guide the analysis of students' perceptions in relation to artificial intelligence, allowing for the exploration of its use, its perceived impact, and its connection to educational processes from the perspective of technical secondary school students in the state of Puebla, Mexico.

RESULTS

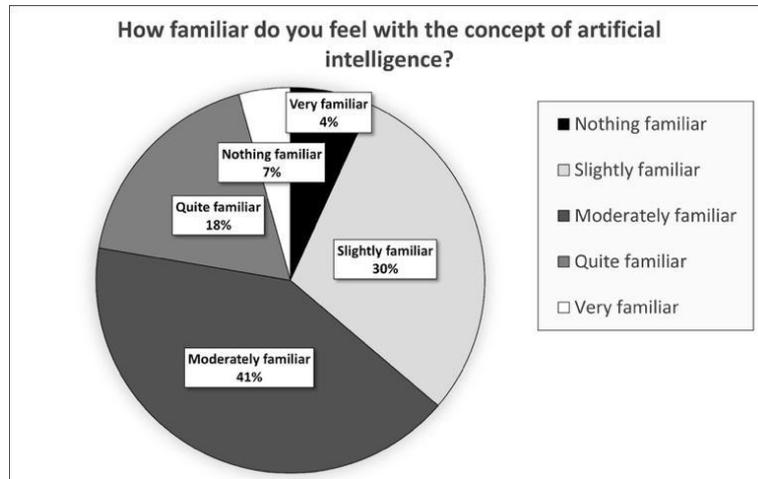
This section presents the study's findings derived from the analysis of quantitative and qualitative data. The results are reported in a structured manner, providing the empirical basis for subsequent interpretation and discussion in later sections of the manuscript. Quantitative data from closed-ended questions and qualitative insights from open-ended responses are presented to document students' perceptions of artificial intelligence.

Familiarity with Artificial Intelligence

To contextualize students' self-reported familiarity with artificial intelligence, participants were asked to indicate their level of familiarity with the concept. The following figure presents the distribution of responses, providing an overview of how students perceive their own understanding of artificial intelligence.

Graphic 1

How familiar are you with the concept of artificial intelligence?



Source: authors' elaboration.

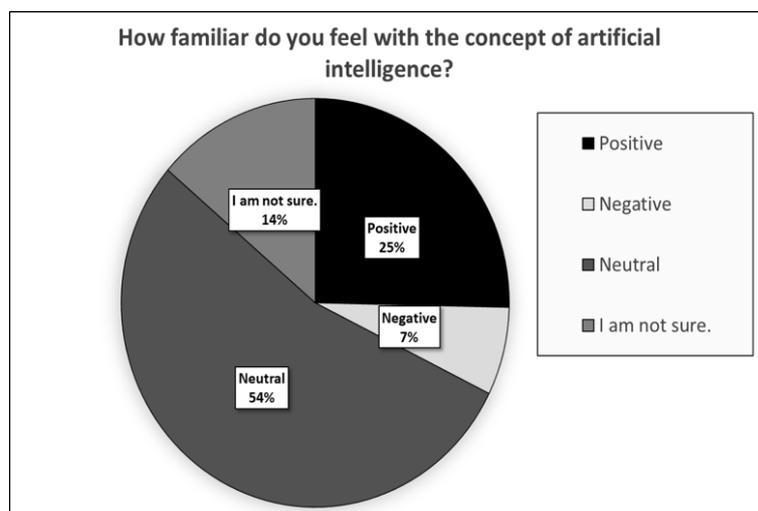
The data reveals a spectrum of familiarity with AI among participants: 41% were moderately familiar, 30% slightly familiar, and 18% quite familiar. Only a small minority (7%) reported being very familiar.

Perception of AI's Impact on Mexico's Future

To examine students' perceptions of the broader societal implications of artificial intelligence, participants were asked to evaluate its potential impact on Mexico's future. The following figure summarizes their responses, reflecting how students position artificial intelligence in relation to national development.

Graphic 2

Do you consider the development of artificial intelligence to be positive, negative, ¿or neutral for the future of Mexico?



Source: authors' elaboration.

