ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND SOCIAL WORK: PREPARING STUDENTS FOR A HUMAN-CENTERED PROFESSION IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Geanina-Ștefana MOȚĂȚEANU,
West University of Timisoara
geanina.motateanu@e-uvt.ro

Tiberiu DUGHI, Assoc. prof. Ph.D.,
Aurel Vlaicu University of Arad
tiberiu.dughi@uav.ro

Abstract: *The paper explores the perception of first-year students from the Department of Social Work regarding the use of artificial intelligence in the educational process as well as in the social work profession. A descriptive research design was employed, using a semi-structured interview guide, and 16 individual interviews were conducted. The practical implications focus on the ethical and responsible use of artificial intelligence, while simultaneously fostering critical thinking and qualitative learning. Furthermore, the professions of teacher and social worker are discussed in the context of the emergence of artificial intelligence in the digital era.*

Keywords: *digital era; social work; education; artificial intelligence; ethics.*

Introduction

The article "Artificial Intelligence and Social Work: Preparing Students for a Human-Centered Profession in the Digital Age" addresses the educational and professional resilience of students from the Department of Social Work at the West University of Timișoara in the context of the digital era.

The article focuses on the adaptation of students to digital transformations, given the widespread influence of artificial intelligence (AI) across all fields of activity. It is important to explore the perceptions held by students from the Department of Social Work regarding the role of AI in the educational environment of higher education, as well as in the social work profession. The study addresses

a highly relevant and contemporary topic, as future social workers will face numerous challenges related to digitalization and the integration of new technologies into professional practice, while also preserving professional ethics and values.

Within this context, the concept of digital resilience becomes increasingly significant. Social workers must continuously adapt to technological changes and uncertainty. Students in the Department of Social Work begin developing this resilience during their undergraduate studies, through the acquisition of competencies and skills that pertain to both human-centered practice and digital proficiency.

Understanding how students perceive artificial intelligence and how it can be integrated into professional practice—without compromising the human dimension—is essential. A final aspect addressed in this research pertains to educational innovation, focusing on the adaptation of teaching staff to AI and the ways in which AI can be successfully integrated into higher education. The goal is to promote an education system that is responsive to new challenges, grounded in present-day realities, and aligned with the growing need for digital literacy.

Asakura et al. (2020) developed an educational project within the field of social work education, integrating artificial intelligence into the curriculum. The authors employed natural language processing to design innovative and interactive simulations aimed at enhancing student engagement. The main findings of the study indicate that these simulations supported social work students in developing key communication competencies, including active listening, critical thinking, and empathy. The researchers emphasized that such training is essential to adequately prepare future social workers for professional practice in the digital age.

In the context of artificial intelligence applications within social work, Diez (2023) emphasizes the necessity of approaching AI from an ethical standpoint. Accordingly, artificial intelligence should be implemented in a way that reflects the core principles of the social work profession: equity, social justice, dignity, and respect for diversity. The author warns that the risks associated with AI can be significant, particularly when decision-making processes are automated. Such developments may have serious implications in areas like child protection and social investigations. Diez (2023) argues that human involvement remains irreplaceable in domains where human judgment is essential. Thus, the study concludes that social work professionals must be actively engaged not only in their field of

practice but also in the ethical development and governance of artificial intelligence.

Gillingham (2019) examined the use of predictive algorithms in decision-making processes within child and family protection services. The study focused on how social services for children and families utilize data analysis to identify potential risks. According to the author, while such technologies may enhance the capacity of social work systems to detect vulnerabilities, there are also significant concerns— particularly regarding algorithmic transparency and the reproduction of biases embedded in historical family data. These datasets, when analyzed without human oversight, may lead to misinformed conclusions. The core conclusion of the study asserts that critical decisions must remain within the domain of trained human professionals, as artificial intelligence cannot serve as the sole authoritative decision-maker. Consequently, AI can function as a supportive tool in social work, offering practical benefits, but only when its use is carefully monitored and ethically grounded.

Over the past five years, research has increasingly focused on the field of social work and the potential intersections that may arise through the lens of technology, particularly artificial intelligence. In this context, Goldkind (2021) raised several well-founded questions, considering the unique nature of the social work profession. The author reflects on whether professional autonomy, the decision-making process, and the human relationship established between practitioner and client may be compromised with the introduction of AI into the field. The main challenge identified in integrating artificial intelligence into social work lies in the tendency toward standardization— potentially diminishing or constraining the individualized, unique, and relational aspects of professional-client interactions. The study concludes that while artificial intelligence can contribute to innovation, transformation, and creativity within social work, it must be implemented in a manner that upholds the profession's core ethical principles and value framework.

