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Preface

The 14th International Conference on Information and Education Technology (ICIET 2026) was held in Koriyama, Japan, from April 17 to 19, 2026. It was co-sponsored by Nihon University and IEEE, co-hosted by Shonan Institute of Technology, Okayama University, Japan, etc.

Since its inauguration, ICIET has maintained a steady and healthy development momentum, with successful editions held in Tokyo (2017), Osaka (2018), Aizu (2019), a virtual format (2020), Okayama (2021), Matsue (2022), Fujisawa (2023), Yamaguchi (2024), and Fukuyama (2025). Obviously, this conference maintains a good momentum of steady development these years. Since its inception, ICIET has consistently invited renowned experts to deliver keynote and plenary speeches focusing on cutting-edge topics in information and education technology. The core objective of the conference is to bring together leading researchers, experts, and scholars worldwide to share their latest research findings, exchange insights, and address critical open issues in the field of information and education technology.

The proceedings of ICIET 2026 compile over 130 full papers, covering a broad spectrum of research areas in information and education technology, including but not limited to: Generative AI in Teaching and Learning: Applications and Content Creation; Intelligent Tutoring Systems and Human-AI Collaborative Learning; Learning Analytics and Educational Data Mining, Natural Language Processing and Computer Vision in Education; Immersive Technologies and Game-Based Learning in Education; Programming Education and Computational Thinking Development; and Innovative Pedagogical Models and Inclusive Design in Education in the Digital Era.

The high quality of the papers included in these proceedings is attributed to the rigorous peer review process. We sincerely appreciate the peer reviewers for their valuable time and constructive comments, which greatly helped the authors refine their manuscripts. We would like to thank all authors who submitted their research work, as their contributions were fundamental to the success of the conference. As you engage with these proceedings, we encourage you to submit your research proposals to ICIET 2027, which is scheduled to be held in Osaka, Japan, from April 9 to 12, 2027.

Finally, we would like to reiterate our gratitude to all individuals and institutions that contributed to the success of ICIET 2026. May this collection of papers bring new insights and opportunities to researchers, educators, and practitioners worldwide.

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2026 14th International Conference on Information and Education Technology (ICIET 2026)

Table of Contents

Preface	xiv
Conference Committees	xv
Generative AI in Teaching and Learning: Applications and Content Creation	
Enhancing Grammatical Accuracy Through Dynamic Text Enhancement in an English Reading-to-Write Task	1
<i>Koichi Kawamura, Harumi Kashiwagi, Min Kang</i>	
Examining the Influence of Co-Creation Perception in Associative Creation with Generative AI on Memory Consolidation	6
<i>Shunki Tsumagari, Satori Hachisuka, Shin'ichi Warisawa</i>	
Utilizing Generative AI in Foreign Language Education: A Qualitative Study on the Application of the Music-Generation AI 'Suno' for Beginner Japanese Learners	11
<i>Pei-Ling Chien</i>	
Exploring the Impact of AI-generated Feedback on EAP Writing: Writing Performance, Self-Regulation, and AI Literacy	22
<i>Yanqiu Shen, Shuyan He</i>	
Learning Programming with Generative AI: A Pre-University Pilot Study	27
<i>Su-Ting Yong, Li-Yeun Chin, Reginamary Matthews, Bavani Ramayah</i>	
Enhancing Blended Learning through AI-Generated Visuals: A Framework for Hybrid Classroom Integration	32
<i>Ronel F. Ramos, Roman M. De Angel, Alfredo L. Calimbo, Juan Paulo H. Magcuyao</i>	
Transforming Student Assignments through GenAI Innovation in Higher Education	37
<i>Jihye Yoo, Mei Mei Lau, Calvin Cheng, Yuk Chau Aris Lam, Yuri Takaku</i>	
AI-Generated "Participant Video" Showing Teen-Idol for Getting Motivated to Watch Video Lectures	41
<i>Masahiro Ishii</i>	
Integrating Google Gemini Veo 3 for AI-Generated Educational Videos in Blended Learning Environments	47
<i>Roman Madrid De Angel, Ronel F. Ramos, Juan Paulo Hilario Magcuyao, Patricia Jean Bejar Letegio</i>	

Educational Effects of Animated Output and Application-Specific Commands in Programming Classes in the Age of Generative AI	52
<i>Kazunari Ito</i>	
Enhancing Reflective Writing Through Combined AI and Teacher Feedback Using Gibbs' Reflective Cycle	58
<i>Siyun Lin, Wen Yu, Xiaoyang Yang, Peng Chen</i>	
Enhancing Classroom Monitoring in Science Experiments Using Synthetic Videos.....	65
<i>Yufei Li, Edwin Chng, Megani Rajendran, Aik Beng Ng, Yong Leng Kelvin Tan, Simon See</i>	
Intelligent Tutoring Systems and Human-AI Collaborative Learning	
Learning by Teaching: A Teachable AI Bot for Software Development Education	74
<i>Siyuan Du, Jiayang Shi, Dhanya Shah, Damiano Distanto, Larry Heimann, Shihong Huang</i>	
Development of a Prototype Q&A System for University Freshmen Based on Large Language Models	79
<i>Chung-Yi Tu, Ho Wai Yuen, Ko-Fu Wang, An-Ning Lee, Min-Chi Chang</i>	
Scaffolding Learning with AI - Chatbot Support for In-Company Projects.....	84
<i>Shalyn TAN, Mohamed Faiz Mustaqim MOHAMED FOAD, Mervyn Asher JOHN, Azroy SAIYADI</i>	
Learning Motivation and Achievement in AI-Supported Project-Based Learning: A Comparison of a Pedagogical AI Agent and ChatGPT	94
<i>Meng-Wei Lin, Chih-Cheng Hung</i>	
Investigating the Effects of Multi AI Agents on Students' Programming Problem-Solving, Cognitive Load, and Learning Performance	99
<i>Yu-Chen Chiang, Chia-Jung Chang</i>	
Design of a Scalable AI-powered Tutoring System with Adaptive, Error-aware Prompting Built on Automated Programming Assessment.....	104
<i>Li-Wen Lin, Man-Rong Lin, Horng-Chang Yang</i>	
IntelliDSA: An LLM-Enabled Interactive Learning System for Data Structures and Algorithms Education	109
<i>Anh Huynh, Hanh Tran, Duy Nguyen, Chau Vo</i>	
Conversational Agent with Emotional Intelligence for Foreign Language Learning	115
<i>Athanasios Kallipolitis, Dionysios Koulouris, Melina Tziomaka, Kosmas Pinitas, Argyrios Zafeiriou, Andreas Menychtas, Ilias Maglogiannis, Voula Giouli, Athina Sioupi, Stamatia Michalopoulou, George Tsoulouhas, Michail Katras, Panagiotis Charalampopoulos, Aristotelis Stamopoulos</i>	
LATEE: An Intelligent Tutoring System with AI Assistant and Virtual Patients for Clinical Diagnostic Reasoning Training	120
<i>Tu Nguyen, Tan Dang, Duy Nguyen, Chau Vo</i>	
From Tools to Intelligent Learning Partners: AI-Driven Assistants for Personalized Learning in Blended Environments	127
<i>Ngoc Yen Dang</i>	

