

Attitudes toward Artificial Intelligence among Students and Faculty: A Qualitative Inquiry

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ABSTRACT

We are witnessing the unprecedented and rapid impact of Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education, through the student experience of learning and teacher practices of teaching, assessment, and support. This work adopts an interpretative, qualitative approach to understand students' and faculty's attitudes on the use of Artificial Intelligence in Pakistan. A semi-structured interview approach was taken to explore the participants' experiences, aspirations, and apprehensions. This used Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019) to examine the comments for the themes that they represent. The findings indicate attitudes are ambivalent: students value convenience and assistance with academic work, but have concerns about trust, privacy, security, ethics, and addiction. These concerns may reflect student expectations for efficiency and task-focused outcomes; faculty expectations for trust, privacy, and responsible design. Triangulation strategies and additional participants were used to establish these. The study offers a rich description of attitudes about Artificial Intelligence and a qualitative perspective for scale development.

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INTRODUCTION

Artificial Intelligence is an important part of contemporary education, affecting the process of information discovery, creation of texts, problem solving, and evaluation (Holmes et al., 2019). This has been accelerated by the emergence of generative technologies such as ChatGPT, which enable the creation of text and images, summarization, and ideation (Dwivedi et al., 2023). Understanding attitudes towards Artificial Intelligence is important as this impacts the adoption, use, and regulation of technology. The technology acceptance model gives importance to the influence of perceived usefulness and ease of use on intention to use (Venkatesh et al., 2003). However, with Artificial Intelligence, we need to be mindful of ethical responsibility, trust, and judgment (Floridi et al., 2018). Students and teachers in higher education use Artificial Intelligence in many ways. Students can use it to study, and academics can consider the effects it has on pedagogic quality indicators, authenticity of assessment, and academic integrity. Existing research mapping the use of AI in the university sector has identified purposes (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019), but there is less research on how Artificial Intelligence is understood and people's feelings about it (technically known as "affect") (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019). This study responds to this need by examining perceptions of Artificial Intelligence using qualitative research approaches and comparing student and academic perceptions to identify similar and different 'worldviews'.

The rapid advancement and integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in higher education has prompted increasing scholarly attention toward understanding how key stakeholders—particularly students and faculty—perceive and engage with this transformative technology. Attitudes toward AI are commonly conceptualized as a multidimensional construct comprising cognitive (beliefs and knowledge), affective (emotional responses), and behavioral (intentions and actions) components. These dimensions collectively influence individuals' willingness to adopt and meaningfully integrate AI into academic practices (Sultana, 2025; Nikolic, 2024). However, emerging research suggests that attitudes toward AI are not merely individual psychological dispositions but are also shaped by broader socio-cultural, institutional, and ethical contexts.

Within the student population, the literature largely indicates a favorable orientation toward AI technologies. Students tend to perceive AI as a functional and supportive tool that enhances learning efficiency, facilitates access to information, and improves academic productivity (Fitria, 2021; Dobrovská et al., 2024). This positive disposition is often grounded in the perceived utility and immediacy of AI-driven feedback systems, which align with contemporary learners' expectations for speed, personalization, and accessibility. Furthermore, empirical studies have demonstrated that students' engagement with AI is strongly influenced by affective responses, with positive emotions such as curiosity and excitement acting as key drivers of usage intentions (Vaněček, 2024).

Nevertheless, this optimistic perspective is accompanied by a growing body of critical discourse. Students increasingly express concerns regarding overdependence on AI, the potential erosion of critical thinking skills, and ethical dilemmas related to academic integrity and data privacy (Yan et al., 2025). Importantly, recent findings suggest a shift from passive acceptance to more reflective and evaluative engagement, with students questioning the credibility, transparency, and limitations of AI-generated outputs (Gao et al., 2026). This duality highlights that students' attitudes are characterized not by unconditional acceptance but by a negotiated balance between perceived benefits and potential risks.

In contrast, faculty attitudes toward AI tend to be more cautious and context-dependent. Educators' perceptions are often influenced by their level of technological proficiency, prior exposure to digital tools, and the degree of institutional support available for AI integration (Enrichment Review, 2025). While faculty members acknowledge the pedagogical potential of AI—particularly in enabling personalized learning and instructional innovation—they simultaneously express apprehension regarding its implications for academic integrity, intellectual rigor, and the authenticity of student learning processes (Lien, 2025). This cautious stance reflects a deeper concern about the changing nature of knowledge production and assessment in AI-mediated educational environments.

Studies that examine both students and faculty reveal a shared yet nuanced perspective: both groups recognize the transformative potential of AI while emphasizing the necessity for ethical governance, clear institutional policies, and responsible usage frameworks (Paul, 2025). This convergence suggests that attitudes toward AI are shaped by a dynamic interplay between innovation and regulation, where acceptance is contingent upon trust, transparency, and accountability. At the same time, divergences between students' enthusiasm and faculty's caution underscore the importance of examining these perspectives collectively to develop a more holistic understanding of AI adoption in higher education.

Theoretically, attitudes toward AI are frequently interpreted through models such as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), which identify perceived usefulness, ease of use, and social influence as primary determinants of technology adoption (Nikolic, 2024; Muneer, 2026). While these models provide valuable explanatory frameworks, they have been critiqued for their limited ability to capture the complex, context-bound, and meaning-making processes underlying individuals' interactions with AI. As such, there is a growing recognition of the need to move beyond purely quantitative and model-driven approaches toward more interpretive methodologies.

Despite the expanding literature, a significant gap remains in qualitative research that explores the lived experiences, subjective interpretations, and contextual realities of AI use among students and faculty. Existing studies are predominantly survey-based, offering breadth but often lacking the depth required to understand how attitudes are constructed, negotiated, and transformed in real-world academic settings. This limitation is particularly pronounced in underrepresented contexts, including developing countries, where cultural norms, institutional structures, and technological access may shape AI perceptions in unique ways.