The specialized literature highlights various techniques through which social workers can prevent professional burnout. Grządzielewska (2021) argues that machine learning can help anticipate and prevent burnout symptoms. Artificial intelligence can be effectively used by analyzing workplace-related data, including workload, health issues, mental health indicators, behaviors, stress levels, and interactions with supervisors and colleagues. By processing these variables, AI systems can identify specific patterns or typologies that either exacerbate or mitigate professional exhaustion. The main

conclusion of the study is that artificial intelligence can be introduced across multiple areas of practice to support the emotional well-being of social workers. However, this is only possible if professionals are directly involved in the process, ensuring that the data used is accurate and that implementation is carried out ethically and responsibly.

In 2024, Walter presented a new perspective on how artificial intelligence can be effectively integrated into higher education institutions. The author argues that AI has the potential to bring transformative changes to higher education, provided it is built upon three essential pillars: AI literacy, critical thinking, and prompt engineering. In this regard, Walter (2024) emphasizes that artificial intelligence should not be reduced to tools like ChatGPT, which are readily accessible to students. Instead, students must understand how AI systems function, as well as the ethical considerations and responsibilities associated with their use. Frequently, students struggle with formulating effective queries for AI tools. Walter suggests that students must be trained in constructing prompts in a way that elicits meaningful and relevant responses. Moreover, critical thinking plays a key role in objectively filtering information and understanding AI's role throughout the educational process. Ultimately, the author underlines the need for curricular reform that integrates the responsible and pedagogically sound use of artificial intelligence.

Pitts et al. (2025) state in a qualitative study that students hold diverse perceptions regarding the use of artificial intelligence in the educational process, particularly the use of tools such as ChatGPT. The main advantages of AI reported by student respondents include quick access to sources and information, faster text composition, support during examination sessions through supplementary information, and clarification of concepts that were not fully understood during lectures and seminars. However, the primary challenges identified by respondents relate to a growing dependence on ChatGPT, the tendency to rely on it continuously, and a risk of approaching education in a more superficial manner. Additionally, students reported encountering inaccurate or misleading information. The authors argue that there is a clear need for institutional policies at the level of higher education institutions to establish how AI tools can be used ethically and responsibly, in a way that genuinely supports students' educational and professional development.

Modern education systems can leverage artificial intelligence to keep up with the most significant trends in the field. In this regard, Owoc et al. (2021) identified several advantages of AI use in education. Among them, the authors emphasize the ability to adapt

educational content and course delivery based on the individual student's characteristics, level of understanding, and learning style—thus enabling a personalized learning approach. Furthermore, AI contributes to optimizing assessment time, allowing for automated and objective evaluation processes. However, the authors also noted several barriers that may hinder the integration of AI in education. These include the lack of digital preparedness among teaching staff, the potential long-term erosion of human interaction, concerns regarding ethics and data privacy, and various technical or infrastructural issues that may arise during implementation.

In 2024, Sidiropoulos and Anagnostopoulos conducted a study aimed at presenting how artificial intelligence can be applied in education, with a particular focus on ChatGPT. The authors developed a categorization of AI applications, beginning with its use in teaching support—for example, through virtual assistants that provide explanations and generate various educational materials. They then explored the role of AI in directly supporting the learning process, where the emphasis is on offering explanations, models, examples, and automated responses to students' questions. The third category centers on administrative functions, where AI can be employed to analyze data and support academic processes. While the authors acknowledge the benefits of these applications, they also highlight significant ethical and pedagogical challenges. These include issues related to intellectual ownership, the risk of plagiarism, data privacy, and ethical concerns more broadly. In conclusion, the authors stress the importance of training both educators and students, supported by clear institutional guidelines grounded in ethical practice and professional transparency.

Tambe & Rice (2018) explored the role of artificial intelligence in the field of social work and concluded that it can assist professionals in making objective decisions and facilitating social interventions. As observed, all researchers acknowledge the positive impact of artificial intelligence on social work, while also emphasizing the need for data protection and adherence to professional ethics. In this context, the authors argue that increased attention must be paid to the profession itself in order to effectively integrate and utilize artificial intelligence in the modern era.

Han et al. (2025) conducted a study similar to the one proposed in this article. The authors analyzed how higher education students use artificial intelligence. The study focused on the advantages of using AI in the educational process, with key findings showing that AI is employed in learning because it offers personalized support that progresses from general to specific. Students' individual perceptions

are subjective and reflect the ways in which they have used artificial intelligence.

The innovation of digitalization has been studied over time with a focus on both education and the field of social work. In 2023, Toros et al. explored how artificial intelligence influences the social work profession, the interpersonal relationships between professionals and clients, as well as organizations as a whole. The authors highlight visible advantages, such as adaptability and flexibility in professional training, and improved access to resources. At the same time, they also address concerns related to the future preparedness of professionals in the digital era. The authors argue that social workers need digital competencies in order to practice effectively both in the present and in the future. Ardelean &Veres (2023) explored the educational field and the implications of artificial intelligence, highlighting risks associated with students' potential dependency on technology due to the constant use of AI. Another concern relates to the reduction of human interaction and the limitations it may impose.

