



Between the Canvas and the Algorithm: How Generative AI Is Reshaping Artistic Identity Among Fine Arts Students in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examines how emerging Fine Arts practitioners in Pakistan interpret the growing presence of generative artificial intelligence (AI) in creative practice and how that encounter relates to artistic identity, originality, authorship, emotional response, career expectations, and educational preparation. The study draws on 12 individual online semi-structured interviews with nine current Fine Arts students and three recent graduates associated with the University of Sargodha. Participants were recruited through non-probability convenience sampling with voluntary participation. Interviews were conducted in English, Urdu, or a combination of both, audio-recorded with consent, transcribed, anonymized, and translated where necessary. The data were examined through thematic analysis that moved from familiarization and initial coding to broader categories, candidate themes, review, and final interpretation. Six interconnected themes were identified: AI as a supportive creative assistant; emotional ambivalence involving excitement, curiosity, and anxiety; human emotion and lived experience as central to artistic identity and creativity; negotiation of originality and authorship; career anxiety alongside confidence in human adaptability; and uneven institutional guidance in an AI-influenced creative environment. Across participant accounts, AI was valued for information, brainstorming, visual references, idea generation, and speed, while human judgment, lived experience, intention, and personal contribution remained central to meaningful artistic practice. The findings are synthesized through the study-derived idea of negotiated artistic identity, understood here as an interpretive description rather than a validated theory. The study contributes context-specific qualitative evidence from a Pakistani Fine Arts setting and supports the need for critical AI literacy, clearer guidance on authorship and disclosure, and continued attention to foundational artistic skills.

1. Introduction

Generative artificial intelligence has altered the conditions under which visual ideas can be produced, revised, and circulated. Text-to-image systems can generate polished visual outputs within seconds, while conversational AI systems can provide concepts, references, explanations, and iterative suggestions throughout a creative task. For art and design education, this shift is not only technical. It raises questions about what counts as creative agency, how students understand originality and authorship, and whether the skills through which artistic identity is traditionally developed retain the same value in an AI-influenced environment (Epstein et al., 2023; Oksanen et al., 2023; Zhou & Lee, 2024).

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Research increasingly treats generative AI as both a creativity-support technology and a source of new constraints. Experimental work suggests that AI assistance can improve individual ideation or creative performance, but may also narrow diversity when many users draw on similar machine-generated suggestions (Doshi & Hauser, 2024). Human-AI collaboration appears most productive when people remain active co-creators who evaluate, select, revise, and give meaning to AI output rather than merely accepting generated material (Ivcevic & Grandinetti, 2024; McGuire et al., 2024). In arts education, the same tension appears in students' responses to AI image tools: they may welcome speed, experimentation, and expanded visual possibilities while remaining concerned about craftsmanship, dependence, authenticity, and the erosion of independent judgment (Ansone et al., 2025; Hıçyılmaz, 2025; Huh et al., 2025).

The issue becomes especially consequential during the development of artistic identity. Emerging artists are not only learning software or production techniques; they are learning to see themselves as creators whose work expresses intention, experience, judgment, and a developing personal voice. Research on AI-generated art shows that perceptions of creativity and value change when viewers believe that an artwork was produced by AI rather than by a human, indicating that authorship, effort, agency, and human experience remain important to aesthetic judgment (Bellaïche et al., 2023; Messer, 2024). Questions of ownership are similarly unsettled. When a human supplies a prompt, selects an output, edits it, and integrates it into a larger creative process, authorship may become distributed across human and technological actors rather than residing in a single creator (Epstein et al., 2020; Watikinnakorn et al., 2023).

Emotional responses are therefore central to understanding how students interpret AI. Higher-education research documents mixed reactions that combine perceived usefulness with anxiety about integrity, skill development, and employment (Chan & Hu, 2023). AI anxiety can also take different forms, including anxiety about learning the technology and anxiety about job replacement (Wang et al., 2024). Within art and design education, recent studies similarly report that curiosity, experimentation, uncertainty, and concern often coexist rather than forming simple pro-AI or anti-AI positions (Sáez-Velasco et al., 2024; Hwang & Wu, 2025). This ambivalence matters because a technology that supports creative production may simultaneously challenge a student's confidence in the value of the skills and identity being developed.

