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Leveraging AI to enhance active learning strategies in science classrooms: implications for teacher professional development

Rejoice Elikem Vorsah [1,] * and Frank Oppong [2]

[1] Department of Teacher Education, Patton College of Education, Ohio University, USA.
[2] Department of Educational Studies, Patton College of Education, Ohio University, USA.

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Abstract

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in educational settings offers transformative potential for enhancing active learning strategies in science classrooms. This paper explores how AI-driven tools can support the implementation of active learning methodologies such as problem-based learning (PBL), interactive simulations, and personalized learning pathways. These strategies have been shown to increase student engagement, foster critical thinking, and deepen the understanding of scientific concepts. The analysis highlights the role of AI in creating adaptive learning environments where students receive real-time feedback and differentiated instruction tailored to their individual learning needs. An essential aspect of leveraging AI for active learning is ensuring that teachers are adequately prepared to implement these technologies effectively. The discussion delves into professional development programs that equip educators with the skills and knowledge to incorporate AI tools into their teaching practices. Such programs should emphasize hands-on training, collaborative workshops, and continuous learning opportunities that align with current advancements in educational technology. By fostering teacher confidence and proficiency, these initiatives ensure that educators can maximize the benefits of AI to enhance student learning outcomes. The paper also considers the implications of adopting AI in teaching for long-term educational practices, including ethical considerations, data privacy concerns, and the importance of maintaining a human-centric approach in classrooms. Examples of successful implementations and case studies provide insights into best practices and the challenges encountered. This comprehensive approach underscores the value of combining innovative technology with strategic teacher development to create enriched, interactive, and sustainable learning environments that promote critical thinking and environmental awareness among students.

Keywords: AI in education; Active learning; Science classrooms; Teacher professional development; PBL; Interactive simulations

1. Introduction

1.1. Overview of AI in Education

Artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming the landscape of education, providing new tools and methodologies that enhance teaching and learning processes. In recent years, AI has expanded its reach from administrative and assessment functions to more interactive and engaging classroom practices, especially in science education [1] [2]. The use of AI in science classrooms includes personalized learning platforms, intelligent tutoring systems (ITS), and adaptive assessments that cater to individual student needs [3]. These technologies help to identify knowledge gaps, suggest customized content, and support students' learning paths more effectively. By automating routine tasks and offering detailed analytics, AI allows teachers to focus on higher-order teaching strategies that foster critical thinking and problem-solving skills [4] [5]. The integration of AI enables educators to shift from traditional teaching methods to more dynamic and student-centred approaches that align with 21st-century educational goals.

* Corresponding author: Rejoice Elikem Vorsah

1.2. Importance of Active Learning in Science Education

Active learning has been widely recognized as a crucial component of effective science education [6]. Unlike passive learning, which typically involves students receiving information without significant engagement, active learning requires students to participate in meaningful activities that foster analysis, synthesis, and evaluation [7]. Strategies such as problem-based learning (PBL), group discussions, and interactive simulations are central to active learning, emphasizing collaboration and hands-on experiences [8]. PBL encourages students to solve real-world problems, promoting deeper understanding and retention of scientific concepts [3]. Interactive simulations, on the other hand, allow students to visualize and experiment with complex scientific phenomena in a risk-free environment, enhancing their comprehension and engagement [9] [5]. The combination of these strategies builds essential skills such as communication and teamwork, preparing students for complex scientific inquiries [10]. However, successful implementation requires thoughtful planning and appropriate resources to maximize student outcomes [11].

1.3. Purpose and Scope of the Article

The primary aim of this article is to explore how AI technologies can support and enhance active learning in science classrooms. By examining current AI-driven educational tools and their applications, this article seeks to identify how these technologies contribute to deeper learning and engagement among students [1]. Additionally, it will discuss the implications of AI for teacher professional development, focusing on how educators can effectively integrate these tools into their teaching practices to optimize student outcomes [7]. The article will also highlight potential challenges and limitations associated with using AI in active learning environments and offer solutions for overcoming these barriers [12].

The scope of the article includes an analysis of AI technologies such as machine learning algorithms, virtual labs, and ITS that facilitate active learning [4]. It will provide case studies and examples from various educational contexts to illustrate the practical impact of AI on science education. The discussion will also cover future trends and recommendations for policymakers and educators on integrating AI more holistically into active learning frameworks [13] [9].

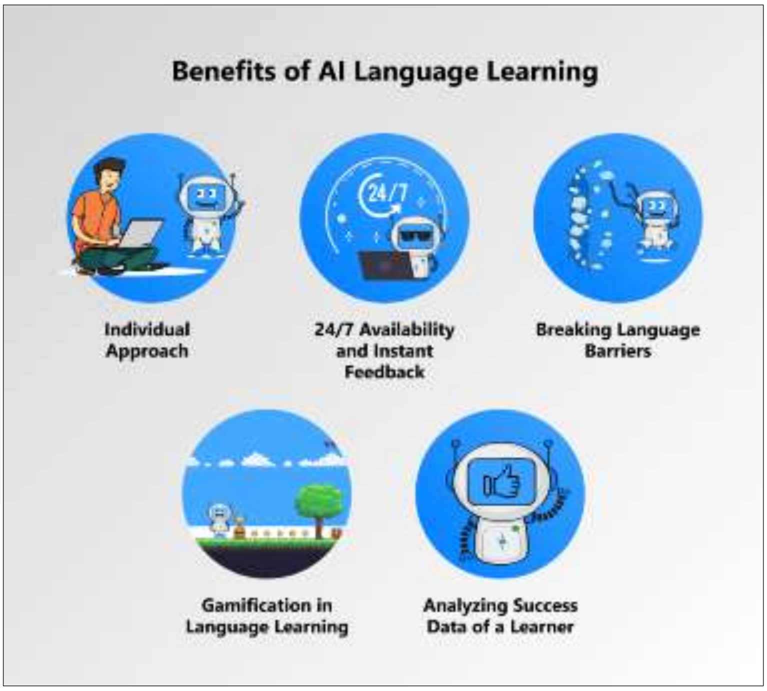

Figure 1 A diagram showing the integration of AI into active learning environments [7]