At the same time, Goian (2010) analyzed the role of language and its importance in the social worker profession. In this regard, the presence of artificial intelligence in social work may generate challenges related to linguistic consistency, particularly in the area of translation. Moreover, artificial intelligence could also serve as a solution for developing and standardizing terminology, especially in terms of synonymy.

Moreover, in the educational field, Goian (2020) highlighted students' perceptions of bullying. In this context, artificial intelligence can become a solution for counteracting bullying. Accordingly, AI algorithms can be used to detect aggressive behaviors, offensive language, or stigmatization within the educational environment.

Goian (2013) highlights how social work services in the Banat region can be developed both in the private and public sectors. The author emphasizes shortcomings such as the lack of qualified personnel, professional burnout, and the absence of adequate supervision. In this context, artificial intelligence can provide valuable support and a sustainable solution for streamlining administrative processes and enhancing continuous professional supervision in the field.

Reamer (2023) investigated the practical implications of artificial intelligence in social work intervention. The author noted that potential errors made by AI represent a major challenge for the social work system. Additionally, the author emphasized that by relying on technology, we can identify the problems and needs of each client

more efficiently, and our intervention can become significantly more effective, as it is based on real data and patterns. In conclusion, it is evident that there are highly current scholarly works focusing on the impact of artificial intelligence in both the educational environment and the social work system. In this regard, it is essential for education professionals to train students and future practitioners to access digital resources in an ethical and responsible manner.

Methodology

The purpose of this research is to identify the perceptions of students from the Department of Social Work at the West University of Timișoara regarding the use of artificial intelligence in the educational process and in the social work profession.

Objectives

O1: Identifying the perception of students from the Department of Social Work at the West University of Timișoara regarding the use of artificial intelligence in the educational process.

O2: Exploring the perceptions of students from the Department of Social Work at the West University of Timișoara regarding the use of artificial intelligence in the social work profession, as well as the risks associated with its use.

Research questions

Q1: What are the perceptions of students from the Department of Social Work at the West University of Timișoara regarding the integration of artificial intelligence into the educational process?

Q2: What are the perceptions of students from the Department of Social Work at the West University of Timișoara concerning the implementation of artificial intelligence in the social work profession, including the potential risks associated with its use?

Sample and instrument

The research group consisted of 16 students from the Department of Social Work at the West University of Timișoara. Among the 16 interviewed students, 4 are enrolled in the first year of the distance learning program in social work, while 12 are first-year students in the full-time social work program. The 12 full-time students are between 19 and 20 years old, while the four distance learning students are between 30 and 45 years old. Additionally, two students are male and twelve are female. A structured interview guide was used, and the qualitative method applied was the individual telephone interview.

Rowland et al., (2019) conducted a study that highlights how the interview is applied in the field of science education. The authors state that the interview technique is part of the qualitative method and

represents a tool that fosters a closer connection between the respondent and the researcher. Moreover, the structured individual interview contributes to ensuring that the research is logically organized and that data are maintained in a chronological order.

Rowland et al., (2019) emphasize the importance of the individual interview in research. The authors argue that the individual interview encourages the interviewer to reflect on specific details, thereby significantly improving the process of data collection and interpretation. Furthermore, the interview contributes to a clear chronological sequencing of events and provides greater stability within the dialogue. In this regard, the individual interview plays a crucial role even when considering the professional relationship between the interviewer and the research participant.

Data collection and processing

The respondents expressed their willingness to participate voluntarily in the research, and the confidentiality of the data as well as research ethics were fully respected. The interviews were conducted individually via telephone, scheduled by mutual agreement with the respondents, and transcribed verbatim to ensure maximum accuracy. Each interview lasted approximately 20 minutes and was conducted between April and May 2025. The respondents were informed about the overall purpose of the research, its objectives, and the research questions.

Results and Discussion

The main themes that emerged from the data collection and analysis are as follows: students' personal perceptions regarding the use of artificial intelligence in both educational and personal contexts; the impact of artificial intelligence on individual learning styles and the potential replacement of human professions with technology-driven roles; the ways in which artificial intelligence can be further utilized in the social work profession; and the ethical and responsible use of artificial intelligence.

Regarding respondents' perceptions of the use of artificial intelligence in both the educational sphere and personal life, the following patterns were identified. All respondents demonstrate a positive perception toward the use of artificial intelligence in both educational and personal contexts. They report frequent use of AI, particularly as a means to manage highly complex academic tasks. The use of AI often began out of curiosity, with many students being introduced to it by their university peers, who noticed that it helped streamline their academic workload.

