

## **ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION: PERCEPTIONS OF RESEARCH SCHOLARS ON OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Artificial Intelligence in higher education has changed teaching, learning and research practices in academic institutions. This study examined perceptions of using AI in institutions by conducting interviews with fifteen PhD scholars from various disciplines including Management, Economics, and Commerce and analysing their opinions. The study found five key themes: educational benefits of AI, ethical concerns and academic integrity, impact on critical thinking and creativity, responsible AI use and institutional regulation, digital inequality and privacy concerns. The study found that AI improves academic productivity and efficiency. But participants express their concern about plagiarism, academic dishonesty, Overdependence on AI-generated content, diminished critical thinking, and unequal access to technology. The study emphasises the need for ethical AI policies, awareness programs, responsible AI practices and equal access for technology in higher education institutions.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Higher Education, Academic Integrity, Research Scholars, Thematic Analysis, Responsible AI Use, Digital Inequality

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Artificial Intelligence or AI is changing the way we learn in educational institutions. This is because of its significant growth of AI technologies (Crompton & Burke, 2023). Since the public release of ChatGPT in November 2022 academic institutions around the world are using AI to help the students with their works. This is changing how students complete their educational work and how teachers evaluate it (Bhullar et al., 2024).

AI is different from computer programs that academic institutions used before. Those old or traditional programs just helped students to get information or watch educational content. AI can perform more advanced tasks like summarising, paraphrasing and generating human-like content (Atchley et al., 2024). This is causing a lot of discussion among teachers and scholars, about appropriate use of AI tools for academic works. They are trying to identify ethical way to use AI in academic institutions.

Research scholars are in an important position while discussing the role of AI in higher education. They use AI tools; examine if it is good or bad and students might even make their own AI content. Their opinion is very valuable because they know how to use AI tools with an improved efficiency and productivity, which helps in academic honesty and originality in work (Eke, 2023). The researcher needs to examine the scholar's opinion about AI tools to make rules and policies for institutions to use AI in a responsible way with preserving fundamental values of education and research.

Existing studies indicate several benefits of AI which help students learn faster, giving them personal assistance, make it easier to understand ideas and make their writing better (Luo et al., 2025; Nguyen, 2025). Research scholars use AI for checking grammar, paraphrasing, generating research ideas, managing references and organising literature (Khalifa & Albadawy, 2024). Using AI in these ways can reduce stress, save time and help them get more work done.

There are issues about plagiarism, academic dishonesty and misusing AI-generated content (Chan, 2023; Gallent-Torres et al., 2023). Studies have found that students are submitting assignments with the help of AI without understanding the concept, using it for online examinations and relying on AI-generated summaries without reading the original sources (Gruenhagen et al., 2024). These behaviours bring up questions about the originality of work, the value of degrees, and what institutions should do to maintain high academic standards (Sweeney, 2023; Balalle & Pannilage, 2025).

Responsible use of AI has become more important which emphasises transparency, supervision, original work and critical evaluation of AI-generated content (Memarian & Doleck, 2023; Schiff, 2022). Researchers are requesting institutions to establish clear policies, set up systems to monitor AI usage, provide ethical guidelines and include these topics in their syllabi (Aler Tubella et al., 2024; Jin et al., 2025). Many educational institutions still lack good policies and students aren't well-informed about the appropriate guidelines (Wang et al., 2024; Humble, 2025). There are also concerns that overuse of AI could affect critical thinking, creativity and problem-solving skills (Vendrell & Johnston, 2026). Also, might lead to users relying heavily on them reducing critical thinking and losing control over their own learning (Atchley et al., 2024). Additionally, unequal access to AI tools and data security issues may make existing educational inequalities (Köbis & Mehner, 2021; Porayska-Pomsta, 2024).

Most research so far has focused on undergraduate students, teachers or institutional policies but There is lack a of understanding about how doctoral scholars deal with the opportunities and challenges of AI (Bond et al., 2024). This study aims to fill that gap by looking at what research scholars think about AI in education including their experiences with benefits, concerns, responsible use and suggestions, for institutions regulations.

## **2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

- To explore the role of AI as a support tool in higher education.
- To examine ethical concerns related to plagiarism, academic dishonesty, and misuse of AI-generated content in academic settings.
- To assess the influence of AI usage on students' creativity, analytical thinking, and independent learning behaviour.
- To understand perceptions regarding responsible AI usage and institutional regulation in higher education.
- To analyse issues of digital inequality, privacy, and technological accessibility associated with AI adoption in education.