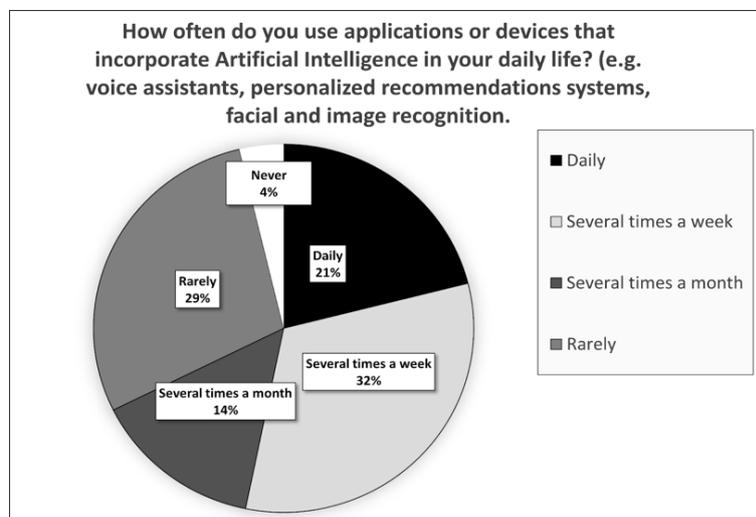
When asked about the impact of AI on Mexico's future, more than half of the respondents (54%) expressed a neutral stance, while 25% viewed it positively, 7% negatively, and 14% were uncertain.

Frequency of AI Use in Daily Life

To explore the extent to which artificial intelligence is integrated into students' everyday routines, participants were asked about the frequency with which they use applications or devices that incorporate AI technologies. The following figure presents the distribution of responses related to daily AI use.

Graphic 3

How often do you use applications or devices that incorporate Artificial Intelligence in your daily life (e.g., voice assistants, personalized recommendation systems, facial and image recognition)?



Source: authors' elaboration.

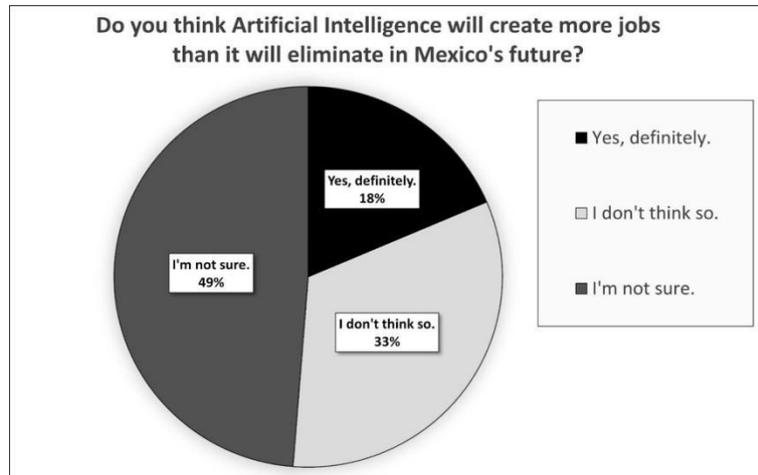
A significant portion of participants (32%) reported using AI-powered applications or devices several times a week, with another 14% using them several times a month. Only 4% claimed to never use AI.

Perceived Impact on Employment

To assess students' expectations regarding the relationship between artificial intelligence and employment, participants were asked to evaluate whether AI would create more jobs than it eliminates in Mexico's future. The following figure summarizes their responses.

Graphic 4

Do you think Artificial Intelligence will create more jobs than it will eliminate in Mexico's future?



Source: authors' elaboration.

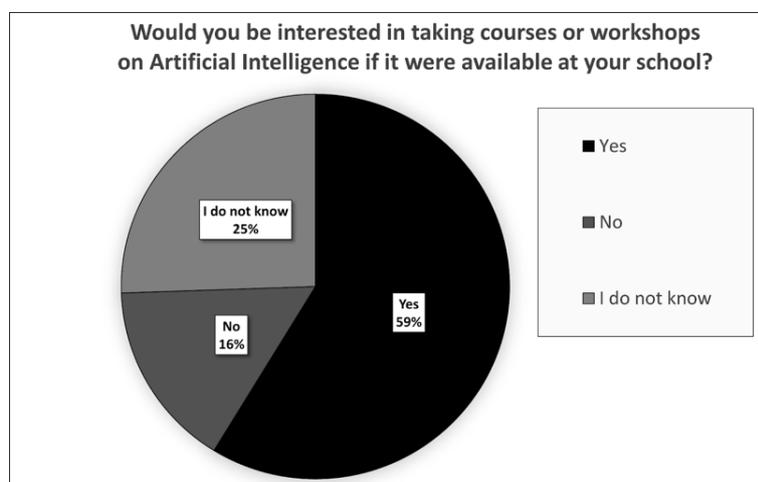
The data regarding AI's impact on employment reveals a landscape characterized by significant uncertainty. When asked whether AI will create more jobs than it eliminates in Mexico's future, nearly half of the participants (49%) expressed uncertainty. A substantial proportion, 33%, believed that AI would not result in a net creation of jobs, while a notably smaller segment of only 18% held an optimistic outlook.