2. The role of active learning in science education

2.1. Key Active Learning Strategies in Science

Active learning has revolutionized science education by promoting interactive and student-centred teaching approaches. Key strategies include flipped classrooms, collaborative learning, and hands-on experiments [15] [16]. The flipped classroom model transforms traditional learning structures by having students review content prior to class, thus allowing in-person sessions to focus on discussions, problem-solving, and deeper exploration of the material [17]. Collaborative learning fosters group-based activities where students collectively engage in understanding complex scientific ideas and improving their critical thinking skills [18] [19]. Hands-on experiments offer experiential learning opportunities that enable students to connect theoretical concepts with practical applications [20] [21]. This engagement not only strengthens comprehension but also develops scientific inquiry skills essential for real-world problem-solving.

2.2. Benefits of Active Learning for Science Students

Active learning techniques contribute to more profound understanding and retention of scientific concepts [22][23]. Students involved in strategies such as group projects, peer-led discussions, and laboratory activities show improved problem-solving skills and critical thinking capabilities compared to peers in traditional lecture-based settings [24] [25]. Studies indicate that active participation enhances long-term memory retention and academic performance [26]. This interactive approach also cultivates creativity, helping students explore various perspectives and develop adaptive solutions [27] [28]. Furthermore, active learning nurtures student confidence and enthusiasm, fostering a positive learning environment that motivates continuous inquiry and exploration [29] [30].

2.3. Challenges of Implementing Active Learning

While active learning provides numerous advantages, its implementation is met with challenges. Limited resources, such as inadequate funding for laboratory tools or advanced technology, can hinder its widespread adoption [31] [32]. Active learning often requires more time for planning and execution, posing challenges for educators managing tight curricula [33] [34]. Additionally, teacher preparedness is crucial; instructors must undergo training to facilitate active learning effectively and manage interactive classroom settings [35] [36]. Addressing these obstacles involves institutional support, comprehensive teacher training programs, and policy changes to prioritize active learning in education [37] [38].

Table 1 A table comparing traditional teaching methods with active learning strategies, illustrating differences in student engagement, critical thinking, and retention outcomes.

Aspect	Traditional Teaching Methods	Active Learning Strategies
Student Engagement	Passive, with students mainly listening to lectures.	High engagement, with students actively participating in discussions, problem-solving, and hands-on activities.
Classroom Interaction	Limited student-teacher interaction; students mainly ask questions.	Frequent peer interaction and group work, enhancing collaboration and communication.
Critical Thinking	Focus on memorization and recall of facts.	Emphasizes analysis, evaluation, and synthesis of knowledge, fostering deeper critical thinking.
Retention Outcomes	Short-term retention due to lack of application of knowledge.	Long-term retention through practical application and real-world connections to the material.
Learning Environment	Teacher-centred, with little emphasis on student choice.	Student-centred, with learners guiding their own educational paths through projects and activities.
Assessment Methods	Primarily exams and quizzes focusing on factual recall.	Formative assessments, peer reviews, and project-based evaluations focus on application and creativity.
Teacher's Role	Teacher as the primary source of information.	Teacher as a facilitator, guiding students' learning experiences and supporting collaboration.
Learning Pace	Fixed pace for the entire class, may not accommodate all learning styles.	Flexible pace, allowing students to progress according to their individual understanding.
Motivation	Dependent on external rewards like grades.	Intrinsic motivation, as students see direct applications of knowledge and enjoy interactive learning.

3. AI in science education

3.1. AI Technologies for Active Learning

AI has become an invaluable tool in transforming educational landscapes, particularly in science classrooms. Advanced AI technologies, such as ITS, virtual labs, and adaptive learning platforms, play a pivotal role in facilitating active learning [39] [40]. ITS provide personalized instruction by using data-driven algorithms to tailor content to each student's pace and learning style [41]. These systems enable students to receive targeted assistance, akin to one-on-one tutoring, thereby enhancing comprehension and academic performance [42]. Virtual labs simulate real-world scientific experiments, allowing students to practice and experiment without the constraints of physical lab resources [43]. Adaptive learning platforms adjust the difficulty of tasks based on a student's performance, offering a customized learning pathway that supports continuous engagement and growth [44] [45].

3.2. Enhancing Student Engagement through AI

AI-driven learning environments create a more interactive and personalized educational experience [46]. By analysing student data, AI can adapt content delivery in real-time, ensuring that learners receive the optimal level of challenge and support [47]. This personalization increases motivation and keeps students engaged as they progress at a suitable pace [48]. Real-time feedback, enabled by machine learning algorithms, helps students understand mistakes immediately, promoting active correction and deeper learning [49] [50]. Moreover, AI tools can present information through simulations, interactive visualizations, and augmented reality, making complex scientific concepts more accessible and engaging [51] [52]. Such integration of AI not only stimulates curiosity but also encourages students to take initiative in their own learning [53].

