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STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AS A TRANSFORMATIVE TOOL IN TERTIARY ASSESSMENT

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Abstract: *Artificial intelligence (AI) is gradually integrated into tertiary education assessment systems influencing how students complete academic tasks and how institutions design evaluation structure. This research examines students' perceptions of AI in tertiary assessment, focusing on their general attitudes toward its implementation. A quantitative cross-sectional survey was conducted among 176 university students. Descriptive statistics and reliability analysis through SPSS were used to analyse the data. The General Perception scale established acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach's α = .747). The findings imply that students generally hold positive perceptions of AI integration in tertiary assessment (M = 3.108, SD = 0.386). All four items recorded mean values above 3.00, suggesting agreement that AI can complement traditional assessment practices and has the potential to transform assessment systems. These results suggest that students increasingly recognise AI as a supportive academic tool rather than a threat to learning processes. The findings provide crucial implications for tertiary education institutions in developing suitable AI integration policies and designing assessment structures that promote academic integrity while leveraging technological innovation.*

Keywords: *Artificial intelligence; tertiary assessment; student perceptions; higher education; AI integration*

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Introduction

The rapid expansion of artificial intelligence (AI) in higher education has significantly reshaped assessment practices. AI-driven systems are increasingly employed for automated grading, feedback generation, and academic integrity monitoring (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019; Xia et al., 2024). Recent empirical studies indicate that students widely use generative AI tools to support assessment-related tasks, including drafting, idea generation, and revision (Gruenhagen et al., 2024; Johnston et al., 2024).

Although AI offers potential benefits, such as efficiency, improved feedback quality, and personalised support, it also raises concerns about academic integrity, ethical use, and fairness (Cotton et al., 2023; Almassaad et al., 2024). Studies across diverse higher education contexts show that students often adopt a dual perspective: recognising AI's utility while expressing apprehension regarding overreliance and assessment legitimacy (Yan et al., 2025; Alshamy et al., 2025).

Technology acceptance theory suggests that perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use significantly influence individuals' attitudes toward new technologies (Davis, 1989; Venkatesh et al., 2003). In the context of AI-enabled assessment, students' perceptions of benefits and risks may directly shape their acceptance and behavioural intentions. Furthermore, institutional readiness, including governance structures, ethical guidelines, and digital infrastructure, has been identified as a critical factor in responsible AI implementation (Xia et al., 2024).

Consequently, this study aims to investigate students' general perceptions, the perceived balance of benefits and risks, and the role of institutional readiness in AI-enabled assessments. By examining students' voice, this research provides vital empirical evidence to guide Malaysian higher education institutions in navigating the ethical and pedagogical complexities of the AI era.

Accordingly, this study examines:
RQ1: What are students' general perceptions of artificial intelligence (AI) in tertiary assessment?

Literature Review

AI in Higher Education

The current educational setting shows that AI is now used in higher education to support teaching and learning (Batsurovska et al., 2024; Flückiger, 2025). Regarding tertiary institutions, AI tools are commonly used for various tasks such as assisting the writing process, providing automated feedback, and supporting language (Malik et al., 2023; Wahyuni et al., 2026). According to Kok et al. (2024) and Vidalis et al. (2024), these tools are said to improve students' work efficiency and support them academically on their journey. As AI tools are now easier to access, their use to complete academic tasks has become more prevalent, prompting discussion of their positive and negative impacts on students' academic performance.

At the same time, the availability of AI tools has raised concerns about their impacts on tertiary education. Past studies, such as Lye and Lim's (2024), highlight the threats to academic integrity, honesty, and fairness, especially in assessments. These findings are also supported by Nah et al. (2023), who discuss the misuse of AI tools in the academic setting. There are also ongoing discussions about how the use of AI may influence academic performance and

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standards (Alkan, 2026; Liu et al., 2025; Vieriu & Petrea, 2025). Based on these discussions, it is important to examine how students perceive and use AI in higher education, particularly in assessments.