From Blended Teaching to Human-AI Collaborative Teaching: A New Teaching Form Under the Transformation of Generative Artificial Intelligence Technology..... 134

Tianyu Xu, Jingnan Wang, Aimin Xu

An Ensemble Method for Student Policy Chatbot..... 139

Jeneffer Sabonsolin, Fernando Quiroz Jr., Edison Ralar, Angelo Arguson

Integrating Drones and Virtual Reality to Enhance Problem-Solving and Critical Thinking: Evidence from Remote Australian Schools 144

Farha Sattar, Muhammad Nawaz

Learning Analytics and Educational Data Mining

Learning Analytics and Machine Learning Approaches for Predicting Student Performance 149

Indika Wickramasinghe

A Data-Driven Learning Analytics Framework for Personalized Course Adaptation in Cyber-Physical Educational Systems 154

Nikolaos Nikolakis, Konstantinos Sakkas, Nikolaos Antoniadis

Open University Learning Analytics Using Machine Learning Algorithms: A KDD-Based Approach..... 159

Ace C. Lagman, Joselito O. Carpio, Arvin N. Natividad, Jeneffer A. Sabonsolin

Personalized Learning Activity Recommendations Through Learning Analytics and GPT-4: A Study on Assignment Log Data from Google Classroom 163

Aulia Akhrian Syahidi, Kongkij Voraputhaporn

Interpretable Machine Learning for Academic Risk Detection and Adaptive Support in Education 169

Ibrahim Gashim

Learning Analytics System Using Machine Learning and LLM-Based Report Generation 174

Chung-Yi Tu, Ho Wai Yuen, Chun-Yuan Lin, SHENG CHIH YANG, Ko-Fu Wang

Speech Dynamics in Face-to-Face vs. Online Workshops: A Teamwork Science Perspective 179

Tsuyoshi Aburai

Feature Engineering for Behavioral Analytics: Regression-Based Detection of Tinkering Patterns in C/C++ Learning Environments 183

Elisa V. Malasaga, Angelo C. Arguson, Viremina Christie C. Cariaga, Jameson C. Buhayang

Cognitive-Structure Classification for a Deterministic Error-Generation Simulator 188

Toru Kawamura, Masahiro Ishii

Integrating Hybrid Pre-Processing Strategies to Optimize Classification Algorithm Performance 194

Jeneffer A. Sabonsolin, Jameson Buhayang, Christian I. Cabrera, Edwardo Miguel Roldan, Philip I Doctor, Jaevier A. Villanueva

Intelligent Scoring and Educational Assessment Models

Prompt Engineering for Automated Essay Scoring with Large Language Models: Improving Teacher-Aligned Rubric Scoring of EFL Essays on DREsS 200

Rahaf Alshareef, Maram Meccawy, Halima Samra

Combining Mixture-of-Experts with Large Language Model for Holistic and Analytic Scoring in Japanese Language Essays.....	208
<i>Dyah Lalita Luhurkinanti, Takashi Tsunakawa, Prima Dewi Purnamasari, Anak Agung Putri Ratna</i>	
Beyond Accuracy: A Multi-Dimensional Evaluation of AI Models Using the Portuguese Secondary School Math Performance Dataset.....	214
<i>Sachini Gunasekara, Mirka Saarela</i>	
AI for Assessment in Art Education: Using NLP for Analyzing Thai Reflective Writing	219
<i>Suphitcha Chanrueang, Sirathan Chanrueang, Pichaya Sookplung</i>	
Comparing Human and LLM in Evaluating Social Aspect of Mathematical Word Problems.....	224
<i>Ika Qutsiati Utami, Wu-Yuin Hwang</i>	
Estimating Break Necessity during VDT Tasks in Educational Settings	229
<i>Ryota Ochi</i>	
Hierarchical Bayesian Model Based on the Structure of Item Response Theory for Training Evaluation Data with Multiple Evaluation Items	235
<i>Ryota Kozakai</i>	
Automated Assessment System Based on Large Multimodal Models for Clinical Reasoning Evaluation of Surgical Resident	240
<i>Ming-Ching Lee, Yu-Wei Chou, Tsoi-Na Fung, Jin-Fa Lin</i>	
Natural Language Processing and Computer Vision in Education	
Library Seat Hogging Detection Using Hybrid Real and AI-Generated Data	245
<i>Natchanon Viwatanawanakarn, Nagul Cooharajanane, Veera Muangsin, Pin Pin Tea-makorn, Kanokwan Atchariyachanvanich</i>	
A Multi-Stage Deep Learning and Computer Vision Framework for Robust Child Identification in Kindergarten.....	251
<i>Tiya Bisla, Ritik Shukla, Yui Kataoka, Keisuke Teramoto, Md. Rahatul Islam, Keiichi Horio</i>	
NLP-Based Mapping of Adversity Quotient and Bloom's Taxonomy in Higher Education	258
<i>Jyoti Mudkanna Gavhane, Reena Pagare</i>	
Examining Students' Fatigue-Related Narratives on AI Chatbot Use: An Affinity Propagation-Based Text Mining Approach.....	265
<i>John Paul P. Miranda, Marcial Bonnie M. Salac, Walter Boltron, Jovita G. Rivera, Mark Anthony A. Castro, Emmanuel B. Parreño, Christian S. Mallari</i>	
Authorship Analysis in the Age of AI: From Expert Reasoning to Multi-Agent Pipelines.....	271
<i>John Blake</i>	
Stress-Aware Feedback Generation with LLMs: Evaluating Linguistic and Affective Alignment from a Simulated Dataset of Student Stress Responses.....	276
<i>Aulia Akhrian Syahidi</i>	