## **3. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Educators and administrators can now use AI to analyse vast amounts of data, providing insights that drive informed decisions and strategies. The use of AI in education has drawn a lot of attention from researchers regarding its benefits, issues and how institutions are

reacting to its adoption (Crompton & Burke, 2023; Bond et al., 2024). Researchers have found that AI can make learning more efficient. It can also provide help and improve research productivity (Luo et al., 2025; Nguyen, 2025). Scholars are using AI for tasks like reviewing literature, grammar correction, paraphrasing, managing citations and making complex ideas simpler (Khalifa & Albadawy, 2024). These uses of AI have been shown to reduce stress and save time for academics.

Ethical concern is an important issue in which there are a lot of problems with students of dishonest about their work and excessive dependence of AI content to do their assignments without understanding the subject matter (Eke, 2023; Gallent-Torres et al., 2023). Some students are even using AI tools during online examinations. This is a problem because students are not really learning anything by doing this (Gruenhagen et al., 2024; Sweeney, 2023). These things are changing the way we think about who did the work and whether someone really deserves a degree (Balalle & Pannilage, 2025). So now people are talking about how to use AI in a responsible way. This means being honest, about when you use AI having work reviewed by others making sure originality and evaluating critically about AI-generated content (Memarian & Doleck, 2023; Schiff, 2022).

Institutional responses to AI have been marked by regulation rather than complete prohibition. Most of the top institutions have created rules that allow the use of AI under certain conditions and acknowledging the importance of giving credits and letting instructors make their own decisions (Moorhouse et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2024). Some of the things that institutions are doing includes creating guidelines for ethical behaviour adding statements to syllabi giving advice on how to redesign assessments and providing training on AI literacy (An et al., 2025; Jin et al., 2025). However, there remains a gap between creating policies and classroom implementation as many teachers reported that they do not getting proper training and support (Humble, 2025; McDonald et al., 2025). Researchers are warning that unstructured way of using AI tools will negatively affect creativity and cognitive development. There are also concerns about access to AI tools and problems with keeping data safe which could make a further increase in educational inequalities (Köbis & Mehner, 2021; Porayska-Pomsta, 2024).

This is a gap because research scholars are the ones who show us what it means to be honest, in our academic work and who guide new researchers. This study is trying to fill this gap by looking at what research scholars think about the things AI can do for education the ethical concerns, how to use AI in a responsible way and what institutions should do to regulate it.

#### **4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The present study employed a qualitative research methodology to investigate PhD scholars' perceptions and experiences of using Artificial Intelligence (AI) in higher education. The educational benefits, ethical concerns, responsible AI use and challenges of AI technologies in academic activities were explored in depth using the descriptive qualitative research design. Primary data was collected from 15 PhD scholars from Kasaragod district of Kerala through semi-structured interviews using purposive sampling technique, from disciplines including Management, Economics, and Commerce as the participants had adequate knowledge and experience related to use of AI in research and academics. The sample included both male and female aged between 25 and 35 years. The interviews were conducted through online and offline modes based on the convenience of participants each interview lasted approximately 30 to 40 minutes in both English and Malayalam.

The interview answers were analysed using thematic analysis. The data was systematically coded and organised using the software Taguette. Key themes that emerged included the

educational benefits of AI, ethical concerns and academic integrity, impact on critical thinking and creativity, responsible use of AI and institutional regulation, and digital inequality and privacy concerns. The study was performed in accordance with all ethical considerations, including informed consent, confidentiality and voluntary participation.

## **5. DATA ANALYSIS& FINDINGS**

The analysis resulted in the emergence of five major themes which include educational benefits of AI, ethical concerns and academic integrity, impact on critical thinking and creativity, responsible AI use and institutional regulation and digital inequality and privacy concerns.

### **5.1. Educational Benefits of AI**

The findings about educational benefits directly address the first objective of the study. Participants think that AI is a helpful tool for education which makes learning easier and faster by providing the information they need. Many respondents stated that AI assists them in understanding difficult theoretical concepts, organise academic work, new research ideas and interpreting educational materials. AI even helps students write better and make their writing sound more professional (Luo et al., 2025). Several respondents said that AI saves them a lot of time and reduces the stress related to academic work and research. It also useful for grammar correction, citation generation, phrasing, and language translation and improving their language skills. Respondents use AI when they are reviewing articles, writing proposals and coming up with new ideas and creating content for academic works.