„Yes, I used artificial intelligence to better structure my course materials, especially when they contained a large volume of information. I provided the content to ChatGPT, and it organized the course material for me, then generated multiple-choice questions." *(R3)*

Artificial intelligence is perceived as especially useful during exam sessions, as students rely on it to summarize large volumes of course materials. Moreover, AI provides sample multiple-choice tests, enabling students to assess their learning progress. Another significant advantage is the additional explanations AI offers regarding specific phrases and concepts that students struggle to understand.

AI is also seen as a valuable tool for generating examples, ideas, and solutions for starting academic projects. The main tool used by respondents is ChatGPT. For students, ChatGPT is not just a functional instrument but rather a digital application that offers guidance and academic support. Many students report that academic requirements can sometimes be vague or unclear, making AI a more accessible source of clarification than directly asking instructors.

„Yes, it helps me search for different types of information, both personal and related to university, but within certain limits." *(R6)*

Most respondents believe they use AI in an ethical and limited manner, and they are aware of the importance of maintaining boundaries in its usage. Furthermore, the information obtained from AI is regularly verified against reliable academic sources to avoid inaccuracies. This reflects a critical and balanced approach to integrating AI into their learning process.

In the personal sphere, several respondents indicated that they use AI to help structure their thoughts, express themselves more clearly, find synonyms or professional phrasing, and even seek feedback on how others perceive them. The most commonly cited advantage of AI is the significant time savings it provides. Students noted that they used to spend a lot of time starting projects from scratch without having access to explanations, ideas, examples, or outlines.

Most of the respondents have been using AI for at least two years, with some having started during high school. Encouragingly, students do not rely entirely on AI-generated content; instead, they view it as a source of suggestions worth developing independently and validating through academic research.

„Yes, I have used AI very frequently to help me understand certain concepts I didn't grasp at university and to assist me with starting some of my projects." *(R10)*

Most students consider it acceptable to use artificial intelligence for drafting academic assignments, but not entirely. They report that AI can support the generation of ideas and help structure the content of their work more effectively. There are, however, a few isolated cases where respondents admitted to having used AI entirely to complete a project—typically in critical moments, such as approaching submission deadlines.

The main benefits identified by students relate to the reformulation of their ideas in a more academic and professional style, as well as to the clarity of explanations provided in more accessible language compared to traditional course materials. Half of the respondents expressed significant concerns regarding the frequent use of AI, primarily due to the risk of receiving incomplete, outdated, or inaccurate information. Furthermore, students perceive the academic staff as trustworthy sources of guidance and information. When comparing AI tools such as ChatGPT to their instructors, respondents highlight the lack of empathy, humor, and human interaction in the former.

„I find that it sometimes provides inaccurate information. It seems artificial and lacks a human touch—it does not exhibit empathy." (R2)

Overall, students regard AI as a useful and accessible resource—particularly valuable for generating ideas when facing difficulties. A small portion of respondents believe that tools like ChatGPT can serve as assistants or learning aids that can be directed according to their specific needs. For all respondents, artificial intelligence remains a technical tool, whereas critical thinking is viewed as far more important in the long term. This indicates a high level of awareness and academic integrity among the students surveyed.

„I use it consistently for every assignment—I ask it to provide synonyms and rephrase my ideas. When I have thoughts that I struggle to articulate elegantly, it reformulates them in an academic style. The ideas remain mine; it simply helps them sound better." (R4)

Respondents were asked which tools they use to access artificial intelligence. All participants stated that they currently use only ChatGPT, citing its free access, objectivity, and efficiency as key reasons. They consider ChatGPT's interface to be user-friendly, relevant, and generally accurate in terms of the information provided.

Approximately half of the respondents reported having experimented with other tools or search engines—especially Google and Gemini—but ultimately returned to ChatGPT due to its more

concrete, specific, and direct responses, which do not require overly precise prompts. According to the students, ChatGPT quickly understands the question posed and avoids unnecessary digressions. The main qualities valued by respondents include the tool's objectivity, professional phrasing, and the ability to verbally convey educational content, which they associate with human-like characteristics. Very few respondents reported using other applications, and most students stated they are satisfied with ChatGPT and are not inclined to explore alternative tools.

„I have only used ChatGPT. The difference between ChatGPT and Google is that ChatGPT is much faster. It provides clear and direct answers, without wasting time." (R4)

Regarding the theme that explores the impact of artificial intelligence on learning styles and the human profession, students report a generally positive influence in the educational sphere. The main advantage mentioned is the absence of shame or inhibition—they feel free to ask as many questions as needed without fear of judgment. All respondents describe ChatGPT as a complement to the teacher, an assistant that replaces human interaction, yet remains accessible from anywhere.