Structural Alignment and Semantic Divergence in Culturally Configured AI Evaluation of Scientific Titles Using BERT and QAP Network Analysis	282
<i>Li Xiangming, Wei Wei</i>	
Enhancing Sentiment Prediction in Multilingual and Code-Mixed Filipino Faculty Evaluations using Transformer-based Architectures	287
<i>Kent Levi A. Bonifacio, Alfio I. Regla</i>	
Deductive Reasoning Paths in Solving Graphical IGCSE Problems: A Comparative Analysis of ChatGPT's Algebraic and Visual Inference Strategies.....	293
<i>Yukari Shirota, Basabi Chakraborty, Anna Kuwana, Hiroaki Ohshima</i>	
Breaking Language Barriers with AI: Transforming Academic Writing in Higher Education.....	298
<i>Yazilmiwati Yaacob, Rozaini Ahmad, Nur Izzati Mustamam, Muhamad Safwan Mohd A'seri, Malissa Maria Mahmud</i>	
Machine Learning Algorithms for Prediction and Sentiment Classification for Graduate Tracer Data: A KDD Methodology Comparative Study	302
<i>Ace C. Lagman, Jeneffer A. Sabonsolin, Jonelle Angelo S. Cenita, Kirk Alvin S. Awat</i>	
Revisiting K-12 Education through the Lens of General System Theory: A Systematic Review of Image Recognition Technologies in Education (IRTED).....	310
<i>Fenglin JIA, Anthony Kong</i>	
Design, Development, and Evaluation of Innovative Educational Platforms	
Cloud-Integrated Enhancements of Answer Interface for Programming Learning Assistant System.....	315
<i>Huiyu Qi, Zhikang Li, Nobuo Funabiki, Htoo Htoo Sandi Kyaw, Wen-chung Kao, Yi-Fang Lee</i>	
STAN: Self-Training Assistance of Nonprofit for Cloud Computing.....	322
<i>Huai-Sheng Huang, Ching-Yao Lin, Shih-Teng Ma, Zih-Yi Yang</i>	
CIVICA: A Citation-Grounded Retrieval-Augmented System for Consumer Law.....	327
<i>Chirag C Shekar, Mansi D, Arushi K, Bhargav B.G, Nithin V Pujari</i>	
Developing a Proof-of-Concept Automarker for Handwritten Mathematics Assessments	333
<i>Ntsako Morotha Mahlaola, Mogamat Yaaseen Martin</i>	
Implementation and Benefits of a Remote Access-Based Physical PLC Laboratory to Increase the Flexibility and Intensity of Vocational Higher Education Students' Practice	339
<i>Petrus Sutyasadi</i>	
Development of GeoLab Desktop: Geotechnical Analysis in Civil Engineering Education and Practice ...	343
<i>Julia Bien Florencio, Quennie Mae Estrella, Jhamil G. Gutierrez, Robert Kristoper R. Gina</i>	
Optimization of Children's Blended Learning Service System: A Data-Driven Approach Integrating AHP and HCD	348
<i>Songhua Guo, Di Zhang</i>	

Determining the Impact of Online Meeting and Collaboration Platforms: A Comparative Analysis of Students, Professionals, and Employees Preference of Collaboration Tools in the Philippines using AHP-TOPSIS	353
--	-----

Rianina D. Borres, Robin Gabriel R. Reyes, Ram Aron D. Banal, Carlos Enrique V. Atamirano, Christian Elie D. Talag, Luke John J. Alindogan, John R. Ordoño

StructEase: An Interactive Visualization Platform for Enhancing Structural Analysis Learning in Civil Engineering	358
---	-----

Quennie Mae Estrella, Julia Bien Florencio, John Briones

An AI-Based Digital Platform for Sustainable Livestock Lifecycle Management.....	363
--	-----

Dinargul Mukhammejanova, Anel Aidos, Dina Koishiyeva, Murat Nauryzbayev, Jeong Won Kang, Assel Mukasheva

Immersive Technologies and Game-Based Learning in Education

Immersive VR-Based Mindful Walking for Student Wellbeing in Higher Education: Psychological Outcomes and Experiential Qualities.....	368
--	-----

Mengru Liu, Anthony Kong, Yuting Lang, Ziyang Cai

Design and Validation of a Gamified Mobile Simulator (GMS) for Global Warming Education: A Learning Facilitator Supporting SDG 17	373
---	-----

Fatma Sukmawati, Analiza B. Tanghal, Novelina Andika Kusuma, Jovita Ridhani

Engage, Don't Overwhelm: A BOPPPS & 6E Framework for Scaffolding AIGC and XR in Interdisciplinary Design Education	379
--	-----

Che-Yu Hsu

3D Holographic Visualization for Electromagnetism Education and Research Applications.....	384
--	-----

Shivam J Kalloli, S D Yukthi Shree, Ananya Devraj, Erin Michelle M, Susmita Deb

Integrating Digital and Physical Learning: The Development of 'Tax Tycoon' for Tax Education in Middle School Students	389
--	-----

Nurazizah, Watcharee Ketpichainarong, Sooppawat Thipparat, Wararat Wongkia

Augmented Reality for Advancing Reflective Learning in Architectural Education: A Site-Specific Design-Build Approach.....	394
--	-----

Mona Azadian, Gergely Csikvari, Yang Song

Fact-Check-Game for Cognitive Defense: Log-Based Evidence and Pedagogical Design Implications for AI-Age Information Literacy	399
---	-----