International scholarship on generative AI in arts education has expanded rapidly. Recent reviews and empirical studies address pedagogical integration, student adoption, creative identity, ethics, and human-AI co-creation across multiple national settings (Chen & Hung, 2026; Fang, 2026; Farran et al., 2026; Heigl, 2026; Jiang et al., 2026; Wu et al., 2026). In Pakistan, emerging work has begun to consider the educational opportunities and concerns associated with AI in art education (Adeel & Yasmeen, 2025), but participant-centered qualitative evidence remains comparatively limited. The most defensible gap is therefore not that artistic identity or emotional responses to AI are globally unstudied. Rather, there is still value in examining how these interconnected issues are interpreted within a specific Pakistani Fine Arts context.

The present study addresses that contextual gap through in-depth interviews with current Fine Arts students and recent graduates associated with the University of Sargodha. The term 'reshaping' is used here to describe an interpretive process reported by participants rather than a measured causal effect. Four questions guide the analysis: (1) What emotional responses do participants describe in relation to AI in art and design? (2) How do participants understand AI in relation to artistic identity, creativity, originality, and authorship? (3) What concerns and expectations do they express regarding future creative employment and the continuing role of human artists? and (4) How do they describe AI use in artistic practice and their educational preparation for an AI-influenced creative environment?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Generative AI, creativity, and human agency

Recent research increasingly frames generative AI as a collaborator, scaffold, or ideation resource rather than a self-sufficient replacement for human creativity. Habib et al. (2024) found that generative AI can support student creativity, while Bian et al. (2025) reported gains in engagement and self-efficacy in AI-supported visual art education. At the same time, creative benefit depends on how the technology is incorporated. McGuire et al. (2024) emphasize co-creation and creative self-efficacy, and Creely and Blannin (2025) argue for reflective partnerships in which human judgment remains visible. These findings are consistent with broader work showing that AI may enhance individual performance while also introducing risks of homogenization, dependence, or reduced diversity (Doshi & Hauser, 2024).

Agency is particularly important because the educational goal is not simply to produce a successful image. Students must learn to judge relevance, make selections, revise ideas, and connect technical decisions to artistic intent. Ivcevic and Grandinetti (2024) therefore describe AI as a creativity-support tool whose value is mediated by human evaluation. This distinction is central to the present study, where participants often separated AI-generated possibilities from the final creative decisions they considered their own.

2.2 Artistic identity, authenticity, and authorship

Generative AI complicates artistic identity because it inserts a computational system into stages of the creative process that have traditionally been associated with human ideation and execution. Oksanen et al. (2023) show that empirical research on AI in fine arts has moved beyond speculative debate toward measurable questions about perception, practice, and evaluation. Yet the meaning of artistic identity remains closely tied to agency, personal experience, and a sense of ownership over creative decisions. Bellaiche et al. (2023) demonstrate that viewers often prefer human-created artwork and attach value to the perceived human source of a work. Messer (2024) similarly shows that AI involvement can change perceptions of authenticity and originality.

Authorship becomes especially uncertain in collaborative production. Epstein et al. (2020) found that observers distribute credit across users, programmers, and AI systems when evaluating AI-generated art. Legal and ethical scholarship likewise shows that existing frameworks struggle to assign ownership when human prompting, machine generation, and human revision are intertwined (Watiktinnakorn et al., 2023). For students, these questions are not merely legal. They affect whether a work feels personally theirs, how much intervention is required before AI-assisted output is considered original, and whether reliance on AI changes the meaning of being an artist.

