



Artificial Intelligence as a Learning Tool and Teachers as Validators

Fostering Growth Mindset in 21st-Century Classroom Learning

¹Mamet Mustofa, ¹Mutiara Kartika, ¹Surya Wahyu Hidayat, ¹Riana Mahsar*

Affiliations:

¹ Universitas Ahmad Dahlan, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

*Correspondence: riana.mashar@pgpaud.uad.ac.id

ABSTRACT

The rapid integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into educational settings has introduced both opportunities and tensions in classroom learning. This article examines the role of AI as a learning tool and positions teachers as validators who ensure accuracy, depth, and pedagogical integrity in AI-assisted environments. Drawing on growth mindset theory, the study proposes a conceptual framework, the AI-Teacher Synergy Framework (ATSF), which delineates three interconnected phases: AI-Assisted Exploration, Teacher Validation and Feedback, and Growth Mindset Reinforcement. Through a synthesis of recent literature, the article presents findings across three dimensions: the capacity of AI to catalyze active learning, the evolving role of teachers from content deliverers to validators and mentors, and the function of growth mindset as a bridge between technology use and meaningful learning outcomes. Results indicate that AI tools increase student engagement and personalize learning pathways, but their effectiveness depends on teachers who critically evaluate AI outputs and cultivate resilience in learners. The article concludes that sustainable AI integration requires a synergistic model where technology augments instruction and teachers remain the authoritative validators of knowledge construction.

Keywords

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Introduction

Classroom learning in the 21st century faces a set of persistent challenges that traditional pedagogies struggle to resolve. Students arrive with diverse learning needs, varying levels of prior knowledge, and different rates of cognitive processing. Teachers, regardless of expertise, cannot simultaneously personalize instruction for thirty students in real time. This structural limitation has led to disengagement, surface-level learning, and widening achievement gaps across socioeconomic lines [1]. The problem is not a lack of teacher competence; it is a constraint of scale and time that the conventional classroom model imposes.

Artificial intelligence has entered this space with the promise of addressing exactly these constraints. AI-powered tools such as intelligent tutoring systems, adaptive learning platforms, and generative language models now offer students immediate feedback, personalized content sequencing, and interactive problem-solving environments [3]. These tools operate at a scale that no single instructor can match. A student who struggles with algebraic equations at 10 p.m. can receive targeted practice from an AI tutor without waiting for the next class session. A learner who excels in reading comprehension can access advanced material without being held back by the pace of the group.

However, the integration of AI into classroom learning raises a critical question: if AI can deliver content, provide feedback, and track progress, what role does the teacher play? This article argues that AI functions best as a learning tool, not a replacement for human instruction. The teacher's role shifts, but it does not diminish. Instead, teachers become validators who verify the accuracy and appropriateness of AI-generated content, who contextualize information within broader disciplinary frameworks, and who model the critical thinking that AI cannot replicate [4]. Luckin et al. [4] argued early that AI should be understood as a tool that unleashes intelligence rather than one that substitutes for it.

Central to this argument is the concept of growth mindset, introduced by Dweck [2], which posits that students who believe their abilities can develop through effort and strategy outperform those who view intelligence as fixed. Growth mindset is not merely a motivational slogan; it is a well-documented psychological orientation that shapes how students respond to difficulty, feedback, and failure. Yeager et al. [5] demonstrated in a national experiment involving over 12,000 students that brief growth mindset interventions improved academic achievement, particularly among students in lower-performing schools. When students approach AI tools with a growth mindset, they treat errors as learning opportunities rather than evidence of inadequacy, and they use AI feedback as a springboard for deeper inquiry.

This article synthesizes current literature to examine three interconnected dimensions: how AI serves as a catalyst for active classroom learning, how teachers function as validators in AI integrated environments, and how growth mindset mediates the relationship between AI use and meaningful learning outcomes. The discussion addresses real classroom issues including student passivity, over-reliance on technology, and the erosion of critical thinking, and it proposes a framework that positions AI and teachers as complementary forces in the learning process.