3.3. Addressing Learning Gaps with AI

One of the significant advantages of AI in education is its ability to identify and bridge learning gaps [54]. Machine learning algorithms can track and analyse students' performance data to pinpoint specific areas where they struggle [55] [56]. This diagnostic capability enables educators to provide targeted interventions and tailor remedial content that addresses individual needs [57]. AI-powered platforms, such as personalized practice exercises and quizzes, adjust in complexity to reinforce learning and help students master difficult concepts [58] [59]. Additionally, these platforms provide educators with insights into classroom-wide trends, facilitating the development of strategies that enhance overall teaching effectiveness [60] [61]. The application of AI thus shifts the focus from reactive teaching to proactive support, making it possible to improve learning outcomes and reduce disparities in educational achievement [62] [63].

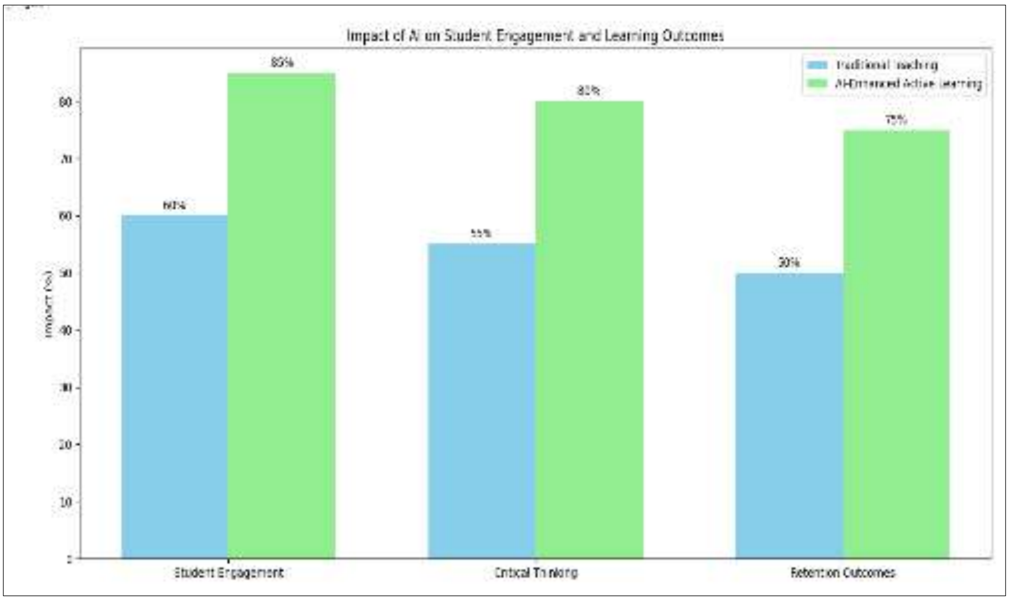

Figure 2 A graph illustrating the impact of AI on student engagement and learning outcomes, comparing traditional and AI-enhanced active learning metrics

4. Teacher professional development and ai integration

4.1. Importance of Teacher PD for AI Integration

The integration of AI in education, particularly in science classrooms, necessitates comprehensive teacher professional development (PD). The evolving landscape of educational technology requires educators to be adept at utilizing AI to enhance active learning [64]. Professional development empowers teachers to understand the potential and limitations of AI tools, allowing them to incorporate these technologies into lesson plans effectively [65] [66]. Effective PD programs focus on practical application, ensuring that teachers can bridge the gap between AI capabilities and curriculum goals [67]. Moreover, teachers equipped with AI literacy can foster a learning environment that maximizes student engagement and caters to diverse learning needs [68].

4.2. Training Teachers to Use AI Tools Effectively

For teachers to implement AI tools effectively, targeted PD programs are essential. Such programs should include hands-on training in using ITS, virtual labs, and adaptive learning platforms [69] [70]. Workshops and training sessions can help teachers familiarize themselves with the nuances of AI-driven teaching aids, building their confidence in incorporating these tools into their teaching [71]. Additionally, PD programs must address how to interpret and leverage data generated by AI platforms to personalize instruction [72]. Educators benefit from understanding how to use AI to monitor student progress and tailor interventions accordingly [33] [44]. Collaborative learning during training, where teachers share strategies and challenges, can further enhance the effectiveness of PD initiatives [65].

4.3. Overcoming Barriers to AI Adoption in Teacher PD

Table 2 Outlining key PD components for integrating AI in science classrooms, comparing traditional PD elements with AI-focused training approaches