2.3 Emotional ambivalence and professional uncertainty

Students' responses to AI are frequently mixed. Chan and Hu (2023) report that university students can value generative AI while simultaneously worrying about integrity, dependence, and skill development. Wang et al. (2024) distinguish learning-related anxiety from job-replacement anxiety, demonstrating that 'AI anxiety' is not a single construct. In design education, Hwang and Wu (2025) link self-efficacy, anxiety, and creative cognition, while Sáez-Velasco et al. (2024) identify both enthusiasm and concern among arts educators and students. These studies support treating ambivalence as an analytically meaningful response rather than an inconsistency that must be resolved.

Professional uncertainty extends beyond students. Kawakami and Venkatagiri (2024) document stress and employment concerns among professional artists, while Öztaş and Arda (2025) show that creative workers interpret AI through both opportunity and threat. At the student level, Wei (2025) links employment anxiety with self-creativity identity. Together, this literature suggests that career concerns may be experienced as identity concerns because doubts about future employment can become doubts about the continuing value of one's creative abilities.

2.4 Art education and the need for contextual guidance

Art and design education research increasingly emphasizes that institutional response matters. Adeel and Yasmeen (2025) identify pedagogical opportunities as well as concerns about over-reliance, authorship, and responsible use. Huh et al. (2025) show that design students may accept AI more readily in exploratory stages than in stages requiring personal judgment, while Chen and Hung (2026) demonstrate how AI can be integrated as a scaffold within design-thinking processes. Systematic reviews published in 2026 confirm that pedagogy, ethics, assessment, creative identity, and AI literacy are now central concerns in higher art education (Fang, 2026; Jiang et al., 2026).

Recent studies also narrow the novelty claim available to any new study. Wu et al. (2026) directly examine diverse art-student perspectives on creative identity and GenAI, and Farran et al. (2026) examine adoption among arts and design students in Palestinian higher education. The contribution of the present study is therefore contextual and integrative: it examines emotional response, artistic identity, authorship, professional uncertainty, and institutional preparation together within one Pakistani Fine Arts setting.

3. Method

3.1 Design and setting

The study used an exploratory qualitative descriptive design based on individual semi-structured interviews. This design was appropriate because the research questions concerned experience, perception, emotion, and meaning rather than the measurement of prevalence or causal effects. The participant and data-collection setting was the Department of Fine Arts, University of Sargodha, Pakistan. The researcher was enrolled in the MS Art & Design program at The Superior University, Lahore; the University of Sargodha was the participant setting rather than the degree-awarding institution.

3.2 Participants and sampling

The final sample comprised 12 participants aged 19 to 24 years (mean age 21.2 years): nine current students and three recent graduates. Nine participants were female and three were male. Their academic areas included Fine Arts, Painting, Graphic

Design, Interior Design, and related Art and Design programs. Most had used commonly available AI tools such as ChatGPT or Gemini, although extensive prior AI experience was not an inclusion requirement.

Participants were recruited through non-probability convenience sampling with voluntary participation. Eligible participants were currently associated with, or had recently completed study within, the Fine Arts context at the University of Sargodha; were willing to participate in an individual online interview; provided informed consent; consented to audio recording; and were willing to discuss AI and creative practice. Convenience sampling reflected practical access to information-rich participants within the bounded MS-level study. The design does not claim statistical representativeness, and the sampling strategy may have introduced volunteer or self-selection bias. The sample size was appropriate to the focused, bounded qualitative inquiry, which prioritized depth and comparison of shared and contrasting accounts rather than statistical representation; formal saturation was not claimed.

3.3 Interview guide and data collection

The semi-structured interview guide was developed from the research objectives and questions. It addressed AI awareness and use, emotional responses, human and machine creativity, artistic identity, originality and authorship, future employment, ethical concerns, and institutional preparation. Open-ended questions were supplemented by probes so that participants could clarify or extend their responses. The guide underwent documented expert review before data collection; however, the study record does not preserve reviewer characteristics or a quantified validation procedure, and no such claim is made here.

All 12 interviews were conducted individually and online. Participants could communicate in English, Urdu, or a combination of both. With permission, interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed. Urdu material was translated into English where necessary with attention to preserving intended meaning. Participants were assigned anonymized identifiers P01 to P12.