Hiroko Kanoh

A VR-Game Framework for Educational Heritage Tourism: A Case Study of Historic Jeddah (Beit Nassif)	404
---	-----

Rahaf Alharbi, Maram Meccawy, Doaa Sinnari

Evaluating a Simulation-Based Digital Environment for Distance Science Learning: Impact on Student Outcomes, Engagement, and Self-Regulated Learning	409
--	-----

Jovita Ridhani, Fatma Sukmawati

Supporting low-performing Learners through the Augmented Reality Sandbox (ARS): Enhancing Spatial Thinking in Geography Education	415
---	-----

Muhammad Nawaz, Farha Sattar

Technology-Enhanced Language Learning and Cross-Cultural Education

Social Media Use and Speaking Self-Assessment in EFL Speaking Classrooms	420
--	-----

Novalina Sembiring, Margana, Jamilah

Digital Narrative to Strengthen Interculturality in Early Childhood	426
---	-----

Cristián Londoño-Proañó, Jeanneth Caroline Galarza-G

A Study on the Impact of DeepSeek on the Foreign Language Writing Behavior and Emotions of Rural Secondary School Students in China's Ethnic Minority Regions	431
---	-----

Zhao Li

Designing Game Mechanics to Mask Repetitive Handwriting Practice: A Design-Based Research Study with Thai CFL Learners.....	436
---	-----

Qiyuan He, Jirapipat Thanyaphongphat

The Use of Learning Management System in Self-Paced Learning with Process Writing to Enhance Creative English Writing Skills and Learner Autonomy for upper secondary students.....	441
---	-----

Butchanan Monthian, Angkana Onthanee

Tailored LMS-Ukiuki Tadoku Website on Japanese Reading Learning: Exploring the Impact on Instruction, Learner Engagement, and Enjoyment.....	446
--	-----

Desak Made Sri Mardani, Endang Nurhayati, Wening Sahayu

Resilience in English Oral Proficiency: Language Anxiety, Self Efficacy, and AI-Assisted CEFR Assessment in a Mixed-Methods Study of Filipino College Students	452
--	-----

Merry Jaine M. Liwanag, Krizel Joanne F. Escala, Larry F. Fronda Jr., Mark Anthony D. Elepaño, Clarisa M. Allic, Jiselle D. Umali

The Impact of AI-Assisted Learning on Non-Native Graduate Students in Overseas Study Programs: A Qualitative Analysis of Learning Anxiety, Classroom Interaction, and Knowledge Construction.....	457
---	-----

Shing Tsy Wei

Exploring Changes in EFL Learners' Epistemic Curiosity and Reading Anxiety through AI-Assisted Summarization in Extensive Reading	469
---	-----

Chia-Yu Cho, Chiung-Hui Chiu, Chih-Chao Hsu, Ya-Fang Tsao

Good Practices in Communication, Pedagogy, and Technology for International Student Success	474
---	-----

Markus Westner

Digital Transformation in Medical and Health Education

Causal Effects of Data Science and AI Education for Students in Healthcare Fields	479
---	-----

Tomoko Nagai

The Impact of an AI-Resume Integrated Flipped Learning (AIR-FL) Approach on Vocational Nursing Students' Career Awareness: A Quasi-Experimental Study.....	484
--	-----

Yongqiao Li, Wenbin Liang, Junjie Gavin Wu

Bridging the Gap in AI Healthcare Education: Enhancing Student Engagement and Communication Skills through Interactive Learning and Virtual Reality 490

Gholamreza Rafiee, Stephen McKeever, Matthew Collins, Aidan McGowan

Acceptance of AI Tools for Clinical Case Writing in Nursing Education: A TAM3-Based Analysis..... 496

Rhiziel P. Manalese, Rodel T. Alimurong, Christian S. Mallari, Rosemarie M. Luciano, Rosarina L. David, John Paul P. Miranda

Quantifying Model Uncertainty in Fine-Grained Image Classification for Veterinary Training Applications 501

Dina Koishiyeva, Anel Aidos, Dinargul Mukhammejanova, Assel Mukasheva, Jeong Won Kang

Development of a Low-Cost Motion Visualization System for Gait Training: Enhancing Running Symmetry through Lissajous-based Feedback..... 506

Seita Takemae, Kazuyuki Kojima

Profile, Usage Patterns, and Purposes of a Ubiquitous Fitness Tracking Application for Everyday Exercise Among Filipino Undergraduates511

Vanessa B. Sibug, Emerson Q. Fernando, Walter Boltron, Jumel C. Miller, Joel B. Quiambao, John Paul P. Miranda

Programming Education and Computational Thinking Development

Enhancing Object-Oriented Programming Education Through Visual and Interactive Learning: A Case Study of the CodeTheory Platform 515

Danijel Kučak, Daniel Bele, Antonela Abičić

Statement-level Evaluation of C Programs with Tree Edit Distance on Normalized AST 520

Wataru Tatsukawa, Toshifusa Sekizawa

A Game Design Approach to x86 Assembly Instruction: Engineering an Intrinsically Integrated Educational Video Game Using Interactive Visual Metaphors 525

Ernesto Rivera-Alvarado, Saúl Guadamuz

Vibe-coding Interactive Teaching Tools: Narrowing the AI-Literacy Gap for Non-Technology Educators... 530

Evelyn Eika, Frode Eika Sandnes

A Multi-Layered Scaffolding Model for Creative Coding Education in Non-IT Art Students 535

He-Lin Luo, Pei-Ying Lin, Ting-Yu Lin

Assessing the Grasp of Java Programming Fundamentals Across Strands using Bayesian Hierarchical Regression 540

Madilaine Claire B. Nacianceno, Joanafel M. Mateo, Aileen P. De Leon, Myka A. Cruz, Aaron John C. Alegre, Jorelle P. Jarabelo, Carl Joseph R. David, Jonh Ray B. Medina

Digital Practices in Engineering and Vocational Education

Biometric Recognition Systems for Evaluating Learning Quality in Engineering Courses: Comparing Physical and Digital Twin Laboratories 546