PD Component	Traditional PD Elements	AI-Focused Training Approaches
Training Focus	Pedagogical methods, content knowledge, and classroom management.	AI tools, integration of AI in the curriculum, and data-driven pedagogy.
Technology Integration	Basic use of educational technology (e.g., projectors, LMS).	Advanced use of AI-driven tools (e.g., AI tutors, personalized learning platforms, chatbots).
Curriculum Adaptation	Traditional methods for adapting lesson plans and materials.	AI integration in lesson design, including AI-assisted lab experiments, simulations, and adaptive learning.
Assessment Practices	Focus on traditional assessment methods (e.g., exams, quizzes).	Use of AI for real-time formative assessments, personalized feedback, and predictive analytics.
Student-Centered Learning	Emphasis on student engagement through active participation.	Empowerment of students through AI tools that personalize learning paths, adapt to individual needs, and provide instant feedback.
Collaboration Opportunities	Teacher collaboration for shared resources and strategies.	Collaboration with AI experts and ed-tech providers to co-develop AI-driven resources and learning experiences.
Professional Reflection	Reflection on teaching practices and student outcomes.	Data-driven reflection supported by AI analytics, reviewing student progress, and adjusting strategies based on AI-generated insights.
Support and Resources	Workshops, seminars, and peer observations.	Continuous AI-based support through virtual AI assistants, online learning communities, and access to cutting-edge AI research in education.
Continuous Learning	Occasional PD sessions with periodic updates.	Ongoing, adaptive PD that evolves with AI technologies, including self-paced learning with AI-based recommendations.
Outcome Measurement	Based on student performance and teacher evaluations.	Measured by both qualitative feedback and quantitative data from AI systems, such as improvements in learning outcomes, student engagement, and efficiency of instruction.

Despite the benefits, integrating AI into teacher PD comes with challenges. One significant barrier is the lack of technical skills among some educators [46]. Training programs must cater to varying levels of technological proficiency to ensure inclusive participation [27]. Resistance to change, often rooted in apprehension about new technology, can also hinder adoption [68] [69]. Addressing these concerns through peer support systems and emphasizing the tangible benefits of AI in improving teaching outcomes is crucial [70]. Access to resources, such as high-quality training materials and AI-compatible hardware, is another challenge that needs attention [71] [62]. Overcoming these obstacles requires coordinated efforts between educational institutions, policy-makers, and technology providers [33].

5. Real-world applications of AI in active learning

5.1. Case Study 1: AI in High School Science Labs

In recent years, AI has been increasingly incorporated into high school science classrooms, transforming traditional learning methods into more interactive and engaging experiences [54]. One notable example is the use of AI-powered virtual laboratories that allow students to conduct experiments in a simulated environment. This approach enables students to visualize complex scientific concepts that might be difficult to demonstrate in a physical lab due to resource constraints [65]. Tools like Labster and PraxiLabs have provided platforms where students can perform virtual dissections, chemical reactions, and other experiments safely and repeatedly [56]. These tools offer real-time feedback, guiding students through experiments and providing instant assessments of their performance [67]. Teachers have reported improved student comprehension and engagement as a result of incorporating these AI tools [68]. Additionally, adaptive AI-driven tutoring systems are being employed to tailor the learning pace to individual students, addressing their specific needs and ensuring no one is left behind [69] [70].

5.2. Case Study 2: AI-Powered PBL in University Settings

At the university level, AI is being leveraged to enhance PBL, which is critical for preparing students for complex, real-world scientific challenges. Universities have adopted AI systems capable of curating and analysing vast amounts of data, assisting students in developing solutions to multifaceted problems [41]. For example, AI-driven platforms can simulate environmental changes, allowing students to explore the effects of climate change and develop mitigation strategies [62]. AI's ability to provide instant feedback and facilitate collaborative learning through intelligent discussion forums has proven to increase the depth of student research and critical thinking [53] [64]. A study conducted at a leading university demonstrated that students using AI-enhanced PBL approaches scored significantly higher in assessments of analytical skills compared to those taught using traditional methods [65] [72]. This integration not only improves the academic outcomes but also prepares students for future careers where AI-driven problem-solving is becoming the norm [67].

Table 3 A comparison illustrating the applications and impacts of AI in high school and university science classrooms, highlighting differences in scope, tools used, and outcomes

Aspect	High School Science Classrooms	University Science Classrooms
Scope of AI Application	Focus on enhancing foundational knowledge and student engagement.	Advanced applications, including research, data analysis, and specialized simulations.
AI Tools Used	AI-driven tutoring systems, educational games, and interactive simulations.	AI-based data analysis tools, research assistants, lab automation, and predictive models.
Student Engagement	Personalized learning paths, instant feedback, and AI chatbots for support.	AI tools for collaborative projects, real-time data processing, and virtual labs.
Learning Outcomes	Improved understanding of basic concepts, higher student motivation.	Enhanced research capabilities, critical thinking, and practical application of scientific methods.
Curriculum Integration	AI supports basic curriculum delivery, such as interactive biology or chemistry simulations.	AI aids in advanced subjects, such as AI-assisted experiments in physics, chemistry, and computer science.
Assessment Methods	Real-time formative assessments and personalized quizzes.	AI-driven peer review systems, complex problem-solving tasks, and simulations for advanced assessment.

Teacher's Role	Facilitator, guiding students through AI-enhanced activities.	Mentor, assisting students with AI-driven research and advanced experiments.
Data Usage	Limited, focused on individual progress and performance.	Extensive, involving large datasets, machine learning models, and research analytics.
Student Autonomy	Students have some control over learning pace and content.	High level of autonomy with AI providing real-time support in independent research and experiments.
Impact on Collaboration	Encourages peer collaboration through AI-enhanced group activities.	Facilitates interdisciplinary collaboration through shared AI-driven research tools and simulations.
Teacher Support	AI-based support for grading, lesson planning, and tutoring.	AI-based research assistants, grading automation, and data visualization tools.