3.4 Data analysis and trustworthiness

The interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The analytic process followed the logic of familiarization, coding, grouping related codes into broader categories, development of candidate themes, review against coded extracts and the wider dataset, refinement, and final interpretation. This approach is consistent with the flexible thematic-analysis framework described by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis was conducted across the complete dataset rather than treating each interview as an isolated case. Frequency alone was not treated as evidence of importance; contrasting and minority views were retained when they contributed to interpretation.

Trustworthiness was supported in four ways. Credibility was strengthened through audio-recorded interviews, transcript checking, and direct participant quotations. Dependability was supported by a visible progression from extracts to codes, categories, candidate themes, and final themes. Confirmability was addressed by retaining contrasting accounts and acknowledging the researcher's interpretive role. Transferability was supported through clear description of the sample and setting while explicitly limiting claims to a single-institution context. The study does not claim intercoder reliability, member checking, or formal saturation because these procedures were not documented. Researcher reflexivity was also maintained throughout interpretation: the researcher, an MS Art & Design student at The Superior University, Lahore, remained attentive to the influence of disciplinary assumptions, returned to transcripts and audio where clarification was needed, and retained contrasting accounts rather than forcing consensus. The researcher was institutionally separate from the University of Sargodha participant setting.

3.5 Ethical considerations

The study protocol, interview guide, data-collection procedures, and participant-protection arrangements were reviewed and approved by the research supervisor as part of the MS thesis process at The Superior University, Lahore. Participation was voluntary. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, confidentiality, the right to withdraw, and the use of audio recording, and informed consent was obtained before interviews began. Identifying information was replaced with participant codes P01–P12. This supervisory academic approval should be distinguished from formal institutional research-ethics committee approval. The source thesis records do not contain a separate institutional ethics committee reference number; therefore, no committee approval number is reported in this manuscript.

Table 1: Participant characteristics

Characteristic	Summary
Total participants	12
Academic status	9 current students; 3 recent graduates
Gender	9 female; 3 male
Age	19–24 years (M = 21.2)
Academic areas	Fine Arts, Painting, Graphic Design, Interior Design, and related Art & Design areas

AI exposure	Exposure to tools such as ChatGPT, Gemini, and Flow AI; degree of practical use varied
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4. Findings

The analysis produced six interrelated themes. They are presented separately for clarity, but they should not be read as causal, sequential, or statistically tested pathways. Participants could describe practical usefulness and anxiety in the same account, or discuss human creativity, ownership, career expectations, and education as overlapping concerns. Quotations below are retained close to participants' original wording; where translation was required, the emphasis was on preserving meaning rather than grammatical polish.

4.1 AI as a supportive creative assistant

Across participant accounts, AI was described as useful for academic support, information gathering, idea generation, visual references, and early-stage creative exploration. Po1 described AI as “so helpful for me, information related to subjects, learn things.” Po2 similarly called it “Useful, helpful, help from AI 24/7, always available for help.” These accounts position AI as an accessible resource rather than the final author of a work.

Creative use was often framed as provisional. Po3 reported using AI “for image generation and ideas” because it could “give multiple concepts, give different variations on a single concept.” Po6 described using AI during a painting project: “In thesis use AI in painting project, create digital picture and then create by myself.” This distinction between machine-generated reference and human execution was important. These accounts showed a willingness to use AI to expand possibilities while continuing to place evaluation, modification, technical correction, and final decision-making with the human creator.

The theme was not universal. One participant had not used AI in assignments, while others emphasized inaccurate information, technical limitations, or the risk of dependence. AI was therefore interpreted as conditionally useful: it could support the beginning of a task without replacing the knowledge, judgment, and personal contribution through which participants understood meaningful creative work.

4.2 Emotional ambivalence: excitement, curiosity, and anxiety

Participants did not describe a single emotional position toward AI. Excitement, curiosity, shock, confusion, and concern could coexist within the same broader experience. Po3 described seeing AI art on social media that could “create professional images within seconds” and initially feeling “shocked,” but also reported “curiosity to create new things in less time” and interest in multiple variations. P10 summarized the coexistence directly: “Emotion: excited, confusion.”