They state that they no longer feel the stress of not understanding the material during in-person lectures. All respondents noted that artificial intelligence often feels human-like, and they frequently use phrases such as "please" and "thank you" in their conversations with ChatGPT, as they feel understood in a space free from pressure or criticism.

„There are things I don't understand during university courses, and AI has explained to me step by step what needs to be done. After the class is over, the information tends to be forgotten. AI acts more like an assistant. For example, I also save time when I use it. I have the main ideas, and it develops them for me—I just read through them, and the time required is cut in half." (R7)

However, some respondents expressed dissatisfaction, stating that summaries or responses are often too brief and require additional explanation. Distance learning students noted that AI is effective for short-term understanding, but for long-term retention and comprehension, reading, using academic resources, and creating personal summaries are essential.

Full-time students who also hold part-time jobs appreciate the usefulness of artificial intelligence, as it frees them from the obligation to attend every class. With the help of AI, they can access additional explanations in their own environment, on their own time.

„In terms of education, I think it helps me understand better. It's useful if you want to absorb the material more quickly. The downside is that it helps you in the moment, but it's not enough—you can't rely on it alone to truly learn." (R10)

All respondents were asked whether artificial intelligence could potentially replace the teaching profession in the future. All students unanimously agreed that no profession involving human interaction and emotional involvement can be fully replaced by AI. They emphasized that teachers are living, human beings who offer real interaction and exercise both critical and subjective judgment. Artificial intelligence is seen solely as an assistant, a support tool, not as a substitute for the teaching profession. Respondents noted that, due to their professional training, teachers offer more than just information—they provide emotional support, humor, and adaptability tailored to the specific needs of students.

„No one can replace the social worker or the teacher. If a student is experiencing a negative emotional state, the teacher can be there to support and encourage them." (R3)

The comparison between teachers and artificial intelligence was made by all participants, and the unanimous conclusion was that ChatGPT lacks empathy and real emotional presence; it is synthetic and objective. The most appreciated characteristic of a teacher is their ability to provide specificity. Teachers can personalize their discourse according to the emotional and educational needs of their students.

„From a teacher, I need full involvement, including emotional support. A social worker cannot be replaced by anyone—it is a profession that requires listening, empathy, and emotional engagement in order to build trust. A robot cannot provide help on an emotional level; everything would be mechanical and schematic." (R4)

The teaching profession was consistently compared to that of the social worker, with identical conclusions: ChatGPT cannot understand or replicate emotional nuance, as it functions only as an informant and educational support tool. Only one respondent mentioned that AI could potentially replace the teacher in very specific contexts—namely, when students suffer from chronic anxiety, shyness, or are extremely emotionally sensitive. In such cases, ChatGPT may yield more effective results than a human educator. The majority of respondents stated that AI can be successfully integrated—sometimes even entirely—in rigid and technical fields where human interaction is minimal or absent, such as IT, robotics, or industrial manufacturing, where work is conducted with materials rather than people.

„I don't believe that the profession of teacher or social worker can be replaced. If that were to happen, there would be no more human connections, no communication—only AI on its own. I think an AI teacher might be helpful for people who are emotionally sensitive or struggle with anxiety." (R15)

The participants in the study were asked whether they had ever experienced adverse effects as a result of using artificial intelligence. The majority of respondents reported going through short periods in which they lost their autonomy in managing educational tasks. They noted that they limited their own thinking processes and relied entirely on AI in the short term. After some time, they realized that they no longer had innovative ideas, creativity, or the ability to express themselves authentically, and they felt manipulated and misled.

„I often felt that I was no longer learning—I had lost my own thoughts and ideas, constantly turning to artificial intelligence. Eventually, I realized that this was not a good approach." (R5)

In retrospect, about half of the respondents experienced a sense of cognitive detachment following long-term use of AI. Distance learning students were the first to become aware of these negative effects and took a break from using AI, redirecting their focus toward reading, writing, and developing their own ideas. Full-time students began to notice the drawbacks of AI usage during examination sessions, where they realized they couldn't recall key information discussed in class. This was largely due to a reliance on AI for supplementary explanations, which led to decreased attention during lectures. A few students mentioned that they reduced their use of ChatGPT after receiving lower grades, as the information provided by the tool was occasionally inaccurate.

„I was constantly influenced by AI, relying on it non-stop. Eventually, I stopped and realized that it cannot help me in real life— AI can't take exams for me. I understood that it should only be used when necessary, in a controlled way." (R9)

The profession of social work in the digital era was also addressed. Students stated that artificial intelligence can become a simple tool for the social worker. The social worker is defined by their specific human intervention, including verbal, non-verbal, and paraverbal communication.