David Sotelo, Carlos Sotelo, Adara Pulido-Sánchez, Sergio Noé Torres-Rodríguez, Jessica Alejandra Ruiz-Ramírez

Cybersecurity Clinic: A Framework for Competency-Based Education	551
<i>Mousumi Munmun, Sena Hounsinnou, Faisal Kaleem, Kyle Swanson</i>	
AI-Assisted Scaffolding in a Project-Based High School Engineering Course.....	557
<i>Emiliano Castorena-Solache, Iyari Alejandro Nava-Téllez, José Antonio Fuentes-Gómez</i>	
E-Learning Adoption and Learning Effectiveness in E-Vehicle Education: An Extended Technology Acceptance Model Tested Using PLS-SEM.....	562
<i>June Raymond L. Mariano, Zachariah John A. Belmonte, Rexmelle F. Decapia Jr., Edison M. Esberto, Enrico M. Tungcul, Ma. Mikaella P. Delfin, Coleen A. Tugna, Israel A. Santos</i>	
Investigating the Washback Effect on Generative AI Strategies: Insights from Engineering Students	567
<i>Troels Peter Mourits Jensen, Per Bakgaard, Pernille Rattleff, Md Saifuddin Khalid</i>	
Factors Affecting Faculty Adoption of E-Vehicle E-Learning Modules for Classroom–Laboratory Integration in Government-Owned Higher Education Institutions: A PLS-SEM Approach	572
<i>Rexmelle F. Decapia Jr., Zachariah John A. Belmonte, June Raymond L. Mariano, Edison M. Esberto, Enrico M. Tungcul, Ma. Mikaella P. Delfin, Coleen A. Tugna, Israel A. Santos</i>	
“Not a Replacement, but a Companion”: The Paradigm Shift in AI-Assisted Learning Among Engineering Students in Bangladesh.....	577
<i>Marufa Akter, Aresha Basir Spriha, Sayma Islam, Nowreen Jahan, Nasheetat Zainah Rahman, Shifat E. Arman, Lafifa Jamal</i>	
Learner Perspectives on Generative AI: Acceptance, Perception, and Cognitive Experience	
The Potential of Generative AI in Supporting Learning.....	584
<i>Nur Izzati Mustamam, Yazilmiwati Yaacob, Rozaini Ahmad, Muhamad Safwan Mohd A’seri, Malissa Maria Mahmud</i>	
Role of Social Influence and Perceived Credibility in Students’ Use of ChatGPT for Learning.....	589
<i>Marjorie S. Villa, Molina G. Rizo, Jeruel B. Canceran, Elaine B. Bolambot, Ben Oliver D. Tutor, Girlie P. Pineda</i>	
Students’ Perceptions of Generative AI Use in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education.....	594
<i>Rozaini Ahmad, Yazilmiwati Yaacob, Muhamad Safwan Mohd A’seri, Nur Izzati Mustamam, Malissa Maria Mahmud</i>	
<i>Isn’t this considered plagiarism?: Perceived Risks and Anxiety of Filipino College Students in Using ChatGPT</i>	<i>599</i>
<i>Josielyne P. Gervacio-Ortiz, Samson G. Melitante, Ronald P. Eusebio Jr., Michael C. Zamora, Princess Nickole B. Alviola, Ralf John T. Jardenaso, Ben Oliver D. Tutor</i>	
Language Models in Education: Students Opinion on Opportunities and Obstacles.....	604
<i>Ioannis Patias, Plamen Totev</i>	
Latent Profiles of AI Tool Usage, Cognitive Load, and Fatigue Among Filipino College Students	610
<i>John Paul P. Miranda, Dolores D. Mallari, Mark Anthony A. Castro, Emmanuel B. Parreño, Jovita G. Rivera, Marcial Bonnie M. Salac</i>	

Students Cognitive Engagement Through the Concerns and Applications of Generative AI in Higher Education	615
--	-----

Muhamad Safwan Mohd A'seri, Yazilmiwati Yaacob, Rozaini Ahmad, Nur Izzati Mustamam, Malissa Maria Mahmud

Sustainable Human-AI Synergy in Education: Decoding Student Continuance Through the Beliefs-Action-Outcome Framework.....	620
---	-----

Thai Khang Huynh, Thi Thuy An Ngo, Ngoc Yen Dang, Thanh Chung Pham

Technological Affordances, Social Pressure, and AI Chatbot Reliance in Philippine Higher Education: A Dual-Path Mediation Model	625
---	-----

John Paul P. Miranda, Jovita G. Rivera, Christian N. Pineda, Nicholas D. Alonzo, Alvin B. Roque, Emmanuel B. Parreño, Marcial Bonnie M. Salac

AI Adoption and Literacy in Higher Education

Research on the Influencing Factors of University Teachers' Use of Artificial Intelligence Technology in Teaching.....	631
--	-----

Zhangli Yao, Rui Deng

A Language Teacher in an AI Literacy Course: Bridging Disciplines with Pedagogies	636
---	-----

Qing Wen, Shuyan He, Shuyuan Zhu, Ling Wang

Prompt Literacy in Higher Education: A Systematic Review of Core Components and Assessment Approaches	641
---	-----

Parichart Sisaeng

Challenges in Qualitative Research in Digital Environments	646
--	-----

Philip Ceasar Casulla Villaflo, Christopher Yap Wright, Winnie Werner Galingana

Exploring University Students' AI literacy in Applying AI tools in Learning: a Focus Group Study	652
--	-----

Lam Ngoc Dieu Dang

Personalized Mathematics Learning Determinants: A Systematic Literature Review Based on UTAUT-2 Model	657
---	-----

Mausooma Mohamed, Ahmad Fauzi Mohd Ayub, Maizura Yasin, Nur Raihan Che Nawi

Risks, Ethics, and Governance of Generative AI

RKRGST Mismatching to Detect Contract Cheating and Automated Obfuscation in Academia	665
--	-----

Oscar Karnalim, Sendy Ferdian Sujadi

Mapping Stakeholder Views on Generative AI in Education: A Review of 48 Studies	670
---	-----