Openness to AI Education

To examine students' openness toward formal education in artificial intelligence, participants were asked whether they would be interested in taking AI-related courses or workshops if offered at their schools. The following figure presents their responses.

Graphic 5

Would you be interested in taking courses or workshops on Artificial Intelligence if they were available at your school?



Source: authors' elaboration.

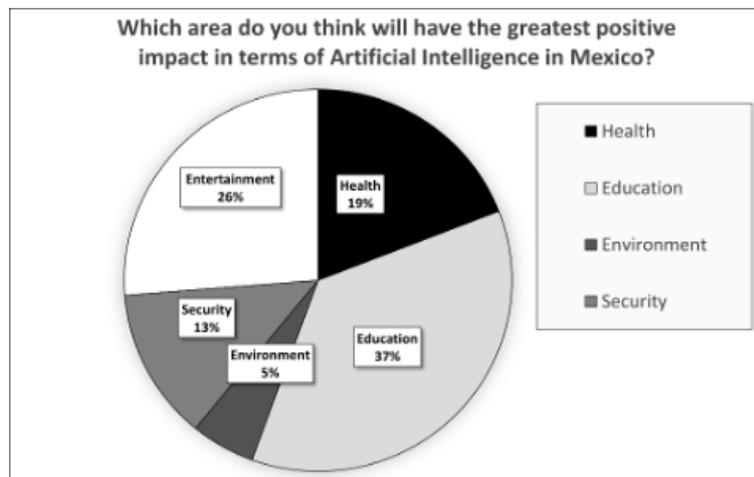
A strong majority of students (59%) expressed interest in taking AI courses or workshops if offered at their schools, while 16% were not interested. This high level of receptivity is characteristic of Gen Z, identified as the most AI-receptive generation in Mexico (19° Estudio sobre los hábitos de usuarios de internet en México, 2023).

Area of Perceived Greatest Positive Impact

To identify the sectors in which students perceive the greatest potential benefits of artificial intelligence, participants were asked to indicate the area they believe would experience the most significant positive impact of AI in Mexico. The following figure summarizes their responses.

Graphic 6

Which area do you think will have the most significant positive impact in terms of Artificial Intelligence in Mexico?



Source: authors' elaboration.

When asked which area would benefit most from AI in Mexico, 37% of participants identified education, followed by health (19%) and security (13%).

Qualitative Findings: Students' Perceptions of Artificial Intelligence

The qualitative analysis of the open-ended responses provides interpretative depth to the quantitative findings by revealing the semantic frameworks through which students conceptualize artificial intelligence. Responses to the prompt requesting a three-word description of AI were examined through thematic analysis, resulting in six emergent categories: positive valuation, ambivalence, concern or distrust, lack of knowledge, transformative vision, and technical or conceptual references.

A substantial number of participants expressed positive valuations of artificial intelligence, using descriptors such as "useful," "efficient," "fast," and "helpful," as well as functional expressions related to problem solving and academic support. These perceptions are consistent with the Technology Acceptance Model, which posits that perceived usefulness and ease of use are central determinants of favorable attitudes toward technology adoption (Davis, 1989). Recent empirical

evidence suggests that these dimensions continue to shape young people's acceptance of AI-based systems in contemporary digital environments (Maslej et al., 2024).

Ambivalence emerged as a dominant qualitative pattern, reflected in responses combining positive and negative evaluations, such as "good and bad" or "helpful but dangerous." This dual stance aligns with findings reported by Faverio and Tyson (2023), who note that young people often engage with AI through mixed cognitive frameworks that simultaneously acknowledge its benefits and express concern about its broader social and ethical implications. Such ambivalence suggests an emerging critical awareness rather than unconditional acceptance, indicating that students perceive AI as context-dependent and shaped by its modes of application and regulation.

Expressions of concern or distrust constituted another salient category. Participants associated AI with risks such as job displacement, dependency, deception, and dehumanization. These concerns resonate with ongoing ethical debates regarding automation and its potential impact on labor, identity, and well-being (West, 2019; Selwyn, 2020). In particular, apprehensions related to excessive reliance on AI and its effects on mental health and social interaction are consistent with warnings raised in psychological and educational literature addressing adolescents' vulnerability to technological overuse (American Psychological Association, 2023).