Most respondents believe that bureaucracy could be reduced if social workers integrated artificial intelligence into their professional practice. In this context, AI can serve as an effective tool for handling technical tasks such as: summarizing legislation, accessing specialized terminology, translation, structuring intervention plans, and searching

for potential solutions. All respondents agree that while artificial intelligence may be highly effective in managing documentation, it can never replace the direct interaction with beneficiaries.

„As a social worker, it is essential to establish human contact, to be seen as a real person. AI is quite intelligent, but it cannot offer the human aspects. For example, if I share how I feel, it may show limited empathy—it can help you know yourself better, and it acts like a good friend you can confide in, because it's discreet. In social work, it might help by providing faster responses, but it's crucial that you already have solid knowledge. Otherwise, it can mislead you, and you won't be able to distinguish truth from error." (R16)

In addition, students identified potential risks, such as the possibility that social workers might reject supervision and rely solely on AI-generated advice, potentially avoiding collaboration with the multidisciplinary team. Looking to the future, students envision the implementation of messaging-type applications that would allow anxious, fearful, or introverted beneficiaries to communicate directly with social workers—much like students currently interact with ChatGPT.

„In the future, artificial intelligence may assist the social work profession because people find it easier to communicate through messages rather than face-to-face. It becomes more comfortable for them to open up this way, without experiencing emotional barriers." (R6)

The study participants were asked about the necessity of academic training on the use of artificial intelligence. The majority of respondents stated that such training would be welcome, as many students believe it is ethical to use artificial intelligence entirely for academic tasks. Thus, respondents expressed the need for a guide to using AI ethically and responsibly in the academic environment. A small proportion of respondents, however, considered it a completely wrong idea to offer such training to students, arguing that it would dramatically increase the number of students relying on artificial intelligence in their educational processes. From this perspective, universities should avoid encouraging the use of AI, so that students do not become dependent on this type of search engine. Overall, the opinions on this issue remain divided.

„I don't necessarily see a need for it; we might no longer be able to control the way students learn directly. There is a risk they might rely on it excessively. The advantage would be that they use it for their benefit, but the downside is that they may stop learning altogether and deceive themselves." (R2)

Another point of the interview guide focused on the concerns and advantages experienced by students from the Department of Social Work regarding the use of artificial intelligence. The responses were complex, reflecting polarized opinions. Many of the study participants stated that schematic planning and organizing ideas in a logical way are the main advantages offered by this technology. Moreover, artificial intelligence serves as a pillar in avoiding uncomfortable or embarrassing questions that students might otherwise need to address to teaching staff.

Many students mentioned that artificial intelligence has become part of their daily lives and routines, being a useful tool to save time.As for the main concerns expressed by the respondents, these are related to the increasing passivity in thinking or expressing their own ideas, the potential errors generated by AI that are not subsequently verified from other sources, and the fear of job loss and professional replacement by robots.

„I like artificial intelligence because it helps me structure my outlines very clearly—I don't forget them, it organizes and details them well, and then I use them as a guide and know exactly what I need to write. This way, I can organize my ideas better." (R3)

The respondents also expressed their views on how university teaching staff should relate to artificial intelligence (AI) in the educational process. Participants believe that teachers' attitudes often shape students' own perspectives on the use of AI. The main perception among respondents is that students should not be restricted or punished by teachers if they choose to use AI alongside their own ideas.

„Professors should be understanding, especially considering that many students come from disadvantaged backgrounds and may lack a well-developed academic vocabulary. In such cases, ChatGPT can serve as a supportive tool—not by completing assignments for students, but by helping them improve their language and vocabulary, thus enabling them to express their ideas more effectively in an academic context." (R3)

Respondents emphasized the need for a practical, ethical, and useful guide to help them use AI correctly—more than the need for limitations or supervision. Half of the participants observed a rigid attitude from teaching staff toward AI and argued that instilling fear is not an appropriate solution. They also believe that in the digital age, it is entirely wrong to limit or even prohibit the use of technology.

The main long-term solution proposed by students is communication. They consider that human interaction, open dialogue,

and receptiveness to solutions are far more effective and sustainable approaches than implementing bans. Ultimately, students believe that teachers themselves need training to better understand how AI works, along with a transition period to adapt to the changes currently transforming education in Romania.

„Professors should explain to students the boundaries and limitations associated with the use of artificial intelligence, and they should acknowledge the current realities rather than impose absolute restrictions. I believe AI is a highly useful tool when employed within reasonable limits and in an ethical manner." (R11)

The final part of the interview focused on the ethical and responsible use of artificial intelligence. Students noted that, over time, the learning process tends to decline and become devalued, as attention shifts toward using AI to complete projects more quickly. The majority of participants in the study believe that future professionals, regardless of their field, require practical skills, critical thinking, personal reflection, and analytical capacity in order to achieve high performance.