Kalpani Vijithasena, Mirka Saarela

A Rapid Iterative Governance Model for Educational Generative AI Policy: Evidence from Japan's Guideline Revision.....	676
--	-----

Hideaki Yoshida, Hiroshi Nagayama, Kohei Nishizuka

Innovative Pedagogical Models and Inclusive Design in Education in the Digital Era

Pedagogical Design and Academic Equity: An Intersectional Learning Analytics Study.....	681
<i>Chukwuemeka Paul Isiwu, Leonard Chukwualuka Nnadi, Yutaka Watanobe</i>	
The Effect of the 5E Cycle Learning Model Assisted by Liveworksheets on Improving Students' Creative Thinking Skills	686
<i>Aprilianata, Frisca Dyan Areza, Budi Mulyono</i>	
Exploring the Differences: Concept Map Reading, Concept Map Construction, and Concept Map Recomposition in a Basic Computer Networking Course	691
<i>Arief Prasetyo, Aryo Pinandito, Tsukasa Hirashima</i>	
From AI Tool to Learning Companion: A Human-Centred Framework for AI-Supported Flipped Social Studies Learning	696
<i>I Nyoman Laba Jayanta, I Wayan Lasmawan, Gede Rasben Dantes, Dewa Bagus Sanjaya</i>	
The Effectiveness of Blended Peer-Tutoring Learning Strategy towards Students' Performance and Problem-Solving Ability among Diploma Students in Learning Mathematics.....	701
<i>Nurul Farhana Jumaat, Fathiyah Jamaludin, Nur Izzati Zainal</i>	
Current State and Characteristics of the Online Learning Support Tools for Western Art Provided by Libraries, Museums, and Art Universities	707
<i>Kanae Suzuki, Suika Saneto</i>	
AI Inclusive co-Design: A RAG-Enhanced Generative AI co-Designer for UDL-Aligned Lesson Planning in Inclusive Classrooms	713
<i>Jaitip Na Songkhla, Thitanat Nasongkhla, Siridej Sujiva</i>	
Designing Adaptive Digital Learning Buddies for Inclusive Vocational Education: Cognitive and Motivational Requirements	717
<i>Jan Spilski, Rebecca Rottinghaus, Jannik Loeber, Monika Heinevetter, Dennis Pusch, Maike Schutzeichel, Birk Thierfelder, Thomas Lachmann</i>	
Community-Based AI Integration in Cultural Heritage Education: Co-Designing a Lesson on the Tiger Sheng Dance of the Yi People with Practitioners and Students.....	725
<i>XiaoYu Zhou, Yi Zhang, Jing Lin</i>	
Scaffolding Piano: An Adaptive Accompaniment System for Informal Learning	732
<i>Satoshi Obata, Hidenori Nakamura, Junichi Ogawa, Manami Mori, Akira Maezawa</i>	
Learning Management Systems as Infrastructure for Educational Leadership: A Bibliometric Analysis	737
<i>Paul Arjanto, Zummy Anselmus Dami, Alfrina Mewengkang, Prisca Diantra Sampe, Vando Kristi Makaruku, Aprilya Christy Lorwens, Missi Yane Lusye Yaky, Feibry Feronika Wiwenly Senduk, Christi Matitaputty</i>	
Enhancing Student Attributes through Digital Technology-Embedded Outdoor Experiential Learning (DITOE): A Preliminary Analysis	745
<i>Seng Tong Chong, Ahmad Zufrie Abd Rahman, Yaw Long Chua, Harwati Hashim, Vasanthan Radhakrishnan</i>	

Implementation and Benefits of a Remote Access-Based Physical PLC Laboratory to Increase the Flexibility and Intensity of Vocational Higher Education Students' Practice

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Abstract—In a vocational program at a higher education institution, lab sessions dominate teaching and learning activities. Ideally, the ratio of students to equipment is 1:1. However, due to the high price of the equipment, the ratio is rarely reached. This leads to rigid schedules and equipment queues. The gap between theoretical understanding and hands-on experience in controlling real hardware poses a significant challenge. This research aims to implement and analyze the benefits of a remote-access-based physical PLC laboratory to increase the flexibility and intensity of student practice. The developed system consists of physical PLC modules integrated with simple I/O modules, remotely accessible via the Internet. The system proves effective in enhancing learning flexibility (24/7 access), the intensity of self-directed practice, and laboratory asset utilization. Furthermore, it bridges the gap between software simulation and hardware reality. It is concluded that a hardware-based remote laboratory is a feasible and effective solution for democratizing access to practical engineering education, serving as a significant enhancer to traditional hands-on learning experiences. Recommendations for future development include adding variety to practical modules and replicating the model for other technical disciplines.

Keywords—remote laboratory; full-time access; flexible learning; e-learning; PLC laboratory

I. INTRODUCTION

Vocational higher education emphasizes practical skills and theoretical understanding. In the Engineering of Mechatronics Technology Department, especially in the Programmable Logic Controllers (PLCs) subject, besides knowing the concept and the theory of the PLCs, students also need to master how to use them practically. In this field of study program, PLC programming competency is very important. More than 70% of manufacturing industries are still using PLCs for their automation. PLCs are industrial standard equipment. Therefore, the price is still considerably high. Looking at those two major facts, access to conventional PLC laboratories often has several problems, such as time and space constraints, a rigid schedule, and student flexibility in using the lab. The number of PLCs in the laboratories is usually limited compared to the number of students. The students should work as a group and reduce the intensity of individual practice. This situation is getting worse during emergencies, such as pandemics, which demand robust,

ubiquitous, and practical learning solutions. Simulation-Hardware Gap: Simulator software (such as TIA Portal), while valuable for logic learning, does not provide real-world experience in handling the electrical characteristics, noise, and dynamic behaviour of real hardware [1]. The teaching-learning process in the laboratory should be able to provide a nearly real experiment environment for the student [2].