6. Pedagogical implications of AI in active learning

6.1. Shifting Pedagogical Practices with AI

The integration of AI into science education is fundamentally reshaping the roles and responsibilities of teachers. Traditionally, teachers have served as the primary source of knowledge, delivering content through lectures and guiding students toward predetermined answers. However, with the introduction of AI-driven tools, this paradigm is shifting. AI empowers teachers to transition from being mere content deliverers to facilitators of learning. This shift enables teachers to focus more on personalized instruction, mentorship, and supporting student growth, while AI takes over repetitive tasks such as grading, content delivery, and assessment [60] [61]. By using AI, teachers can provide real-time feedback and tailored learning experiences, addressing individual students' needs and fostering an environment of continuous learning. For example, ITS can guide students through complex concepts, offer individualized support, and even adapt the curriculum based on students' progress [62] [63]. This approach not only enhances the learning experience but also allows teachers to devote more time to fostering critical thinking and guiding discussions in the classroom, which are essential for active learning.

6.2. Encouraging Critical Thinking through AI

AI tools play a pivotal role in fostering critical thinking by providing students with the opportunity to engage in complex, real-world scenarios that require them to think critically and make decisions. Unlike traditional methods, where students passively receive information, AI systems can present adaptive learning paths that challenge students to solve problems on their own. AI-driven platforms present diverse problem-solving scenarios and feedback, helping students understand the consequences of their actions and decision-making processes. These scenarios often feature multiple solutions or outcomes, encouraging students to explore different approaches, think critically, and consider the broader implications of their choices [64] [65]. Furthermore, AI's ability to personalize the learning journey ensures that students receive challenges at an appropriate level of difficulty, preventing frustration and fostering deeper engagement with the content [66]. The ability to engage with content at a personalized pace also strengthens the student's cognitive abilities and promotes long-term retention of knowledge [67].

6.3. The Future of AI in Science Education

Looking ahead, the role of AI in science education is set to expand further as the technology continues to evolve. Future AI applications in the classroom will likely move beyond simple tutoring systems to incorporate more sophisticated techniques, such as emotion recognition to gauge student engagement, and predictive analytics to identify at-risk students early on [66]. AI's capacity to analyse vast datasets will enable real-time customization of learning materials, ensuring that each student receives content suited to their unique learning style and pace. Furthermore, AI has the potential to break down geographical and resource barriers, making high-quality science education more accessible worldwide. With the development of virtual and augmented reality (VR/AR), AI-powered immersive environments will enable students to explore scientific phenomena in ways previously impossible in traditional classrooms [68] [69]. The future of AI in education holds vast promise, with the potential to not only enhance active learning but also revolutionize the very nature of teaching and learning in science classrooms across the globe.

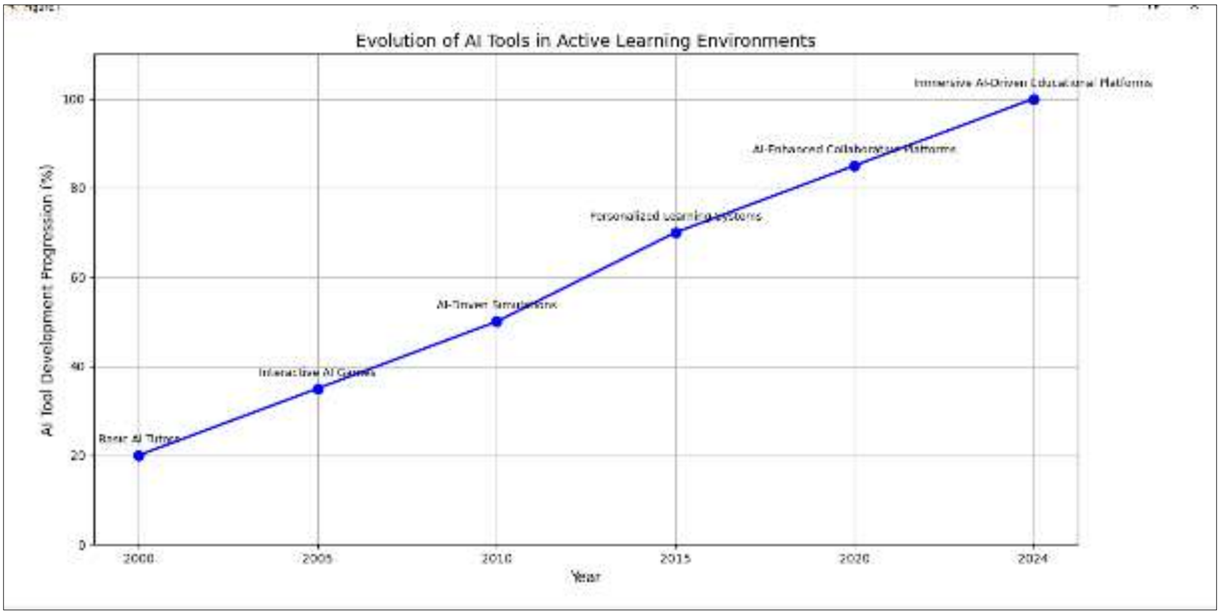

Figure 3 A graph illustrating the evolution of AI tools in active learning environments over time, showcasing the progression from basic AI tutors to advanced, immersive AI-driven educational platforms

7. Ethical considerations and challenges in AI integration

7.1. Privacy and Data Security in AI-Driven Learning

One of the foremost ethical concerns in the integration of AI into education is the privacy and security of student data. AI-powered learning systems, including ITS and adaptive learning platforms, rely heavily on data collection to personalize the learning experience. These systems gather vast amounts of information, from students' interactions and performance to behavioural patterns and even biometric data. While this data is crucial for improving learning outcomes and tailoring educational content, it also raises significant privacy concerns [70]. If not properly secured, student data could be susceptible to unauthorized access or misuse, potentially violating privacy rights and leading to serious consequences. Additionally, there are concerns about the long-term storage of sensitive data and how it might be used outside the educational context, whether for commercial purposes or in ways that students are unaware of or unable to control [71]. To mitigate these risks, educational institutions must adhere to robust data privacy policies, ensuring that student data is collected and stored securely. This includes encrypting data, anonymizing sensitive information, and complying with legal frameworks such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) in the U.S. Moreover, transparency about how data is collected and used is essential to building trust with students, parents, and educators [72].