Moreover, several students emphasized the connection between social work and emotional intelligence—an aspect that artificial intelligence cannot master or transmit—thus failing to contribute meaningfully to the formation of specialists capable of intervening in crisis situations.

„Employers would see that these students lack competencies and knowledge because they did not become emotionally involved. With artificial intelligence, you do not train your empathy." (R2)

Over time, all respondents agreed that language, terminology, and vocabulary used in direct interaction will suffer. While AI can provide technical and professional expressions, without sustained learning and repeated practice, these cannot be effectively assimilated or applied in face-to-face communication.

„The vocabulary of students who rely solely on artificial intelligence becomes virtually nonexistent, as all their projects have been generated by ChatGPT. When they are required to deliver a speech or communicate with a beneficiary, they are unable to understand or express themselves effectively due to an underdeveloped vocabulary." (R3)

In the context of digitalization, respondents consider that the skills, techniques, and aptitudes of new employees will increasingly decline, as excessive reliance on AI leads to a significant reduction in hands-on practice. Consequently, students who focus solely on task completion through AI support will experience visible shortcomings in

their professional practice, having failed to acquire solid professional competencies during their academic training.

One respondent argued that the daily use of AI affects both cognitive functioning and mental health, as it leads to the loss of valuable moments for learning and personal development. Furthermore, respondents stated that graduates who made extensive use of AI ultimately devalued themselves as individuals, as well as the profession and vocation they had chosen. Overall, students perceive that artificial intelligence—specifically, tools such as ChatGPT—should serve as a support instrument rather than a substitute for genuine learning and intellectual engagement.

„I do not believe one can complete their studies without actually learning. The risks are that such a student, once a professional, would be unable to truly support their beneficiaries and would be highly disoriented." (R6)

Some respondents stated that when artificial intelligence is used entirely for projects and academic tasks, it becomes abusive both for the individual and for the academic environment. When a student relies fully on artificial intelligence, they become unable to filter information through their own thinking.

„I would encourage them to use artificial intelligence because it can help develop their vocabulary, but not for assignments and projects—clear boundaries are needed in those cases, as we need to rely on our own ideas." (R10)

The final question addressed to the respondents focused on the recommendations they would offer regarding the use of artificial intelligence in the educational process. The majority support a conscious and responsible use of AI within the academic environment. They also believe that professional development can only occur through individual effort and sustained study. Respondents emphasized that motivation is significantly stronger when achievements result from one's own work. Additionally, they stated that if they were in the role of the professor, they would support a limited use of artificial intelligence. They also affirmed that the role of the educator should be one of support, guidance, and mentorship—not surveillance.

„The final outcome must be your own. Relying solely on content generated by others prevents genuine cognitive engagement and long-term retention. In the future, you may find yourself overwhelmed with questions simply because you failed to pay attention to what was taught at the time." (R14)

In conclusion, artificial intelligence is a topic of interest for both professors and students, and its use in the academic environment represents an ongoing challenge.

Conclusions

The first research question relates to the perceptions of first-year students from the Department of Social Work regarding the integration of artificial intelligence into the educational process. The research findings indicate that the majority of respondents are aware of the importance of maintaining ethical standards in education and research. Therefore, students believe that they should not be restricted by lecturers, but rather guided and empowered to use artificial intelligence—particularly the CHATGPT tool—in an ethical manner. Furthermore, respondents acknowledge that some students rely entirely on artificial intelligence; however, these individuals will lack, in the future, the skills, competences, and knowledge required to practice in such a complex field as social work. Additionally, students discussed aspects related to the importance of critical thinking and personal reflection within the learning process. All respondents perceive artificial intelligence primarily as an assistant—a support tool for word replacement, paraphrasing, and synonym generation—and state that the CHATGPT tool helps them communicate more effectively and refine their colloquial language, transforming it into an academic and professional discourse.

The second research question focuses on the implications that artificial intelligence may have for the teaching profession and the social work profession. The respondents indicated that in the teaching profession, artificial intelligence can be used to assist with structuring course content, capturing students' attention, and providing additional explanations. However, the role of the teacher remains essential, particularly for establishing an authentic emotional connection, understanding students' emotional states, offering empathy and support for challenges they encounter, and alleviating tension through the use of verbal, non-verbal, and paraverbal communication. Therefore, respondents perceive artificial intelligence as an assistant rather than a replacement for the teaching profession. Some students also believe that artificial intelligence can help more introverted students to ask questions more easily, without fear of being judged or scrutinized.