Students' Perceptions of AI in Learning

Students' perceptions of AI-based tools influence their acceptance and their willingness to use them in academic work. Bui and Nguyen (2025) and Lin and Yu (2023)'s studies on the adoption of technology in higher education suggest that students are inclined to use digital tools when they perceive them as useful and important for their learning needs. Anani et al. (2025) found that students perceived AI as tools that can assist them in completing their academic tasks, such as writing and developing ideas. Many students view AI as one of the methods that can enhance efficiency and improve the quality of their assignments (Malik et al., 2023; Vieriu & Petrea, 2025; Wahyuni et al., 2026). Such perceptions may increase the acceptance of incorporating AI into students' assessments.

However, students' views are not consistently positive. Some research reports mixed perceptions among students. This situation occurs when students are unsure whether the use of AI is appropriate for tasks that are being assessed (Thomas et al., 2026; Vieriu & Petrea, 2025; Wahyuni et al., 2026). Studies by Chan (2025), Lund et al. (2025), and Ortiz-Bonnin and Blahopoulou (2025) found that students' confidence to use AI is also influenced by academic integrity, originality of the work, and the fairness of the assessment. In addition, students' perceptions of AI use may be influenced by their familiarity with AI tools (Dobrovská et al., 2024; Sallam et al., 2024). This suggests that students' perceptions of using AI for their academic work are shaped by their perception of its usefulness and familiarity.

Institutional Readiness in Using AI

Institutional readiness is important in determining how artificial intelligence (AI) can be successfully adopted in higher education. Institutional readiness generally refers to clear policies on AI use, as well as guidance and support from institutions to students and educators when utilising AI in tertiary education (Benayoune et al., 2026; Schmidt et al., 2025). Sustaningrum and Haldaka (2025) also highlighted that when such support is available, students may be more confident in using AI tools appropriately in their academic work.

However, there are mixed responses regarding students' perceptions of institutional readiness. Yan et al. (2025) reported that some students feel their institutions can manage AI integration, whereas others are concerned about a lack of clear guidance by the institutions to successfully adopt AI within the system. Additionally, unclear policies on AI use may create uncertainty about acceptable and appropriate AI practices, leading to inconsistent use among students (Benayoune et al., 2026). Thus, institutional readiness influences students' perceptions of the use of AI, as they believe that having clear guidance, support, and policy impacts their confidence to use AI in an academic setting.

Previous studies show that although AI is becoming more common in higher education, students do not view its use in assessment in the same way. While many recognise its usefulness in supporting academic tasks, concerns about academic integrity, fairness, and appropriate use remain. These mixed views suggest that students are still negotiating the role of AI in their academic journey. For this reason, it is important to examine how students perceive AI to be used for their studies. Therefore, this study focuses specifically on the students' perception of the use of AI tools among Malaysian university students.

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Methodology

Research Context

This study explored the context of tertiary education in Malaysia, where artificial intelligence (AI) technologies are increasingly used to support teaching and learning environment. Many students utilize these growing technologies in completing the academic tasks. As AI tools are growing and becoming part of academic practices, it becomes crucial to understand their role in assessment. Thus, examining students' perceptions can contribute to useful insights in designing reliable and impactful AI-supported assessment policies and practices.

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional survey design to measure students' perceptions of AI in tertiary assessment. Quantitative methods are appropriate for examining attitudinal constructs and identifying statistical patterns across populations (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The survey approach allows systematic measurement of students' perception of AI usage in tertiary assessment. A cross - sectional survey enables researchers to collect data from respondents at single point in time and systematically assess prevailing perceptions and attitudes (Fraenkel et.,2019).

Participants and Sampling

This study involved 176 university students (n= 176) who provided valid responses for the analysis. The respondents were recruited from Malaysian public universities and participated voluntarily in the survey. Participation was based on convenience sampling a non-probability sampling technique commonly employed in educational research (Etikan et al.,2016). Then, the questionnaire was distributed through an online survey platform. Only fully completed responses were included in the final dataset to ensure the accuracy of the statistical analysis.