Material and Methods

This study employs a conceptual analysis approach grounded in a systematic synthesis of peer reviewed literature published between 2016 and 2025. The analysis draws on empirical studies, review articles, and theoretical frameworks from databases including IEEE Xplore, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar, and ERIC. A total of 25 sources were selected based on relevance, recency, and methodological rigor. The synthesis follows the integrative review method described by Zawacki-Richter et al. [8], which enables the consolidation of diverse research findings into coherent thematic categories.

To organize the analysis, the study introduces the AI-Teacher Synergy Framework (ATSF), a three-phase conceptual model that describes how AI tools and teacher expertise interact to produce meaningful learning outcomes. The framework builds on Chen et al.'s [6] review of AI applications in education and extends Holmes et al.'s [7] argument that AI in education must be understood through pedagogical, not purely technological, lenses. The ATSF also incorporates Alam's [9] comprehensive review of generative AI capabilities and Koedinger et al.'s [10] foundational work on intelligent tutoring systems in authentic school settings.

The three phases of the ATSF (Fig. 1) operate as a cyclical process rather than a linear sequence. Each phase informs and strengthens the others, creating a feedback loop that sustains student engagement and deepens learning over time. Phase 1, AI-Assisted Exploration, represents the entry point where students engage directly with AI tools. These tools include adaptive platforms that adjust difficulty in real time, generative AI that responds to student queries, and intelligent tutoring systems that model expert problem solving. The function of this phase is exposure and initial sense-making, not mastery [9].

Phase 2, Teacher Validation and Feedback, addresses the recognized limitation of AI systems: they can generate plausible but inaccurate responses, lack contextual judgment, and cannot assess the emotional or social dimensions of learning [7]. In this phase, teachers examine what students have learned through AI interaction, identify misconceptions, and provide corrective or enriching feedback grounded in disciplinary expertise.

Phase 3, Growth Mindset Reinforcement, closes the loop. Students who receive validation and constructive criticism from teachers develop a more robust orientation toward learning. They begin to view AI not as an answer machine but as a thinking partner, and they approach subsequent AI interactions with greater curiosity and persistence [6].

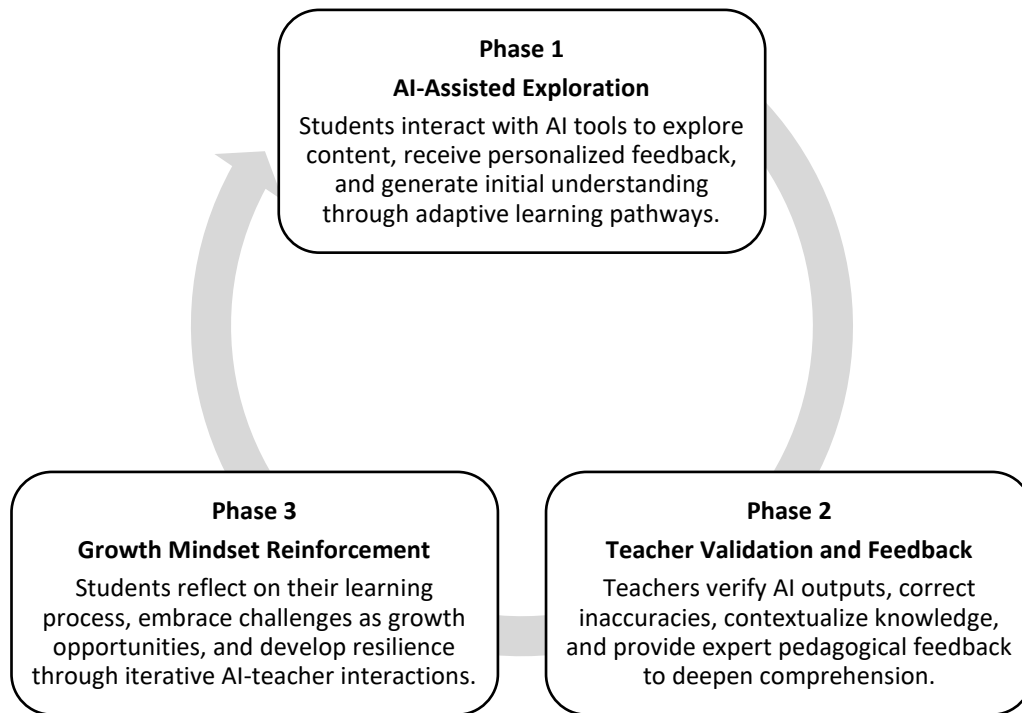


Fig. 1. AI-Teacher Synergy Framework (ATSF)

