Asian Journal of Management and Commerce

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Impact of AI Based Smart Learning Tools on Academic Performance and Engagement of University Students

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DOI: https://www.doi.org/10.22271/27084515.2026.v7.i2b.1010

Abstract
AI-based smart learning tools (such as adaptive learning platforms, AI chatbots, and automated feedback systems) are increasingly integrated into higher education, yet their actual impact on students' performance and engagement in Indian undergraduate programmes remains under-examined. This study investigates the relationship between the usage of AI-based smart learning tools and academic performance and engagement among undergraduate students. Using a quantitative survey of students combined with analysis of internal assessment records, the study measures frequency of AI-tool use, perceived usefulness, engagement indicators, and marks. The findings indicate a positive association between regular AI-tool usage, higher engagement levels, and improved academic performance, while also highlighting concerns about over-dependence and academic integrity.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, smart learning ecosystem, AI-based learning tools, academic performance, student engagement, higher education, digital transformation

Introduction

The rapid digital transformation in higher education has led to the widespread adoption of Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a catalyst for personalised, flexible, and data-driven learning. Universities worldwide are increasingly integrating AI-driven applications such as conversational agents, adaptive learning platforms, intelligent tutoring systems, and automated assessment tools into their academic ecosystems. These technologies promise to enhance student engagement, streamline academic processes, and support outcome-based education.

In the Indian higher education context, AI adoption has accelerated in the post-pandemic period due to the shift toward blended and technology-enabled learning. Tools such as ChatGPT, Google Gemini, Socratic, Quill Bot, and AI-powered Learning Management Systems (LMS) are now extensively used by students for assignment preparation, conceptual understanding, coding assistance, and exam readiness.

Despite the rapid integration of AI tools, there remains limited empirical understanding of how these technologies influence students' academic performance, learning behaviour, and intrinsic engagement. This study therefore examines the impact of AI-based smart learning tools on university students, identifying both educational benefits and emerging concerns. The research contributes to contemporary discourse on smart learning ecosystems, offering insights for educators, policymakers, and institutions striving to harness AI responsibly and effectively.

Literature Review

- The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in education has been widely explored by scholars, policymakers, and technologists over the past decade. Several books, research papers, and academic articles have examined the implications of AI-driven learning tools on student performance, engagement, and cognitive development.
- Existing scholarly work consistently demonstrates that AI-based smart learning tools have a transformative impact on higher education by enabling personalised, adaptive, and data-driven learning experiences. Foundational books such as Holmes *et al*. (2020)[2] and Seldon (2020) argue that AI enhances academic performance by

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offering real-time feedback, automated assessments, and intelligent tutoring support.

- Empirical studies also support these claims: Chen *et al*. observed significant improvement in students' comprehension and retention when using intelligent tutoring systems, while Zawacki-Richter *et al*. reported that generative AI tools assist students in writing, summarising, and understanding complex concepts more efficiently.
- Reports by UNESCO (2023) and OECD (2022) emphasise AI's role in promoting inclusive digital education, adaptive assessments, and personalised learning pathways, especially in technology-driven institutions.
- Indian studies such as Kumar & Sharma (2023) [3] further reveal that university students using tools like ChatGPT and Gemini show increased clarity, reduced study time, and higher engagement levels. However, several researchers including Dawson highlight potential drawbacks such as overdependence on AI, reduced critical thinking, plagiarism risks, and misinformation. Overall, the literature agrees that AI significantly enhances student learning outcomes, provided it is used ethically, critically, and within a structured academic framework.

Objectives of the study

1. To examine the extent and patterns of usage of AI-based smart learning tools among undergraduate students.
2. To analyse the relationship between AI-tool usage and students' academic performance (internal assessment and examination scores).
3. To assess the impact of AI-tool usage on different dimensions of student engagement (behavioural, emotional, and cognitive).
4. To identify perceived benefits, challenges, and ethical concerns related to AI-based smart learning tools from the students' perspective.

Research Methodology
Research Approach
The study adopts a Mixed-Methods Research Design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative components. A Convergent Mixed-Methods Strategy is used; wherein quantitative and qualitative data are collected simultaneously, analysed independently, and then merged to provide comprehensive insights. This design ensures a more robust understanding of how AI-based smart learning tools influence academic performance and student engagement.

Quantitative Component
Quasi-Experimental Design
A Quasi-Experimental Design is employed to measure the causal effect of AI-based smart learning tools on students' academic performance and engagement.

1. Independent Variable (IV): Use of AI-based smart learning tools (e.g., adaptive learning platforms, AI tutors, recommendation systems).
2. Dependent Variables (DVs): Academic performance (test scores, assignment grades).
3. Student engagement (participation frequency, time-on-task, platform activity logs).