A smaller yet relevant group of responses reflected uncertainty or lack of knowledge, including neutral or indeterminate expressions. This absence of a clear evaluative stance may be linked to uneven levels of digital literacy and limited opportunities for structured reflection on AI within formal education, a gap widely documented in research on educational responses to emerging technologies (Williamson & Eynon, 2020).

In contrast, some students articulated a transformative or future-oriented vision of artificial intelligence, employing terms such as "progress," "future," and "innovation." These responses frame AI as a driver of societal change and align with broader narratives that position artificial intelligence as a defining force in contemporary technological evolution (Luckin, 2018; Luckin et al., 2016). Finally, a limited number of participants demonstrated familiarity with technical terminology, referencing concepts such as machine learning or artificial intelligence classifications, suggesting prior exposure to formal or informal AI-related knowledge.

Taken together, these qualitative findings reveal that students' perceptions of artificial intelligence are neither homogeneous nor simplistic. Instead, they reflect a complex interplay of optimism, caution, limited understanding, and emerging critical awareness. This semantic diversity reinforces the need for educational approaches that address not only functional engagement with AI, but also ethical reflection, conceptual understanding, and critical literacy, as emphasized in current research on artificial intelligence in education (Selwyn, 2020; Holmes et al., 2021).

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal a complex and nuanced relationship between Generation Z students and artificial intelligence, characterized by frequent exposure, functional engagement, and persistent uncertainty regarding its broader social, educational, and national implications. Although AI is widely present in students' everyday digital environments, their understanding remains predominantly practical rather than conceptual, as students interact regularly with AI-based systems without fully recognizing how these technologies operate or how they may influence social, economic, and institutional structures. This limited conceptual understanding helps explain the predominantly neutral perceptions observed regarding AI's future impact in Mexico. Rather than reflecting indifference, such neutrality appears to stem from insufficient access to contextualized information that would allow students to evaluate artificial intelligence as a socio-technical phenomenon with

concrete societal consequences. Similar patterns have been documented in broader populations, where individuals simultaneously acknowledge AI's potential benefits and express concern or uncertainty about its risks and long-term implications (Faverio & Tyson, 2023). In the Mexican educational context, these findings suggest the absence of structured curricular or institutional spaces that promote critical discussion of AI beyond its instrumental or functional use.

The frequency of AI use reported by students highlights the extent to which artificial intelligence has become embedded in daily routines. Rather than being perceived as a distinct technological tool, AI appears to function as an infrastructural component of digital environments, shaping access to information, personalization processes, and automated interactions. This normalization of AI use may contribute to its perceived invisibility, reducing opportunities for critical reflection on its role and consequences. Prior research has noted that such background integration can limit users' awareness of algorithmic influence, particularly among younger populations who have grown up in digitally mediated environments (Luckin et al., 2016; Robinson, 2025).

Uncertainty is particularly salient in students' perceptions of AI's impact on employment. The lack of strongly polarized positions suggests that students are navigating competing narratives that emphasize both economic opportunity and labor displacement. This ambivalence reflects broader societal debates surrounding automation and the future of work, as well as limited exposure to structured discussions about how AI may reshape labor markets and skill demands. Similar concerns have been documented among Mexican workers, who recognize AI's productive potential while expressing apprehension about job security (Valladolid & Valladolid, 2024). Among younger students, such uncertainty underscores the need for educational interventions that explicitly address the relationship between AI, work, and future professional trajectories.

At the same time, students' openness toward receiving formal education or training in artificial intelligence indicates a strong expectation that schools should play an active role in preparing them for technologically mediated futures. This disposition aligns with characterizations of Generation Z as a digitally receptive cohort. However, the presence of a resistant minority reveals ethical and pedagogical tensions that merit attention. Qualitative responses suggest concerns related to technological dependence, the potential erosion of creativity, and challenges to academic integrity. These perceptions resonate with critical perspectives in educational research that caution against uncritical adoption of AI in learning environments (Selwyn, 2020).

The qualitative findings further reinforce the complexity of students' attitudes toward artificial intelligence. The coexistence of positive descriptors such as "useful" and "efficient" alongside cautionary or negative terms reflects a dual evaluative framework. This pattern aligns with the Technology Acceptance Model, which posits that perceived usefulness supports acceptance, while perceived risks moderate enthusiasm for technology adoption (Davis, 1989). Students' ambivalence suggests an emerging critical awareness rather than unconditional acceptance, indicating that AI is viewed as beneficial under certain conditions but potentially problematic if misused or insufficiently regulated, a tendency also highlighted by Faverio & Tyson (2023).