Results and Discussion

A. AI as a Catalyst for Active Classroom Learning

The literature consistently demonstrates that AI tools enhance classroom learning by shifting students from passive reception to active engagement. Alam [9] found that generative AI platforms allow students to interact with content dynamically, posing questions, receiving explanations, and testing hypotheses in ways that traditional lectures cannot support. This finding aligns with Kasneci et al. [17], who reported that AI-powered environments foster creativity and exploratory learning by removing the fear of immediate judgment from a human instructor.

Yang [16] observed that students who engaged with ChatGPT for educational tasks reported higher levels of motivation and cognitive engagement compared to those who relied solely on textbook-based learning. However, this engagement was contingent on task design; when students used AI for simple answer retrieval rather than inquiry-driven exploration, the learning

gains diminished. This distinction matters because it highlights that AI tools are only as effective as the pedagogical context in which they operate.

Table 1. AI Tools and Their Functions in Classroom Learning

AI Tool Category	Primary Function	Classroom Application
Intelligent Tutoring Systems	Adaptive problem sequencing and step-by-step guidance	Mathematics and science courses where students need scaffolded practice with immediate corrective feedback
Generative AI (e.g., ChatGPT)	Natural language interaction for content explanation and brainstorming	Writing courses, research projects, and exploratory discussions across disciplines
Adaptive Learning Platforms	Personalized content delivery based on learner performance data	Differentiated instruction in mixed-ability classrooms to address individual learning gaps
Automated Assessment Tools	Real-time evaluation of student work with diagnostic feedback	Formative assessment in large classes where teacher grading capacity is limited
AI-Powered Simulation Environments	Interactive modeling of complex systems and scenarios	Laboratory simulations in physics, chemistry, and engineering education

Chen et al. [6] identified three mechanisms through which AI enhances active learning: immediacy of feedback, scalability of personalization, and reduction of cognitive overload through adaptive content sequencing. Each mechanism addresses a specific classroom issue. Immediacy solves the problem of delayed feedback that plagues traditional homework-based learning. Scalability addresses the impossibility of one teacher differentiating instruction for every student simultaneously. Adaptive sequencing reduces frustration by matching task difficulty to student readiness.

The U.S. Department of Education [1] emphasized that AI systems must minimize bias and avoid adding unnecessary testing burden. This caution is well-placed. Al-Zahrani [18] found that while AI tools improved academic performance metrics, students who lacked guidance in using these tools sometimes developed shallow learning habits, copying AI responses without critical evaluation. Blikstein [19] similarly warned that technology access without pedagogical structure leads to "doing without understanding."

The evidence supports a clear conclusion: AI catalyzes active learning when it is embedded within a structured instructional framework. Without such structure, AI risks becoming a shortcut rather than a scaffold. The ATSF addresses this risk by ensuring that AI-assisted exploration (Phase 1) is always followed by teacher validation (Phase 2), which prevents shallow engagement from calcifying into habit.

B. The Teacher's Evolving Role: From Instructor to Validator

The integration of AI into classrooms does not eliminate the need for teachers; it redefines their function. Zhai [15] argued that AI handles the repetitive, data-intensive aspects of

instruction, such as grading, content delivery, and progress tracking, freeing teachers to focus on higher order pedagogical tasks: mentoring, contextualizing knowledge, and fostering critical thinking. This redistribution of labor represents a qualitative shift in the teaching profession.