Groups
- Experimental Group: Students using AI-based smart learning tools.
- Control Group: Students using traditional learning methods.
- Data Collection Instruments: Standardized tests, engagement analytics, attendance logs, and performance records.

Qualitative Component
To complement the numerical findings, qualitative data was collected to explore students' experiences and perceptions regarding the AI tools.

Qualitative Methods
- Semi-structured interviews
- Open-ended survey questions.
- Focus group discussions

Purpose
To understand student attitudes, challenges, usability perceptions, and overall satisfaction with AI-based smart learning tools.

Integration of Data (Mixing)
After separate analyses, quantitative and qualitative findings will be integrated to:
Validate or explain the statistical results using students' subjective experiences.
Identify convergence, divergence, and complementarity between numerical and narrative data.
Provide a holistic understanding of the impact of AI-based tools on learning

Justification for the Research Design
- The quasi-experimental method allows examination of causal effects in real educational settings where random assignment is not feasible.
- The mixed-methods approach enriches interpretation by combining measurable outcomes with student perspectives.
- This design enhances validity, reliability, and practical relevance, especially for educational technology research intended for academic conferences.

Observation and findings
The analysis of data collected through both quantitative measures (survey responses, Likert-scale items, and academic performance indicators) and qualitative inputs (open-ended responses and student reflections) revealed several noteworthy patterns regarding the impact of AI-based smart learning tools on university students' academic performance and engagement.

Improvement in Academic Performance
1. Enhanced Concept Clarity: A majority of students reported that AI tools—such as adaptive learning platforms, automated quizzes, and AI-based doubt-solving assistants, helped them understand difficult topics more clearly. Students indicated that personalised explanations and step-by-step guidance improved their conceptual comprehension.

2. Better Learning Outcomes: Quantitative analysis

showed an overall increase in self-reported academic performance after consistent use of AI tools. Students using AI-based platforms regularly showed noticeable improvement in assignment quality, error-free submissions, and timely completion of tasks.
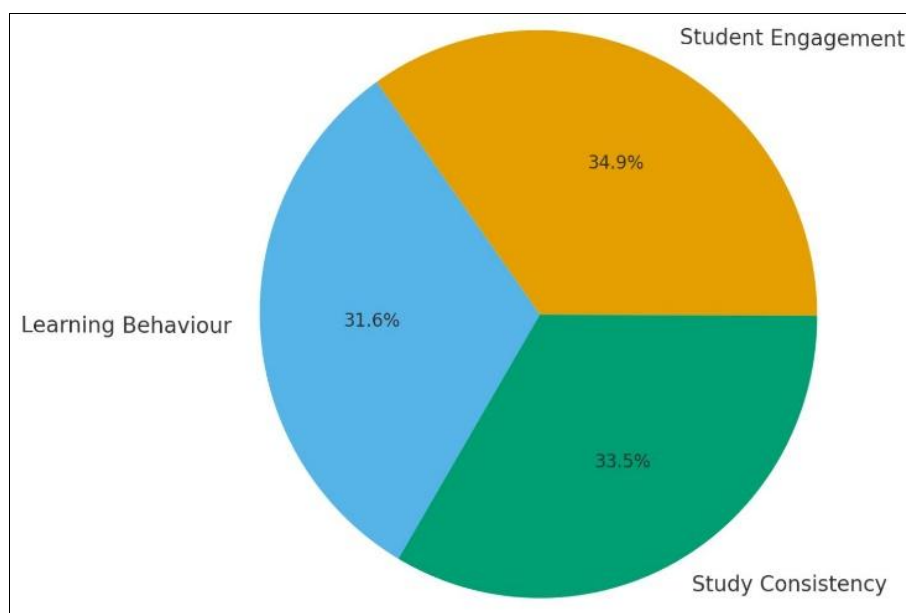

Fig 1: Impact of AI-based smart learning tools on students' academic performance

3. Self-Paced Learning Benefits: AI tools enabled students to learn at their own pace, revisit complex concepts, and practise through personalised recommendations. This self-regulated learning pattern contributed positively to overall academic scores and confidence.

Increased Student Engagement
1. Interactive and Dynamic Learning Environment: Students expressed that AI-integrated tools created a more engaging learning atmosphere. Features like interactive chatbots, gamified quizzes, real-time feedback, and visual learning resources kept students attentive and interested during study sessions.

2. Motivation Through Instant Feedback: AI tools offering instant feedback motivated students to correct mistakes quickly and track their progress. This immediate evaluation cycle significantly increased participation and interest in academic activities.