7.2. Bias in AI Algorithms

Another major challenge in the deployment of AI tools in education is the potential for bias in AI algorithms. AI systems are trained using vast datasets, but if these datasets are not representative of diverse student populations, the resulting algorithms may perpetuate existing biases, leading to unfair outcomes [66]. For instance, AI systems trained on historical data from predominantly certain demographic groups may fail to accurately assess or support students from underrepresented groups. This can result in biased recommendations, inaccurate assessments of student performance, or an unequal distribution of resources. Moreover, biased algorithms can exacerbate existing educational inequalities by reinforcing stereotypes or making decisions based on flawed assumptions [63] [54]. To address these issues, AI developers must ensure that the datasets used for training are diverse and inclusive, representing various socio-economic, cultural, and educational backgrounds. Additionally, AI tools should be regularly audited for fairness and adjusted as necessary to mitigate potential biases. Ensuring that AI systems are transparent in their decision-making processes will also help educators better understand how outcomes are generated, providing an opportunity to identify and correct biases before they impact students [67].

7.3. Ensuring Fair Access to AI Resources

Equitable access to AI-powered learning tools is critical for ensuring that all students, regardless of their socio-economic background, can benefit from the advantages these technologies offer [55]. While AI has the potential to transform education by providing personalized, efficient learning experiences, access to these tools is not universal. Students from low-income families or rural areas may lack the necessary infrastructure, such as reliable internet access and modern computing devices, to engage with AI-powered learning platforms [67]. This digital divide can result in unequal learning opportunities, leaving disadvantaged students behind. It is essential that educational policies address this gap by promoting the availability of affordable technology and ensuring that AI resources are accessible to all students [55]. This could involve government and private sector partnerships to subsidize access to AI learning tools, as well as investing in initiatives that promote digital literacy and infrastructure development in underserved communities. By ensuring that all students have access to AI resources, we can help bridge the achievement gap and create more equitable learning environments [66].

8. Future directions in teacher professional development for AI integration

8.1. Advancements in AI for Teaching Science

In recent years, the integration of AI in education has dramatically transformed the way science is taught and learned. Emerging technologies like Augmented Reality (AR), Virtual Reality (VR), and AI-powered simulations are shaping the future of science education, providing students with immersive, interactive, and personalized learning experiences [58]. These advancements hold the potential to address the challenges of traditional science education while enhancing engagement and deepening understanding of complex scientific concepts.

8.1.1. Augmented Reality (AR) in Science Education

Augmented Reality (AR) technology overlays digital information onto the real world, enabling students to interact with both physical and virtual elements in real-time [70]. In science classrooms, AR offers students the opportunity to visualize scientific phenomena that would otherwise be difficult to conceptualize. For example, AR can bring molecular structures to life, allowing students to explore atoms, molecules, and chemical reactions in a dynamic, interactive manner. In biology, AR can enable students to "see" inside the human body or observe the inner workings of a cell in a way that traditional textbooks or videos cannot replicate. Such immersive experiences help students build a stronger conceptual understanding of science by engaging multiple senses and providing a more tangible interaction with abstract concepts [44]. Furthermore, AR applications can make learning more engaging and accessible by offering interactive 3D models that enhance spatial learning, making complex scientific structures easier to understand. As AR technology continues to evolve, it is expected to become more affordable and widely integrated into science education tools, providing more opportunities for personalized and enriched learning environments [65].

8.1.2. Virtual Reality (VR) for Science Education

Virtual Reality (VR) offers an even more immersive experience compared to AR, creating fully virtual environments that allow students to experience science from a completely new perspective. VR technology enables learners to enter simulations of environments that would otherwise be too dangerous, costly, or inaccessible for hands-on experiences [71]. For instance, students can explore the surface of Mars, perform experiments in a controlled laboratory setting, or dive into the deep ocean to study marine ecosystems without leaving the classroom. In physics, VR can simulate complex experiments, such as particle collisions or the behaviour of gases under various conditions, helping students grasp difficult theoretical concepts through interactive learning [60]. VR also allows for the personalization of learning experiences, where students can navigate through lessons at their own pace, making it ideal for differentiated instruction. The immersive nature of VR not only enhances engagement but also provides a safe space for experimentation, fostering creativity and critical thinking. As VR technologies improve and become more affordable, their integration into science education is expected to increase, providing students with dynamic, real-world experiences that are otherwise unattainable [46].