Negative reactions became more pronounced when participants connected AI to artistic value or employment. Po6 stated, “No value of our painting as AI is generating,” and later worried that AI might “take the job.” Po4 simultaneously defended human thinking and described reduced confidence: “The way we think and create ideas, it is not done by AI. But confidence low that AI can create everything.” P12 said “happy AI comes” while also noting “Issues in job because people is creating using AI.” These responses show why ambivalence is a more accurate descriptor than simple acceptance or resistance. Use of AI did not eliminate anxiety, and anxiety did not necessarily lead to rejection.

4.3 Human emotion and experience as the core of artistic identity

When participants explained what distinguished human creativity from AI, they repeatedly returned to emotion, lived experience, imagination, effort, intention, and individuality. Po5 stated, “Human feelings be created by human but not by AI.” Participants did not deny that AI could generate technically impressive images; rather, they distinguished technical production from the human experience they believed gives art personal meaning.

Artistic identity was also described as developmental. Po2 explained, “Ideas appreciated and identity mistakes, slowly slowly grown up,” suggesting that identity develops through time, mistakes, practice, and learning. Po3 added, “Not change identity, continuously learning and focus on creative thinking.” These accounts frame artistic identity as something cultivated through experience rather than instantly produced. Imperfection, manual engagement, and personal interpretation were not necessarily deficiencies; they were part of the process through which participants understood themselves as artists.

4.4 Negotiating originality and authorship

Originality and authorship were among the most contested themes. Participants did not share a single rule for deciding when AI-assisted work remained original or who should be considered its author. Po5 took a restrictive view, stating, “The work not belongs to you if it be created using AI.” Other participants placed more weight on the human contribution made after generation, such as modification, selection, technical correction, or manual execution.

Authorship was similarly distributed across several possible agents. Some participants prioritized the human idea or prompt-giver, while Po2 and Po9 identified “AI” as the author in particular cases. Po5 identified the “AI tool developer” as another possibility. The disagreement indicates that participants were actively locating creative agency at different stages of an AI-assisted process. Originality, in their accounts, depended less on whether AI had been used at all than on how much meaningful human contribution remained visible.

4.5 Career anxiety and human adaptability

Career-related responses ranged from strong concern to confidence. Po3 said, “Job concern (Yes), AI is doing too much fast things.” Po6 predicted, “After graduation job will be replaced through AI,” while Po8 worried that “AI may replace human jobs.” These concerns were linked especially to speed, lower perceived cost, and the possibility that clients could generate material without employing a trained artist.

Other participants rejected a deterministic replacement narrative. Po7 stated, “After graduation no concern,” and P10 said “Career not affected.” A constructive middle position emphasized adaptation. Po3 predicted that “After 10 years human artist AI and human work together,” and described AI as “a friend, partner, assistant always available.” Po7 argued that the future remained positive “if human not fully depends on AI.” Po2 expressed both concern and self-belief: “Concern on job, but belief on myself to do without AI.” The resulting theme therefore concerns both anxiety and adaptability. Participants imagined professional resilience through a combination of human creativity, technological knowledge, strong portfolios, and limited dependence.

4.6 Institutional guidance in an AI-influenced creative environment

Participants described uneven educational preparation rather than a single institutional experience. Some had received basic information or advice to use AI without becoming dependent on it, while others reported little field-specific guidance. Po8 stated, “Teacher as such not told to use AI in our field. Just to get the idea.” Po9 said, “Teacher not guided about the AI to use in field,” and P12 similarly reported, “Teacher not address about AI in creative field.” One participant experienced restriction rather than integration: “Teacher not guide to use AI even they restrict to use AI” (Po6).

At the same time, AI itself was described as an unusually accessible source of guidance. Po1 called it “A good guider,” Po3 “a friend, partner, assistant always available,” and Po6 a “24/7 teacher” capable of explaining material “step by step in detail.” This creates a central educational tension: students may encounter rapidly developing AI systems informally and rely on them for assistance before formal programs have established consistent disciplinary guidance. The data support a need for clearer frameworks around responsible use, authorship, disclosure, critical evaluation, and the preservation of foundational artistic skills, but they do not support claiming that every participant requested the same policy or training program.