Instruments and Reliability

The instruments focused on a respondent's profile and General views on AI in assessment. Each item was measured on a four-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree). Likert scales are widely used in social science research to measure perceptions, attitudes and opinions (Joshi et al.,2015).

To ensure the instrument's internal consistency, a Cronbach's Alpha analysis was performed. The scale yielded a coefficient of .747, surpassing the generally accepted threshold of .70 for reliability in social science research (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994; Taber, 2018). All corrected item-total correlations exceeded .30, confirming that every item contributed meaningfully to the construct of general perception and justified their retention for subsequent analysis (Field, 2018).

Data Analysis Procedure

The data collected from the survey were systematically processed and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. The analysis was conducted in two primary stages to ensure the empirical rigour of the findings. First, a reliability analysis was performed to evaluate the internal consistency of the General Perception (GP) scale, which yielded a Cronbach's alpha value of .747, indicating an acceptable level of reliability for the four-item construct. During this stage, item-total correlations were monitored to ensure that all items exceeded the recommended threshold of .30, thereby confirming satisfactory item performance and justifying the retention of all variables for subsequent testing. Second,

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descriptive statistics were employed to address the research question, where the mean and standard deviation were calculated for each individual item and the overall construct to determine the prevailing trends in students' perceptions. Descriptive statistics are commonly used to summarize and interpret survey data by presenting central tendencies and variability within the dataset (Pallant, 2020).

Ethical Considerations

Prior to data collection, all participants were informed about the purpose of the study. Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of Universiti Teknologi MARA (REC/06/2025 (ST/MR/121).

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Reliability Statistics of General Perception Scale

	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
GP1	.508	.710
GP2	.596	.657
GP3	.596	.665
GP4	.480	.723

Overall Cronbach's Alpha = .747

Table 1 shows a reliability analysis that was conducted to explore the internal consistency of the General Perception scale that comprised four items. A Cronbach's alpha value of .747 shows the acceptable reliability. This indicates that all items measure students' overall perception of AI integration in tertiary assessments consistently. All corrected item-total correlations have exceeded the recommended value of .30, showing satisfactory item performance. As a result, all four items were retained for subsequent analysis.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of General Perception Items

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
GP1	176	1.00	4.00	3.0852	.54365
GP2	176	2.00	4.00	3.0852	.53303
GP3	176	2.00	4.00	3.1193	.45666
GP4	176	2.00	4.00	3.1420	.50962
GP_TOTAL	176	2.25	4.00	3.108	.386

Table 2 illustrates descriptive statistics that were conducted to evaluate general students' perception in the usage of AI in tertiary assessment. The mean for the General Perception construct was M = 3.108 (SD= .386) on a four-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree, 4 = Strongly Agree). This indicates that students generally have positive views towards the integration of AI in assessment.

Based on the results, all items recorded mean values above 3.00, indicating consistent agreement among respondents. The highest mean was for the statement GP4(M = 3.142, SD = 0.510), indicating that AI has the potential to positively transform assessment practices. This

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was followed by GP3 (M = 3.119, SD = 0.457), which indicates that AI plays a significant role in shaping the way assessments are conducted. The remaining items also reflected positive agreement, including GP1 (M = 3.085, SD = 0.544), which states that the integration of AI in assessment is a valuable development, and GP2 (M = 3.085, SD = 0.533), which suggests that AI tools can complement traditional assessment methods.

Overall, the results show that students demonstrate positive perception of AI as a constructive and transformative tool, rather than as a threat in tertiary assessment

Discussion

Overall Acceptance

The overall mean score (M=3.108) highlights that students generally hold positive perceptions regarding the use of AI in assessment. The highest agreement was observed for the item, indicating that AI has the potential to influence assessment practices, with students anticipating how it is designed and delivered in the future. Similar findings were reported by Yan et al. (2025), who found that university studenst perceived AI as a transformative tool for higher education assessment systems. Likewise, Johnston et al. (2024) observed that students' growing familiarity with AI learning environments, supports the view that AI is increasingly recognised as part of current academic practices.