Table 2. Comparison of Traditional and AI-Integrated Teacher Roles

Dimension	Traditional Role	AI-Integrated Role
Content Delivery	Primary source of information through lectures and textbooks	Curator and validator of AI-generated content; corrects errors and fills contextual gaps
Assessment	Designs, administers, and grades all assessments manually	Interprets AI-generated diagnostic data; designs targeted interventions based on analytics
Feedback Mechanism	Provides delayed feedback after assignment submission	Supplements AI's immediate feedback with nuanced, context-specific guidance
Student Interaction	Manages whole-class instruction with limited individual attention	Focuses on individual and small-group mentoring while AI handles routine queries
Critical Thinking Development	Embeds critical thinking within lecture-based Socratic questioning	Teaches students to evaluate AI outputs, question sources, and construct independent arguments

Holmes et al. [7] proposed that teachers in AI-integrated classrooms serve as "pedagogical architects" who design learning experiences around AI capabilities rather than competing with them. This view resonates with Sharma [25], who found that when teachers adopted a co-facilitator role alongside AI tools, student learning outcomes improved significantly compared to classrooms where AI was introduced without restructuring the teacher's role.

The validator function is particularly critical in the era of generative AI. Large language models produce fluent, confident text that can contain factual errors, logical inconsistencies, or ideological biases [3]. Grassini [3] documented cases where students accepted AI-generated responses uncritically because the text appeared authoritative. Teachers who validate AI outputs teach students a skill that extends far beyond the classroom: the ability to interrogate information sources and demand evidence.

The American Psychological Association [12] reported that classrooms adapting to AI use most effectively were those where teachers received professional development focused on AI literacy. Selby [21] confirmed this finding, demonstrating that teachers who participated in case-based AI professional development programs showed marked improvements in their ability to integrate AI tools meaningfully and to identify when AI outputs required correction. Wang et al. [22] proposed the AIA-PCEK framework, which positions teacher pedagogical content knowledge as the essential complement to AI capability.

Vygotsky's [20] concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) provides a theoretical foundation for the teacher-as-validator model. AI tools can identify what a student knows and does not know, but only a human teacher can assess where a student is within the ZPD and provide the precise scaffolding needed to advance understanding. VanLehn [24] found that while intelligent tutoring systems approached the effectiveness of human tutors in well-defined domains, human tutors remained superior in ill-defined, open-ended learning contexts that required judgment, empathy, and adaptive questioning.

The classroom issue at stake is significant: without teacher validation, AI integration risks producing students who are information-rich but understanding-poor. The ATSF positions the teacher as the indispensable quality control mechanism in a system where AI generates volume and the teacher ensures depth.

C. Growth Mindset as the Bridge Between AI Tools and Meaningful Learning

Growth mindset theory provides the psychological infrastructure that connects AI tool use to durable learning outcomes. Dweck and Yeager [11] reviewed two decades of research and concluded that growth mindset operates not as a trait but as a context-sensitive orientation that educators can cultivate through deliberate instructional choices. When students believe they can improve through effort, they engage more productively with challenging material, persist longer in the face of difficulty, and respond more constructively to feedback.

Table 3. Growth Mindset Indicators in AI-Assisted Learning Environments

Growth Mindset Indicator	Growth Mindset Indicator	Supporting AI Feature
Embrace of Challenge	Students select higher-difficulty tasks and attempt complex problems voluntarily	Adaptive difficulty scaling that gradually increases complexity based on mastery
Persistence After Failure	Students retry problems after incorrect attempts rather than abandoning tasks	Immediate corrective feedback with hints and alternative solution pathways
Effort Attribution	Students attribute success to strategy and practice rather than innate ability	Progress dashboards that visualize improvement over time and effort invested
Feedback Receptivity	Students actively seek and incorporate feedback into subsequent work	AI-generated revision suggestions and iterative drafting tools
Learning Goal Orientation	Students focus on understanding concepts rather than merely completing tasks	Inquiry-based AI interactions that reward exploration and questioning over answer retrieval

Claro, Paunesku, and Dweck [14] demonstrated that growth mindset tempers the effects of socioeconomic disadvantage on academic achievement. Students from low-income backgrounds who held a growth mindset performed at levels comparable to wealthier peers with fixed mindsets. This finding carries direct implications for AI-integrated classrooms: if AI tools can provide equitable access to high-quality learning resources, and if teachers can foster growth

mindset alongside that access, the combination has the potential to narrow achievement gaps that structural inequality has created.

Yeager et al. [5] showed that even brief, scalable growth mindset interventions produced measurable gains in academic performance. When these interventions are combined with AI tools that reinforce growth-oriented behaviors, such as adaptive difficulty, process-focused feedback, and effort visualization, the impact compounds. Kasneci et al. [17] observed that students using generative AI in growth-oriented learning environments displayed greater creativity and willingness to experiment than those in environments that emphasized correctness over process.