8.1.3. AI-Powered Simulations in Science Education

AI-powered simulations are another significant advancement in science education. These simulations employ machine learning algorithms to model real-world scenarios and allow students to interact with virtual models of scientific phenomena [44]. By utilizing AI, these simulations can adjust in real-time to reflect student responses, providing immediate feedback and personalized learning experiences. For example, in chemistry, AI simulations can guide students through experiments on chemical reactions, allowing them to alter variables like temperature or concentration and observe the outcomes, without the risks or costs associated with real-world experiments. Similarly, in environmental science, AI can model the effects of climate change by simulating how different actions (such as deforestation or pollution) impact ecosystems over time, offering students a comprehensive understanding of ecological processes [50].

Furthermore, AI-powered simulations are increasingly being used to model biological processes, such as gene editing and protein folding, providing students with cutting-edge tools to explore the latest scientific advancements [43]. These tools not only deepen students' understanding of scientific concepts but also foster inquiry-based learning, where students can test hypotheses, experiment with variables, and analyse the results. Such AI-driven simulations help bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, making science education more hands-on and relevant to the real world. As AI continues to advance, these simulations will become more sophisticated, providing even greater opportunities for personalized and adaptive learning [71].

8.1.4. The Future of AI in Science Education

The future of AI in science education is undeniably promising, with the potential to revolutionize the way science is taught and learned. As AI technologies become more advanced and integrated into educational platforms, they will create increasingly immersive and personalized learning experiences for students [53]. For instance, AI could play a key role in developing personalized curricula that adapt to individual learning styles and paces, providing students with tailored lessons based on their strengths and areas of improvement. Additionally, AI can assist teachers by automating administrative tasks, analysing student performance data, and providing insights into student progress, thus allowing educators to focus more on individualized instruction [30]. The continued development of AI tools, particularly in the fields of AR, VR, and simulations, will enhance student engagement, foster critical thinking, and promote deeper learning of scientific concepts. As these technologies become more accessible and affordable, AI will play an increasingly pivotal role in shaping the future of science education, ensuring that students are equipped with the skills and knowledge to tackle the challenges of the 21st century [55].

In conclusion, the integration of AI in science education is not just a trend, but a transformative shift that promises to enhance learning experiences, improve student engagement, and promote deeper understanding [41]. Emerging technologies such as AR, VR, and AI-powered simulations have the potential to revolutionize how students interact with scientific concepts, providing immersive, personalized, and interactive learning environments that foster inquiry and creativity. As AI continues to evolve, its impact on science education will only grow, offering students new opportunities to explore, experiment, and learn in ways that were once unimaginable [59].

8.2. Long-Term Professional Development Strategies for Sustainable AI Integration

To fully integrate AI into science education, it is crucial to develop long-term professional development (PD) strategies that empower teachers to continuously adapt to new tools and technologies. While short-term training sessions can provide teachers with initial exposure to AI, sustainable PD programs are necessary to ensure that educators remain up-to-date with evolving AI technologies and their applications in the classroom [30]. Long-term PD initiatives can provide teachers with the skills, knowledge, and support needed to effectively incorporate AI into their teaching practices, ensuring that AI's integration into science education is both impactful and lasting.

8.2.1. Continuous Learning and Upgradation

One of the key elements of a sustainable PD strategy is the concept of continuous learning. Technology, particularly AI, evolves rapidly, and educators must have access to ongoing training opportunities to stay abreast of new developments and tools [20]. PD programs should be designed to be modular and flexible, allowing teachers to engage with content at their own pace while ensuring that they are regularly updated on the latest AI applications. For instance, short, frequent workshops or webinars focusing on specific AI tools can help teachers keep up with advances without overwhelming them with information. Additionally, a digital platform can be developed where teachers can access tutorials, webinars, and online courses, offering them the flexibility to learn whenever convenient [66]. As AI applications expand in scope, these programs can grow to include topics like data privacy, ethical considerations, and the latest AI advancements in education, thus ensuring teachers' readiness for emerging challenges.

8.2.2. Collaborative Communities and Peer Learning

Long-term PD should also encourage collaborative learning among teachers, fostering a sense of community and shared expertise. Building networks of teachers who actively engage with one another around AI tools can lead to more effective knowledge exchange and problem-solving. Peer learning groups, professional learning communities (PLCs), and mentorship programs are effective ways to help teachers collaborate, share best practices, and troubleshoot challenges they may face while using AI in the classroom. By forming these networks, teachers can exchange experiences and strategies for integrating AI, learning from one another's successes and setbacks. Furthermore, teachers who become proficient in AI can mentor others, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and support [70][72].

8.2.3. Partnerships with Tech Companies and Educational Institutions

Sustainable PD strategies should also include partnerships with tech companies and educational institutions to provide teachers with access to cutting-edge AI tools and resources. Collaborations between schools, AI developers, and universities can lead to the development of tailored PD programs that are directly aligned with the specific needs and challenges of science education [35]. These partnerships can ensure that teachers are receiving high-quality training on the most relevant and impactful tools available, including real-time AI applications that have been tested and refined in other classrooms [59]. Additionally, such partnerships can provide opportunities for teachers to engage in research, pilot programs, and even contribute to the development of new AI tools tailored to education, creating a feedback loop that benefits both teachers and AI developers.

8.2.4. Sustaining Motivation and Overcoming Resistance

It is important that long-term PD strategies not only focus on technical knowledge but also address the psychological aspects of AI integration [32]. Many teachers may feel overwhelmed or resistant to adopting AI, especially if they perceive it as a threat to their role or fear that it will be too complex to learn. PD programs must therefore include motivational elements, emphasizing the benefits of AI in enhancing their teaching practices and supporting student success. Teachers should be reassured that AI is a tool to assist, not replace, them, and that their role as facilitators of learning remains critical [52]. PD programs should highlight case studies and success stories where AI has significantly improved both teaching outcomes and student engagement, helping teachers see the value and potential of AI tools in their classrooms.