Table 2: Summary of themes and illustrative evidence

Theme	Illustrative participant extract	Central interpretation
AI as a supportive creative assistant	“give multiple concepts, give different variations on a single concept.” (Po3)	AI expands early-stage possibilities while human judgment remains central.
Emotional ambivalence	“Emotion: excited, confusion.” (P10)	Positive and negative responses can coexist within the same participant.
Human emotion and experience	“Human feelings be created by human but not by AI.” (Po5)	Participants locate artistic distinctiveness in lived experience, feeling, and intention.
Originality and authorship	“The work not belongs to you if it be created using AI.” (Po5)	Ownership depends on where participants locate meaningful creative agency.
Career anxiety and adaptability	“After 10 years human artist AI and human work together.” (Po3)	Professional futures are imagined through both displacement concerns and adaptation.
Institutional guidance	“Teacher not guided about the AI to use in field.” (Po9)	Formal preparation is uneven while informal AI use is increasingly accessible.

5. Discussion

5.1 Conditional assistance and the preservation of agency

The first theme aligns with research that treats AI as most valuable when it supports rather than substitutes for human creative agency. Participants used AI for information, brainstorming, and visual references, but repeatedly emphasized selection, modification, and judgment. This pattern is consistent with McGuire et al. (2024), who show the importance of co-creation and self-efficacy in human-AI creativity, and with Habib et al. (2024), who identify potential benefits for student creativity when

generative AI is used as a learning resource. The findings also support the caution raised by Doshi and Hauser (2024): the presence of creative benefit does not mean that all forms of AI assistance produce equally desirable outcomes.

In Fine Arts education, this distinction matters because the learning process includes more than efficient output. Students develop observation, technical judgment, conceptual independence, and the ability to justify creative decisions. Participants' insistence on 'adding human thought' suggests that AI literacy should include the ability to reject, revise, and contextualize machine output rather than simply operate a tool. This interpretation is consistent with recent arts-education work emphasizing reflective integration and human judgment (Adeel & Yasmeen, 2025; Chen & Hung, 2026).

5.2 Emotional ambivalence as an identity response

The coexistence of excitement and anxiety closely reflects the wider literature on student responses to generative AI. Chan and Hu (2023) document simultaneous appreciation and concern in higher education, while Wang et al. (2024) show that anxiety can relate to both learning and employment. The present study adds a Fine Arts dimension: anxiety was often connected to the perceived value of human creative skills and the possibility that fast AI-generated imagery could make manually developed abilities feel less economically or culturally secure.

This helps explain why participants could use AI while remaining uneasy about it. The technology was not experienced as an external object separate from identity formation. It entered a domain in which students were developing confidence, style, and a sense of what makes their work personally theirs. Recent design and art-education studies similarly identify relationships among self-efficacy, anxiety, craftsmanship, and artistic ownership (Hiçyilmaz, 2025; Hwang & Wu, 2025). The emotional ambivalence observed here is therefore best understood as part of an identity negotiation rather than evidence of inconsistency.

5.3 Human meaning, originality, and negotiated artistic identity

Participants' defense of human emotion and lived experience corresponds with evidence that judgments of AI art depend on perceived agency and source, not only on visible quality (Bellaiche et al., 2023; Messer, 2024). Their accounts did not require the claim that AI is technically incapable of producing novel or attractive outputs. Instead, they placed distinctive value on the relationship between an artwork and the life, intention, effort, and decisions of its maker. This distinction allows human creativity and AI capability to coexist conceptually without treating them as equivalent.