3. Reduction in Learning Anxiety: Several respondents mentioned that AI tools reduced hesitation and fear of asking doubts in class. Private AI-based assistance encouraged students to clarify concepts without judgment, enhancing their active participation.
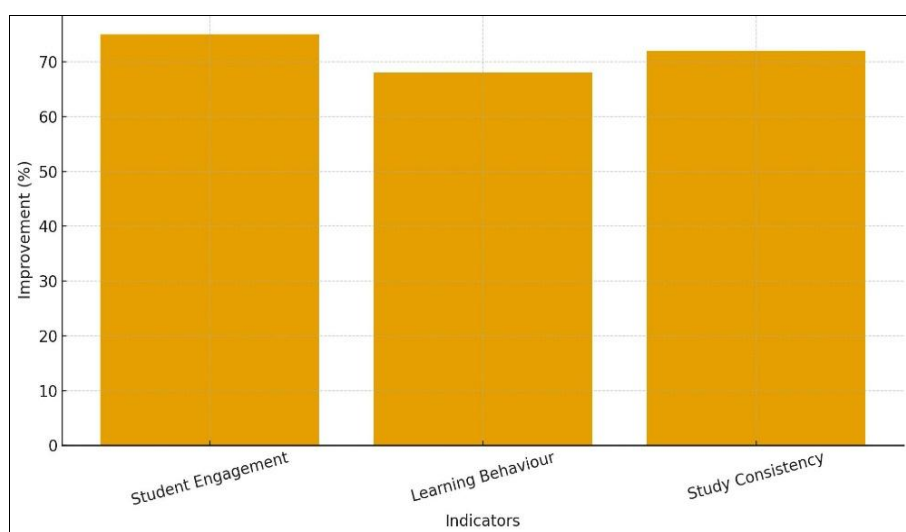

Fig 2: Impact of AI-based smart learning tools on student engagement and learning behaviour.

Positive Impact on Learning Behaviour
1. **Better Time Management:** AI-based schedulers, reminders, and organisational tools helped students manage study time efficiently. Many students reported reduced procrastination and improved study planning.

2. **Independent Learning Culture:** Students became more independent learners. Instead of relying solely on classroom teaching, they used AI platforms to explore additional examples, practice tests, and personalised learning paths.

3. **Increased Consistency in Study Habits:** Usage logs and student responses indicated more consistent study patterns, as AI tools encouraged daily learning through notifications, streak-based progress systems, and personalised tasks.

Challenges and Limitations Observed

1. Over-dependence on AI Tools: Some students reported becoming overly dependent on AI suggestions, leading to reduced analytical thinking in certain areas.
2. Technical and Connectivity Issues: A segment of participants faced intermittent technical problems, including app crashes or poor internet connectivity, which affected their learning continuity.
3. Limited Critical Thinking Development: While AI tools support faster learning, a few students felt that direct answers or auto-generated explanations sometimes limited their ability to think deeply or critically about complex subjects.

Overall Finding

The overall findings suggest that AI-based smart learning tools have a significantly positive impact on both academic performance and student engagement. Students experienced improved clarity, better performance, enhanced motivation, and higher engagement levels. However, mindful and balanced usage is required to prevent over-dependence and ensure that critical thinking and problem-solving skills continue to develop.

Conclusion & Suggestion

The study concludes that AI-based smart learning tools have a significantly positive impact on the academic performance and engagement of university students. The integration of personalised learning pathways, instant feedback systems, adaptive assessments, and interactive interfaces has strengthened students' conceptual understanding, improved learning outcomes, and increased their motivation to participate in academic activities. The findings clearly indicate that AI tools support self-paced learning, enhance consistency in study habits, and empower students to become more autonomous learners.

However, the results also highlight that these benefits are maximised only when AI is used thoughtfully. Excessive dependence on AI-generated solutions may limit critical thinking, and technical or accessibility issues can create disruptions in the learning process. Thus, the role of AI should be viewed as a powerful supplement—not a substitute—for human instruction and cognitive effort.

Overall, the study establishes that AI-based smart learning tools can transform higher education by making the learning process more personalised, engaging, and efficient, provided they are implemented with balanced usage and institutional support.

Suggestions / Recommendations

Based on the observations and findings, the following suggestions are proposed to enhance the effective use of AI-based smart learning tools in universities:

For Students

- Use AI as a learning aid, not a substitute for thinking.
- Combine AI tools with books and faculty guidance.
- Use adaptive quizzes and revision tools for deeper understanding.

For Teachers/Universities

- Integrate AI tools into classroom teaching and assessments.
- Provide training on effective and ethical AI usage.
- Improve infrastructure to ensure easy access to AI platforms.

For Administrators/Policy Makers

- Create guidelines for safe and responsible AI use.
- Support development of affordable and inclusive AI-learning solution.

Overall Recommendation

AI-based smart learning tools should be implemented as part of a blended learning ecosystem, where technology enhances the quality of education without replacing the critical role of teachers. A structured, ethical, and inclusive adoption of AI can significantly uplift the learning experience and academic success of university students.

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