Based on these challenges, this study proposes and implements a solution in the form of a physical PLC laboratory based on remote access. Using a remote PLC Lab, students will be able to access the PLC after normal class hours without having to be in the laboratory. A remote laboratory helps to improve the learning process for the student to reach the learning outcomes without adding formal scheduled extra time of teaching and learning [3]. Conventional laboratories are still important. However, a remote laboratory is a good solution in certain situations [4]. One of the most significant contributions of the remote laboratory is the improvement of self-study for learners [5]. A remote laboratory gives more opportunities and freedom to the students to perform their experiments [6]. Students can still access the PLC from home in the evenings to work on their assignments or to practice. To facilitate and equalize use for students, a simple usage schedule can be created. With this PLC Lab can be accessed at any time for 24 hours a day and 7 days a week. The purpose of this study is firstly to design the technical implementation of a remote PLC laboratory consisting of a Siemens S7-1200 PLC device equipped with a Human-Machine Interface (HMI) device. To access the PLC input channel when testing programs remotely using an ESP32 microcontroller based on MQTT. Meanwhile, to monitor the PLC output channel connected to the indicator lights, a web-based camera will be used. Second, the advantages of this remote laboratory system will be analysed for efficiency and increased utility. Third, the system performance will be evaluated in bridging the gap between using only simulation tools and practical experience using direct hardware, using remote laboratory tools.

II. METHOD

This research begins with the system design stage, technical implementation, and evaluation. The system design includes

mechanical, electronics, and application programs design. Next, the system is assembled and tested. The evaluation phase will collect data on system performance and user satisfaction, in this case, students operating the PLC module remotely.

A. System Design

The system is designed with a client-server architecture. The physical laboratory unit ("server") is located on campus, while students ("clients") can access it from remote locations. The system consists of four main subsystems:

1. Core Control Subsystem (PLC & HMI): A Siemens S7-1200 PLC is used as the main controller, and a 7-inch Siemens HMI panel is used for local display.
2. Remote I/O Subsystem consists of Virtual Digital and Analog Input. Digital Inputs: Physical inputs (buttons, sensors) that are replaced by virtual interfaces. For digital inputs (buttons), an ESP32 module is connected to an MQTT broker. Students access the PLC's input using the MQTT panel that is installed on their mobile phone. Using buttons on the MQTT panel, students can control mechanical relays connected to the ESP32 via MQTT. The mechanical relays then activate the PLC's digital input module. Analog Input: Physical potentiometers are connected to RC servo motors whose position is controlled remotely using the ESP32. The servo angle values (set by the student from the MQTT panel) are converted into analog values that are sent to the PLC.
3. Access and User Interface Subsystem: A host computer in the lab is connected to the PLC via an Ethernet cable and runs Siemens TIA Portal (for programming) and AnyDesk (for remote access) software. Students access this host computer remotely using the AnyDesk client. They can program the PLC through the TIA Portal running on the host computer and download the program to the PLC.
4. Visual Feedback Subsystem: A webcam is strategically positioned to monitor the PLC-HMI panel and indicator lights. The video from the webcam is previewed on the server monitor that accessed by students remotely using the AnyDesk client.

The mechanical design of the system consists of a PLC-HMI frame module and the webcam support. The frame is made from a 20x20mm aluminium profile to hold the PLC, Touchscreen panel box, and the I/O box. The touchscreen panel box is used to hold the 7-inch Siemens HMI. The I/O box is used to keep the ESP-32 microcontroller, a relay module that is used to switch the digital input, and the servo-potentiometer for the analog input feeder of the PLC. Fig. 1. Block diagram of the remote PLC laboratory system is shown in Fig. 1.

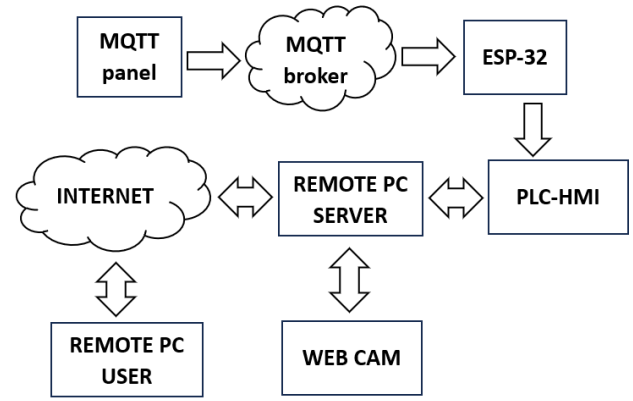


Fig. 1. Block diagram of the remote PLC laboratory system.

B. Technical Implementations

The PLC is connected through a computer in the laboratory. To access the input of the PLC, several mechanical relays are controlled remotely using ESP32 based IoT system that able to be controlled by the students from home using an MQTT panel installed on their mobile phone. A simple queue management system is implemented using Google Spreadsheet so anybody will be able to check it. Fig. 2 shows the MQTT panel from the student's view.

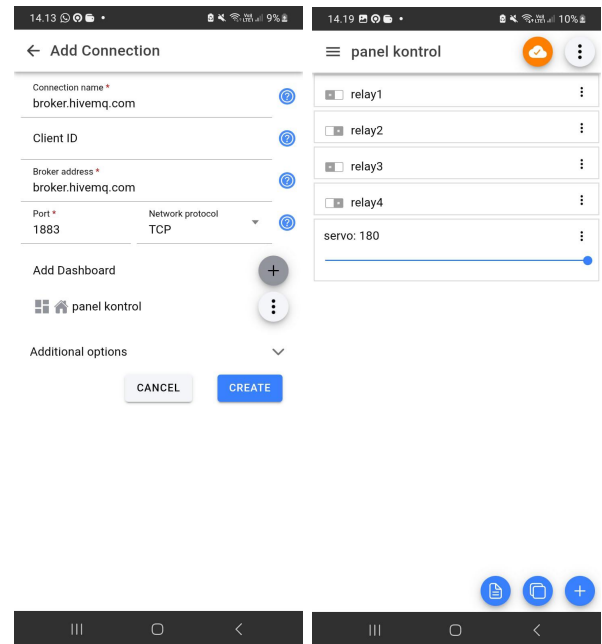


Fig. 2. MQTT panel on the students' mobile phone

The electronic wiring diagram of the ESP32, RC Servo Motor, and the relay module is shown in Fig. 3.