Regarding the implications of artificial intelligence for the social work profession, all respondents stated that the social worker cannot be replaced, as practical fieldwork, social investigations, personalized intervention plans, and direct communication with beneficiaries cannot

be substituted—since artificial intelligence lacks the human spirit and empathy. Moreover, respondents believe that students who excessively rely on artificial intelligence during their studies will be unable to practice effectively, as they will not possess the necessary skills and knowledge to succeed as social workers. In this regard, the only appropriate approach is for the human social worker to use the CHATGPT tool merely as a source of information and to request certain objective viewpoints, but under the condition that all information be verified through reliable sources to ensure validity and credibility.

In conclusion, the students from the Department of Social Work confirm that artificial intelligence, in the digital era, has significant implications both in the academic and educational spheres, as well as in social work studies and practice. The students' perception is critical, ethical, and responsible: artificial intelligence—specifically the CHATGPT tool—is viewed as an aid and support for professionals, regardless of their field of activity, rather than as a total replacement. Moreover, students acknowledge the real implications and the assistance that artificial intelligence provides to students, teachers, social workers, and other professionals alike; however, they believe that its use should be governed by clear and precise boundaries.

References

Ardelean, T., & Veres, E. (2023). Students Perceptions of Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education. SWS International Scientific Conference on Social Sciences, 10, 1-11.

Asakura, K., Occhiuto, K., Todd, S., Leithead, C., & Clapperton, R. (2020). A call to action on artificial intelligence and social work education: Lessons learned from a simulation project using natural language processing. Journal of Teaching in Social Work, 40, 501–518. https://doi.org/10.1080/08841233.2020.1813234

Diez, E. R. (2023). Artificial Intelligence and Social Work: Contributions to an Ethical Artificial Intelligence at the Service of People. The Routledge international handbook of digital social work, 368-381. Routledge.

Gillingham, P. (2019). Can predictive algorithms assist decision-making in social work with children and families?. Child abuse review, 28(2), 114-126. https://doi.org/10.1002/car.2547

Goian, C. (2020). A comparative analysis between the perceptions and attitudes of students in two high schools with different status

regarding the phenomenon of bullying in schools. Educația Plus, 26(1), 308-325. https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=853085

Goian, C. (2010). Ten categories of semantic inconsequentialities in the Romanian social work language. Revista de asistenta sociala [Social Work Review], 1, 79-90.

Goian, C. (2013). The success of the social work apparatus in the Banat region. Analele Ştiinţifice ale Universităţii Alexandru Ioan Cuza din Iaşi. Sociologie şi Asistenţă Socială [Scientific Annals of Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi. Sociology and Social Work], 6(2), 31-39. https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=21331

Goldkind, L. (2021). Social work and artificial intelligence: Into the matrix. Social Work, 66(4), 372-374. https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/swab028

Grządzielewska, M. (2021). Using machine learning in burnout prediction: A survey. Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal, 38(2), 175-180. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10560-020-00733-w

Han, B., Nawaz, S., Buchanan, G., & McKay, D. (2025). Students' Perceptions: Exploring the Interplay of Ethical and Pedagogical Impacts for Adopting AI in Higher Education. International Journal of Artificial Intelligence in Education, 1-26. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s40593-024-00456-4

Owoc, M. L., Sawicka, A., & Weichbroth, P. (2019, August). Artificial intelligence technologies in education: benefits, challenges and strategies of implementation. IFIP international workshop on artificial intelligence for knowledge management, 37-58. Cham: Springer International Publishing. https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-85001-2_4

Pitts, G., Marcus, V., & Motamedi, S. (2025). Student Perspectives on the Benefits and Risks of AI in Education. https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2505.02198

Reamer, F. G. (2023). Artificial intelligence in social work: Emerging ethical issues. International Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics, 20(2), 52-71. https://doi.org/10.55521/10-020-205

Rowland, A. A., Dounas-Frazer, D. R., Ríos, L., Lewandowski, H. J., & Corwin, L. A. (2019). Using the life grid interview technique in STEM education research. International Journal of STEM Education, 6, 1-13.https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s40594-019-0186-z

Sidiropoulos, D., & Anagnostopoulos, C. N. (2024). Applications, challenges and ethical issues of AI and ChatGPT in education. https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2402.07907

Tambe, M., & Rice, E. (Eds.). (2018). Artificial intelligence and social work. Cambridge University Press.

Toros, K., Falch-Eriksen, A., Lehtme, R., Saia, K., McInnes, A., Soppitt, S., ... & Walker, S. (2023). The Digital Turn in Social Work Education and Practice. Conference on Smart Learning Ecosystems and Regional Development, 167-183. Springer, Singapore. https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-981-99-5540-4_10

Walter, Y. (2024). Embracing the future of Artificial Intelligence in the classroom: the relevance of AI literacy, prompt engineering, and critical thinking in modern education. International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education, 21(1), 15. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s41239-024-00448-3