Hence, sustainable professional development strategies are essential for the long-term success of AI integration in science education. These strategies must be flexible, collaborative, and continuously evolving to ensure that teachers have the tools and support they need to effectively use AI in their classrooms. By creating a culture of continuous learning and fostering collaborations with industry and educational partners, schools can ensure that their teachers are equipped to leverage the power of AI to improve science education for all students [33].

8.3. Building a Culture of AI Literacy in Education

Fostering a culture of AI literacy in education requires a comprehensive approach that integrates AI knowledge into both the curriculum and professional development (PD) programs for teachers and students. This approach ensures that AI is not only understood as a tool but also as an essential part of the evolving educational landscape.

For students, embedding AI literacy into science curricula means providing opportunities to learn about AI's applications, ethical considerations, and potential impacts on society [69]. Introducing AI concepts in early education and progressively expanding on them through high school and university levels equips students with the necessary skills to thrive in an AI-driven world. This approach emphasizes practical learning through AI-based projects, coding, and interactive simulations, making AI concepts tangible and relevant.

For teachers, embedding AI literacy in PD programs is crucial for ensuring they can effectively teach and guide students in AI-related topics. Teachers should have access to resources that allow them to understand not only the technical aspects of AI but also its implications for education and society [72]. PD programs that promote AI literacy should include workshops, online courses, and collaborative learning platforms that encourage educators to develop AI competencies and integrate them into their teaching practices.

Building this culture involves creating a continuous feedback loop between curriculum development, teacher PD, and student learning experiences, ensuring that AI literacy becomes an integral part of the educational process for all stakeholders.

9. Conclusion

9.1. Summary of Key Insights

The integration of AI into science education is reshaping the way we approach active learning strategies and teacher professional development (PD). Through the application of AI technologies such as ITS, virtual labs, and adaptive learning platforms, teachers can offer highly personalized learning experiences that engage students in deeper, more meaningful ways. These tools allow for real-time feedback, individualized learning paths, and a level of interactivity that traditional methods struggle to achieve. As a result, students are more actively involved in their learning process, which fosters a deeper understanding of scientific concepts and enhances critical thinking skills.

Furthermore, AI is playing a pivotal role in teacher professional development by offering new ways for educators to learn and grow. AI-based PD programs are tailored to individual teachers' needs, ensuring that professional learning is both relevant and accessible. By focusing on AI literacy, educators are better equipped to integrate AI into their teaching practices, enhancing their ability to foster active learning environments. These programs also offer continuous learning opportunities, ensuring that teachers are always up-to-date with the latest developments in AI technology and its application in the classroom. The combination of AI tools in the classroom and continuous professional development for educators creates a powerful synergy that benefits both teachers and students.

However, the successful integration of AI in education requires addressing several key challenges, including issues related to privacy, data security, and equitable access to AI resources. These ethical considerations must be carefully managed to ensure that AI is used responsibly and effectively. Additionally, overcoming resistance to AI adoption by providing adequate training and support is essential to ensure that all teachers feel confident in using AI tools.

9.2. The Future of Active Learning and AI in Science Classrooms

Looking ahead, the future of active learning in science classrooms appears bright, with AI serving as a transformative force. The potential for AI to further personalize learning experiences, provide real-time insights into student performance, and create dynamic, immersive learning environments is immense. Emerging technologies such as augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) are expected to further expand the possibilities of AI-driven active learning by offering immersive simulations that can bring abstract scientific concepts to life. These tools will allow students to interact with complex scientific phenomena in ways that were previously unimaginable, deepening their understanding and sparking greater curiosity in scientific inquiry.

The evolution of AI in education will also reshape the role of teachers. As AI continues to assist in routine tasks such as grading, content delivery, and student assessment, teachers will be freed to focus more on high-impact areas such as mentorship, facilitation, and personalized guidance. In this evolving landscape, teachers will increasingly take on the role of learning facilitators rather than traditional lecturers. By leveraging AI tools to streamline administrative tasks, educators will have more time to focus on fostering critical thinking and problem-solving skills, as well as nurturing student curiosity and creativity.

However, the full potential of AI in education will only be realized if there is continued investment in teacher professional development. Ongoing training programs are crucial to ensure that teachers are not only equipped to use AI tools effectively but also capable of guiding their students through an increasingly AI-driven world. As AI becomes more integrated into the curriculum, teacher PD must evolve to address the complexities of teaching in this new era. This includes not only training teachers on the use of AI tools but also providing them with the skills to critically engage with the ethical and pedagogical implications of AI.

Ultimately, the future of active learning and AI in science education will be shaped by a combination of technological advancements, thoughtful pedagogy, and continuous teacher development. By fostering a culture of AI literacy and equipping teachers with the tools and knowledge they need, we can ensure that AI's transformative potential is fully realized in the classroom. The integration of AI into active learning strategies offers exciting opportunities for enhancing both teaching and learning, creating a more dynamic, engaging, and effective science education experience for students. Through a concerted effort to develop sustainable PD programs and provide equitable access to AI resources, we can ensure that the next generation of students is well-prepared to navigate the challenges and opportunities of an AI-driven future.

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