In response to these gaps, the present study adopts a qualitative inquiry to explore attitudes toward AI among university students and faculty. By capturing participants' lived experiences and interpretive perspectives, this approach seeks to provide a more nuanced and contextually grounded understanding of how AI is perceived, valued, and contested within higher education. Such insights are essential for informing the development of ethically responsible, pedagogically sound, and culturally responsive AI integration strategies.

In this research, we have made an effort to highlight the effect of unemployment, inflation, gross fixed capital formation, exports, and female workforce involvement on economic growth in developing economies.

Objectives

The research paper has the following objectives:

1. To explore the perceptions of Artificial Intelligence among students and faculty.
2. To explore perceived benefits and risks of use.
3. To compare students and faculty.
4. To inform the development of a questionnaire.

Research Questions

This paper aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What are the attitudes of students and faculty about the use of AI in higher education?
2. What are the benefits of the use of AI in higher education according to students and faculty?
3. What are students' and faculty's concerns about the use of AI?
4. What are the similarities and differences between students' and faculty's attitudes towards the use of AI?

5. What are the main themes for future consideration in designing a scale to measure attitudes towards Artificial Intelligence?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study used a qualitative research strategy to explore attitudes toward Artificial Intelligence. This approach aims to understand the participants' perspectives of phenomena from their real-life experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The purpose of this study was to learn more about what students and faculty think, rather than to determine what we will measure.

Participants

The participants were students and faculty from higher education. They were selected because they have various roles. Students use Artificial Intelligence while faculty produce, assess, and make decisions about it.

Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling was done of individuals who had knowledge and experience in the use of Artificial Intelligence in education. This enabled the collection of relevant data (Patton, 2002).

Data Collection

This method allowed participants to give their perspectives on issues, experiences, and concerns using their own words while considering research questions (Kallio et al., 2016).

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using the Reflexive Thematic Analysis by Braun & Clarke (2019). The process involved:

1. Familiarizing with the data,
2. Generating initial codes
3. Recognizing patterns in responses
4. Developing themes
5. Refining themes with new insights

Data Triangulation

Firstly, to improve the study's credibility, the data were triangulated with students' and teachers' views (Patton, 1999). Secondly, purposive sampling (Patton, 1999) was used by involving new students and teachers later in the study to refine the themes. The perspectives of these students were compared to the findings. Similar themes were confirmed, and new data were used to fine-tune them. This allowed us to ensure the findings reflected strong views of Artificial Intelligence.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results are discussed in terms of the research questions.

(RQ1) Student and Faculty Perceptions of Artificial Intelligence

In general, students perceived Artificial Intelligence to be a useful resource for their studies. They associated it with being accessible, convenient, and providing assistance with learning and tasks.

"It helps me to get an overview when I don't have time to read all of it."

Teachers also feel the benefit, but have varied views. These findings suggest that there is acceptance and wariness in attitudes and beliefs towards the benefits of Artificial Intelligence.

(RQ2) Benefits of Artificial Intelligence

Participants found multiple benefits. For students, these relate to productivity and efficiency, and learning. Students identified how Artificial Intelligence is productive. These were also identified by faculty but had links to academic integrity. They noted that it is related to research assistance, content organization, and inspiration. This is consistent with findings that Artificial Intelligence has a positive effect on productivity in the education sector (Dwivedi et al., 2023).

(RQ3) Concerns About Artificial Intelligence

Students and faculty were concerned. These included: Accuracy, Privacy and security, Ethics, and Dependency.

"I verified the answer, it may not be correct".

Faculty were particularly concerned about integrity and originality. This reflects ethical concerns about Artificial Intelligence (Floridi et al., 2018).

(RQ4) Students and Faculty Perspectives

While students were interested in convenience and support, faculty were concerned about assessment and accountability. Students were more likely to use Artificial Intelligence, but the faculty was more worried. These uses reflect users' attitudes. Students' learning is supported by Artificial Intelligence; faculty use it to evaluate learning.

(RQ5) Themes for Developing Scales

Our method helped us to identify some themes that will inform future scale development:

1. Usefulness of Artificial Intelligence
2. Trustworthiness and reliability
3. Privacy and ethical considerations
4. Reliance and cognitive effects
5. Value of human judgment

The identified themes are different aspects of attitudes towards Artificial Intelligence and can be used to inform the construction of items for quantitative research.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate complex attitudes towards Artificial Intelligence. They recognized benefits and expressed concerns. This is like other research that stresses benefits and risks (Dwivedi et al., 2023; Floridi et al., 2018). There were differences between students and teachers, based on their roles. These reflect theories of technology acceptance that highlight context and experience impact perceptions (Venkatesh et al., 2003). The study also contributes to the literature on qualitative research by offering themes for scale development and connecting qualitative and quantitative research.

Implications

The research paper has these limitations.

1. Universities should have policies for using Artificial Intelligence
2. Staff should be trained in the best practices of Artificial Intelligence
3. Students should be trained in using Artificial Intelligence.

Limitations

This is a small-scale, qualitative study. Research should be replicated in larger samples and using quantitative scales.

CONCLUSIONS

The recent study of student and faculty attitudes towards Artificial Intelligence (AI) revealed that both students and faculty members tend to see AI as a helpful tool in academics and other work settings. But in addition, alongside acceptance of AI, participants also voice concerns about potential over-reliance, a decline in critical thinking skills, and ethical considerations relating to privacy and abuse. In general, opinions about AI were mixed, with acceptance and apprehension, with variations in trust and dependency between students and faculty.

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