Students' identification of education as the sector most likely to benefit from artificial intelligence highlights the pedagogical framing of AI within this population. Rather than associating AI primarily with economic growth or security, students perceive it as a tool capable of supporting teaching and learning processes. This perception aligns with policy-level discourses that emphasize AI's potential to enhance educational practices and optimize instructional work ("AI Will Be at the Service of Education and People in Mexico," 2025). The convergence between student expectations and institutional narratives positions education as a strategic entry point for the responsible and socially grounded integration of artificial intelligence.

Finally, perceptions of academic preparedness reveal a gap between the rapid evolution of artificial intelligence technologies and the responsiveness of educational systems. Students frequently reported limited curricular integration and insufficient institutional guidance regarding AI use. This disconnect has been widely critiqued as a structural limitation of educational systems adapting to technological change (West, 2019). Importantly, students' conditional acceptance of AI—emphasizing responsible and ethical use—reflects a pragmatic stance rather than technological determinism. Such perspectives align with calls for educational approaches that position AI as a tool to augment human judgment and higher-order thinking, rather than as a substitute for intellectual effort (Luckin et al., 2016; Selwyn, 2020; Holmes et al., 2021).

Implications

Building on the findings discussed above, particularly the normalization of artificial intelligence as an invisible component of students' daily practices and the persistent ambivalence observed in their perceptions, the following implications outline key considerations for educational practice and future research.

The findings of this study have several educational and policy-related implications. First, the predominance of functional rather than conceptual familiarity with artificial intelligence among secondary school students highlights the urgent need to incorporate critical AI literacy into formal education. Educational institutions should move beyond prohibitive or purely instrumental approaches and develop curricular frameworks that explicitly address how AI systems operate, their limitations, and their ethical implications.

Second, the widespread uncertainty surrounding AI's impact on employment and society underscores the importance of schools as spaces for informed dialogue. Educational systems can play a key role in contextualizing AI within social, economic, and labor frameworks, enabling students to develop realistic expectations about future professional pathways.

Finally, students' perception of education as a primary sector for AI benefits suggests that schools are viewed as strategic actors in the responsible integration of emerging technologies. Aligning educational policy with these expectations may contribute to a more human-centered and socially responsible implementation of artificial intelligence in Mexico.

For further research

Future research should expand the geographical scope of this study to include additional regions of Mexico in order to examine whether the patterns identified here persist across different social and educational contexts. While the present research provides insight into students' perceptions in two regions of Puebla, broader sampling would strengthen the generalizability of the findings.

Methodologically, future studies could incorporate qualitative instruments such as interviews or focus groups to explore students' reasoning, ethical concerns, and lived experiences with artificial intelligence in greater depth. Additionally, comparative research that includes teachers' perspectives would offer a more comprehensive understanding of how AI is currently approached, regulated, and interpreted within school environments, informing more coherent and context-sensitive educational strategies.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the perceptions of Generation Z students enrolled in public technical junior high schools in Puebla, Mexico, regarding artificial intelligence, its everyday presence, and its perceived social, educational, and labor implications. The findings show that artificial intelligence is already

deeply embedded in students' daily routines; however, their understanding of these technologies remains primarily functional rather than conceptual.

Students demonstrate frequent interaction with AI-based systems and a generally open attitude toward learning about artificial intelligence in formal educational contexts. At the same time, their responses reveal persistent uncertainty about AI's broader societal impact, particularly in relation to employment and long-term national development. This ambivalence reflects limited access to structured information and the absence of clear institutional narratives that frame artificial intelligence within social, ethical, and economic contexts.

The study highlights a gap between the rapid integration of artificial intelligence into students' everyday environments and the limited educational frameworks available to support critical understanding. Addressing this gap represents an important challenge for educational systems, which are increasingly perceived by students as key spaces for fostering informed, ethical, and human-centered engagement with artificial intelligence.

In this context, the present research contributes empirical evidence on how Generation Z students in technical secondary education in Mexico perceive and interact with artificial intelligence within their academic and digital environments. By integrating quantitative trends with qualitative insights, the findings reveal a pattern of functional familiarity accompanied by conceptual uncertainty and ethical ambivalence. This combination underscores the need for educational approaches that move beyond instrumental use and explicitly promote critical understanding, ethical reflection, and future-oriented competencies related to AI. Consequently, the study offers a contextualized contribution to current debates on artificial intelligence in education, particularly in underexplored settings, and provides a foundation for future research and policy initiatives aimed at fostering informed, responsible, and human-centered integration of AI in educational systems.

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