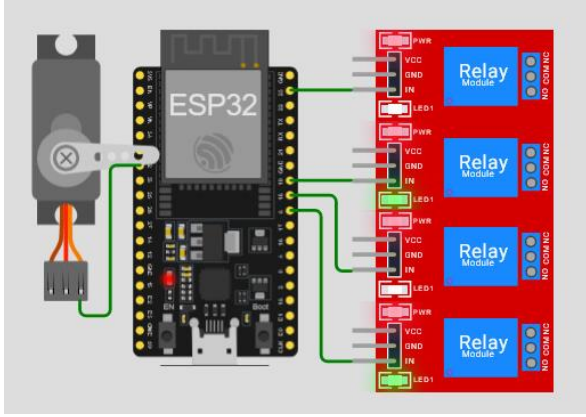


Fig. 3. Electronic wiring diagram of the ESP32, RC Servo Motor, and the relay module .

C. Evaluation

The evaluation of the system's benefit are conducted through:

1. System Performance: Latency from the MQTT commands to the PLC's responses is monitored from the video.
2. Surveys and Interviews: Thirty students fill out questionnaires to check the access perceptions of the system's flexibility, contribution to material understanding, and the ease of use. A 5-point Likert scale was utilized. Table 1 shows the interpretation of the response average.

TABLE I. QUESTIONNAIRE DATA INTERPRETATION

Scale	Interpretation
$x \geq 4.0$	Very satisfied
$3.0 \geq x \geq 3.9$	Satisfied
$2.0 \geq x \geq 2.9$	Neutral
$1.0 \geq x \leq 1.9$	Dissatisfied
$x \leq 0.9$	Very dissatisfied

III. RESULTS

The results of this study can be seen from three things, namely the level of implementation success, access intensity, and user response. The details of each indicator are as follows:

Implementation success: The remote PLC laboratory system has been successfully implemented and is running stably. Functional testing demonstrated that all components operate as designed:

1. Students can connect to the host computer via AnyDesk to program the PLC with the TIA Portal and download programs.

2. The web interface for I/O control (buttons and servos) responds within $< 500\text{ms}$ from user command to execution in the PLC.
3. Video streaming from the webcam provides clear, real-time visual feedback with a latency of approximately 1-2 seconds.

Access intensity: Access log data from the one-month trial period showed significant improvements:

1. 24/7 Access: Approximately 20% of the total lab sessions (additional assignment) were conducted outside of conventional laboratory hours (evenings and weekends).
2. Increased Individual Intensity: The average lab time per student per week increased from 4 hours (in the conventional, scheduled setting) to 5 hours.
3. Asset Utilization: A single PLC can be used by up to four different students in a single day.

The survey results showed positive responses:

1. Flexibility of time and location: 4.7.
2. Ease of repetition and independent experimentation: 4.5.
3. Contribution of the system to understanding the relationship between the program and real-world hardware behavior: 4.6.
4. The quality of visual feedback from the webcam was rated as adequate: 4.0, with a note of a desire for higher resolution and frame rate.

Based on Table 1, all the students are very satisfied with the system. The interview and the questionnaire results also show that the students find it very useful and helpful for them to learn PLC programming. By following the tutorial, the students can freely practice the material and test it without pressure.

IV. DISCUSSION

The limitation of the availability of PLCs can be overcome using this system. The problem actually starts from the limitation of the working hours in the lab. But, using this system, students can work anytime from anywhere connected to the Internet. This method offers a low-cost solution. The reliability is supported by the robust industrial-grade PLC and communication software. Nonetheless, there are still some light and low cost component, such as the microcontroller and some interfacing components on the system.

A. Bridging the Simulation-Hardware Gap

This method gives a solution to bridge the gap between simulation and real-world practice. Student able to observe physical output, such as the pilot lamp and HMI preview of the student's work. By using this system, the teaching learning process is still able to give the students real experience in PLC programming that a simulator cannot give.

B. Democratizing Access and Accelerating Learning

Eliminating time and place constraints, the system can democratize access to the PLC's hardware. The more opportunities to practice with hardware, the more students'

competencies develop. A vocational program is well known for its hands-on oriented study.

C. Challenges and Limitations

Some points to be considered in this research are: (1) Hardware response: A remote access of hardware that includes feedback will take some time to get the response since the first action from the student. This timing in response to the student's action is very important. A pure real-time response is impossible, but an immediate response can be a key for the student in enjoying the remote hardware. (2) Reliability: The network quality and the robustness of the circuit will determine the reliability. (3) Physical Sensor Limitation: This system accommodates accessing the PLC input digital and analogue using MQTT-based IoT. However, there are still many physical sensors that cannot be handled in this remote hardware lab system.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

From the results and discussion above, it can be concluded as follows:

A. Conclusions

After all, it can be concluded that:

1. A remote PLC Laboratory using a Siemens S7-1200 controller, HMI, ESP32 embedded system, MQTT-based IoT, and a remote desktop software has been successfully developed.
2. The system can work the whole time, 24/7 access, which helps the student a lot to master the competency of PLC programming.
3. The system successfully bridges the gap between the simulation environment and real hardware, thereby enriching the learning experience and improving the conceptual understanding and practical skills of vocational education students.

B. Recommendations

Recommendations for further studies are:

1. Content Development: Adding a variety of practical modules to cover more industrial actors (e.g., stepper

motors, miniature conveyor belts, sorting systems) and complex programming scenarios (PID, network communication).

2. Replication and Adaptation: This model can be replicated for other disciplines such as power electronics, microcontrollers, or instrumentation, with appropriate hardware and remote interface adjustments.
3. Technology Enhancements: Explore the use of specialized Virtual Network Computing (VNC) technology, integrate more interactive monitoring dashboards, and enhance video streaming quality with pan/tilt/zoom controllable cameras.
4. Hybrid Learning Model: This system should be integrated as part of a hybrid learning model, where remote sessions complement (but do not completely replace) hands-on lab sessions for skills requiring direct wiring and installation of physical components..

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