Crompton and Burke [23] reviewed the state of AI in higher education and identified a recurring pattern: institutions that successfully integrated AI were those that paired technological implementation with explicit attention to student mindset and metacognitive development. Michigan Virtual [13] reported similar findings in K-12 settings, noting that teacher trust in AI tools and student receptivity to AI-assisted learning both correlated with growth mindset orientations among educators and learners.

The classroom issue here is one of psychological readiness. Students who approach AI tools with a fixed mindset tend to use them as crutches, seeking answers rather than understanding. Students with a growth mindset use the same tools as springboards, treating AI responses as starting points for deeper inquiry. The teacher's role in cultivating growth mindset is therefore inseparable from the teacher's role as a validator: when teachers model critical evaluation of AI outputs and frame errors as learning opportunities, they simultaneously reinforce growth mindset and validate knowledge [11].

Dweck [2] emphasized that praise directed at process rather than ability builds growth mindset. In AI-assisted learning environments, teachers can apply this principle by acknowledging the strategies students use when interacting with AI, such as formulating better prompts, cross-referencing AI answers with other sources, or revising their understanding based on AI feedback, rather than praising the final answer itself. This practice transforms the classroom from a performance arena into a learning laboratory where AI tools and human guidance work in concert.

Conclusion

This article examined the relationship between artificial intelligence, teacher expertise, and growth mindset in 21st-century classroom learning. The findings from 25 reviewed sources indicate that AI can enhance active learning through personalized instruction, immediate feedback, and interactive exploration. However, its effectiveness depends on purposeful pedagogical design. Without proper guidance, AI may encourage superficial learning rather than

deep understanding. The study also highlights that teachers remain central in AI-integrated education. Their roles evolve into validators of AI-generated information, mentors who guide critical thinking, and designers of meaningful learning experiences. This role is essential because generative AI can produce inaccurate but convincing outputs that students may accept uncritically. In addition, growth mindset functions as a key psychological factor connecting AI use with meaningful learning outcomes. Students with a growth mindset are more likely to persist through challenges, engage constructively with feedback, and use AI productively. The proposed AI-Teacher Synergy Framework (ATSF) integrates AI-assisted exploration, teacher validation, and growth mindset reinforcement into a cyclical learning model. Overall, the article concludes that AI should not replace teachers, but rather complement their professional expertise in creating effective and human-centered learning environments.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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Authors



Mamet Mustofa is a student in the Teacher Professional Education Program (PPG) Batch 1 in Pancasila Education at Universitas Ahmad Dahlan. He is actively involved in academic activities, educational research, and professional teacher development programs. His academic interests include civic education, character education, and innovative learning practices that support the development of competent and responsible future educators in Indonesia. (email: mametmm824@gmail.com).



Mutiara Kartika is a student in the Teacher Professional Education Program (PPG) Batch 1 in Pancasila Education at Universitas Ahmad Dahlan. She is currently participating in academic and professional development activities designed to strengthen pedagogical competence and teaching professionalism. Her interests focus on Pancasila education, citizenship values, and educational innovation to support meaningful and student-centered learning experiences. (email: mutiarakartika2212@gmail.com).



Surya Wahyu Hidayat is a student in the Teacher Professional Education Program (PPG) Batch 1 in Pancasila Education at Universitas Ahmad Dahlan. He is actively engaged in academic learning, teaching practice, and professional teacher preparation programs. His academic interests include civic literacy, character education, and the integration of innovative instructional approaches to improve student engagement and learning quality in schools. (email: suryawahyu02@gmail.com).



Dr. Riana Mahsar, M.Psi., Psikolog is a lecturer in the Teacher Professional Education Program (PPG) at Universitas Ahmad Dahlan. She holds a doctoral degree in psychology and specializes in guidance and counseling. Her academic and professional interests focus on educational psychology, student counseling, teacher professional development, and child development. She actively contributes to academic activities, teacher education programs, and research related to counseling and educational well-being. (email: riana.mashar@pgpauad.uad.ac.id).