AI as a Complementary Tool

Students also agreed that AI can complement traditional assessment practices rather than a replacement for educators or conventional assessment methods. This finding suggests that AI is perceived as a tool that enables students to experience more efficient feedback and assist in completing academic tasks. Similar observations were highlighted by Kok et al. (2024) and Vidalis et al. (2024), who noted that students often associate AI tools with improved efficiency and enhanced learning support. These perceptions are very important to highlight, as resistance to educational technology is often associated with concerns of displacement of traditional roles and the automation of assessment. However, the present findings demonstrate that students still value the role of educators while viewing AI as an additional facilitative mechanism within tertiary assessment environments (Batsurovska et al., 2024; Flückiger, 2025).

Implications for Assessment Redesign

The reliable positive perception across all four items provides favourable indicators to integrate AI into tertiary assessment. Since students already perceive AI as valuable and transformative, institutions may encounter less resistance in implementing AI in assessment practices. Similar findings were reported by Sustaningrum and Haldaka (2025) and Yan et al. (2025), who emphasised that institutional support and positive user perceptions contribute significantly to successful AI adoption. However, while AI's potential benefits have been identified, the integration will still require careful usage boundaries and pedagogical alignment. Institutional guidance and structured implementation are important to ensure that AI is used responsibly in academic contexts (Benayoune, 2026; Schmidt et al., 2025). Cotton et al. (2023) similarly argued the need for educators to shift assessment practices towards higher-order thinking and critical evaluation, as well as focus on more authentic tasks.

Theoretical Implications

The findings of this study may also be interpreted through the perspective of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) introduced by Davis (1989). The positive perception towards the use

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of AI reflects the perceived usefulness of AI in assessment content particularly in higher education context. Students' acceptance of AI suggests that they recognise its potential benefits in supporting academic tasks and improving assessment experiences. These findings suggest that students perceive AI as both useful and beneficial, which aligns with the core assumptions of the Technology Acceptance Model that perceived usefulness positively influences technology acceptance and future behavioural intention (Davis, 1989). Therefore, it is suggested that students may be psychologically prepared for the usage of AI within the assessment framework (Dobrovská et al., 2024; Sallam et al., 2024).

Limitation of the study

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the data were collected from specific groups of university students, which may limit generalisability to other educational contexts. Second, the study relied on self-reported perceptions rather than actual behavioural data related to AI usage in assessment practices. Future studies may incorporate mixed-method approaches or comparative institutional samples to obtain deeper insights of students' experience and behavioural engagement with AI technologies.

Conclusion

This study examined students' perceptions of artificial intelligence implementation in tertiary assessment where the findings indicate that students generally display constructive perspectives. AI is viewed as a supportive and complementary tool that can enhance academic tasks and improve assessment developments. The consistency of agreement across all items implies that students acknowledge AI's ability to transform assessment practices in higher education.

These findings imply that higher education institutions may face relatively low resistance when initiating AI-supported assessment systems. However, responsible implementation remains essential. Higher education institutions should establish clear guidelines, ethical procedures and pedagogical frameworks to ensure that AI tools are used correctly and do not compromise academic integrity.

This study can be extended to wider scope by observing perceived benefits and risks of AI integration as well as institutional readiness for AI adoption in assessment systems. Such research will impact to a broader understanding of how artificial intelligence can be responsibly integrated into tertiary education.

Higher education institutions need to play a more supportive role in guiding the use of artificial intelligence in assessment. Clear policies, appropriate support, and ongoing digital literacy initiatives can help ensure that AI is used ethically and effectively in academic settings. As AI continues to become part of students' learning experiences, future research may examine factors that influence its acceptance and use, particularly through established frameworks such as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM).

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