Originality and authorship made that coexistence more difficult. Participants located authorship at different points in the process, echoing Epstein et al. (2020), who found distributed judgments of credit in AI-generated art. The study therefore uses negotiated artistic identity as an interpretive synthesis for the way participants attempted to preserve agency, emotional expression, judgment, and creative ownership while selectively accommodating AI. The concept is not presented as a validated theory or a globally novel framework. Recent work already examines art students' negotiation of creative identity with GenAI (Wu et al., 2026). Its contribution here is heuristic: it organizes how these tensions appeared together in a Pakistani Fine Arts sample.

5.4 Career uncertainty, adaptation, and institutional responsibility

Career anxiety in the present study resembles concerns reported among professional artists and creative workers (Kawakami & Venkatagiri, 2024; Öztaş & Arda, 2025). However, the interview data do not establish that AI will cause job displacement. They show that some participants perceive speed, automation, and changing client behavior as threats, while others expect adaptation or coexistence. This distinction is important because participant expectations should not be converted into labor-market predictions. The more defensible implication is that career preparation may need to include both human creative strengths and the ability to work critically with AI.

Institutional guidance connects all six themes. Students were already using AI for assistance, experiencing mixed emotions, debating originality, and imagining future employment, yet their descriptions of formal guidance were uneven. Recent systematic reviews similarly emphasize the need for AI literacy, assessment guidance, ethics, and curriculum design in higher art education (Fang, 2026; Jiang et al., 2026). The present findings support program-level discussion of responsible AI use, disclosure, authorship, and the protection of independent conceptual and manual development. They do not justify a single national policy based on one institution.

6. Implications for Fine Arts Education

Three implications follow from the findings. First, AI literacy in Fine Arts education should extend beyond software operation. Students need opportunities to evaluate the relevance, limitations, bias, and authorship implications of AI-generated material. Second, institutions should clarify expectations around acceptable AI use, attribution, disclosure, and assessment while avoiding both uncritical adoption and blanket prohibition. Third, foundational artistic skills remain important because participants used

human judgment, experience, manual practice, and personal contribution as the basis for distinguishing their work from machine-generated output. These implications are context-informed rather than nationally prescriptive.

7. Limitations

The study has several limitations. It is based on a 12-participant convenience sample from one institutional setting and cannot provide statistical representation of Fine Arts students across Pakistan. Volunteer and self-selection bias are possible. The sample included both current students and recent graduates, which broadens the range of perspectives but means the findings should not be interpreted as representing current undergraduates only. Interviews were conducted online and relied on self-report rather than observation of creative practice or analysis of artworks. Some responses required translation between Urdu and English, which may affect nuance. The study was cross-sectional during a period of rapid technological change, so perceptions may shift as AI tools and institutional policies develop. Finally, the study does not claim formal data saturation, intercoder reliability, or member checking because these procedures were not documented.

8. Conclusion

Within this sample, generative AI was neither accepted uncritically nor rejected outright. Participants treated it as a useful but conditional form of assistance while continuing to place human agency, emotion, lived experience, judgment, originality, and personal contribution at the center of artistic identity. Their accounts also revealed unresolved questions about authorship and employment, alongside a belief that human artists can adapt if they retain creative independence and learn to use AI critically.

The study's central contribution is therefore contextual and integrative. It shows how practical AI use, emotional ambivalence, artistic identity, originality, authorship, career uncertainty, and educational preparation can be negotiated within the same Fine Arts experience. The study-derived phrase negotiated artistic identity provides a concise way to describe this process without claiming a universal theory. For Fine Arts education, the most defensible response is not to treat AI as either a threat to be excluded or a shortcut to be embraced. It is to create clearer spaces in which students can learn when AI is useful, where human judgment remains necessary, how authorship should be disclosed, and how a developing artistic voice can remain visible within an AI-influenced creative landscape.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations: The study protocol, interview guide, data-collection procedures, and participant-protection arrangements were reviewed and approved by the research supervisor as part of the MS thesis process at The Superior University, Lahore. Participation was voluntary and based on informed consent. Participants were informed of confidentiality, the right to withdraw, and audio recording, and identifying information was replaced with codes P01–P12. This was supervisory academic approval; the source thesis records do not contain a separate institutional research-ethics committee reference number, so no committee approval number is reported in this manuscript.

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