Participant 4 stated;

*“AI helps students to save time, organize their academic works, and access information very quickly.”*

Participant 9 stated;

*“I use AI tools for summarising articles, generating new research ideas, and improving academic writing quality.”*

Some respondents also stated that AI helps make learning more personalised and flexible by quickly explaining challenging topics. Overall, findings indicate that most of the PhD scholars recognise AI as an important tool for higher education which supports learning by increasing efficiency and improving productivity of their academic work in institutions only by using it in a balanced and responsible way.

### **5.2. Ethical Concerns and Academic Integrity**

The participants of the study were concerned about the ethical use of AI in colleges and universities especially when it comes to plagiarism, misinformation, excessive dependence of AI-generated contented unethical practices (Eke, 2023; Gallent-Torres et al., 2023). Majority of the respondents clearly stated that students misuse AI tools for completing assignments, reports and online examinations without trying or understanding what they are doing (Sweeney, 2023). Some respondents noticed that some students just copy what the AI tools generated without checking originality and accuracy. The respondents also stated that biased or wrong AI-generated information will negatively affect the credibility and quality of academic work in higher education.

Participant 3 stated:

*"One of the major ethical concerns related with AI use in education is plagiarism and overdependence on AI-generated content of students. I have seen students directly copying AI-generated content for assignments and seminars".*

Participants also mentioned that overdependence on AI could compromise academic integrity and hinder independent academic effort (Balalle & Pannilage, 2025). This will emphasise the importance of responsible use of AI in higher education.

Participant 7 mentioned:

*"AI can negatively affect the academic integrity of students when they misuse AI-generated content during examinations or assignments and using content without proper verification and originality".*

Research shows that while AI has educational benefits, participants are highly concerned about its unethical misuse and its negative impact on academic integrity by emphasising transparency, originality and responsible use of AI in academic works which supports second objective of the study.

### **5.3. Impact on Critical Thinking and Creativity**

The findings related to critical thinking and creativity directly address the third objective of the study. The respondents believe that relying heavily on AI could negatively impact critical thinking, creativity and independent learning ability of students. Many respondents expressed concern that students might start using answers generated by AI instead of using their own ability to analyse information and solve problems. Also, excessive use of AI might decrease students' motivation to think creatively and generating their own ideas which negatively affect their intellectual growth in academic works. AI contributes to the problem as students often use ready-made answers rather than engaging learning process.

Participant 5 stated:

*"Excessive use of AI tools may reduce critical thinking and analytical abilities because students may rely on generated or ready-made responses instead of independent learning".*

Participant 8 explained:

*"Students should avoid overdependence on AI tools because it may weaken independent thinking and creativity".*

The respondents reveal that AI should be used as a supportive educational assistant, not a replacement for their academic thinking and effort. Using AI responsibly will help to come up with original ideas, creativity and independent learning not a substitute for our own thoughts and efforts.

Participant 10 mentioned:

*"Responsible AI use means using AI tools as a supporting tool rather than a replacement for independent learning and academic effort".*

Participant 13 stated:

*"Over dependence on AI-generated content may weaken or hinder students' originality and intellectual development".*

The findings suggest AI improves efficiency and support for academic tasks, but participants are concerned that AI may weaken creativity, analytical thinking and independent learning among students and researchers.

#### 5.4. Responsible AI Use and Institutional Regulation

The findings correspond with the fourth objective of understanding perceptions regarding responsible AI use and institutional regulation. The respondents who took part in this study revealed using AI tools in a responsible way is very important in academic institutions. They also think that there should be strict rules and policies to control how AI is used in education. Majority of the respondents believe that AI should be used ethically, transparently and a learning support not a replacement for student ability and creativity.

The respondents suggested that academic institutions should make clear policies and ethical guidelines for using AI tools. They highlighted the need for monitoring systems and educational awareness programs to promote ethical AI or responsible AI practices. They emphasised the role of educators also in guiding their works.

Participant 2 stated:

*"Academic institutions should regulate AI usage by developing ethical guidelines and awareness programs for students".*

Participant 6 explained:

*"Responsible AI use means using AI transparently, ethically, and only as a support system for learning rather than replacing human effort and creativity"*

Respondents reveal the importance of AI literacy among students in higher education an institution have a greater responsibility to prepare students for future workplaces to use AI in a way that is fair and good (Moorhouse et al., 2023).

Participant 9 mentioned:

*"Teachers and institutions play a vital role in guiding the students toward ethical use of AI through policies and academic support".*

Participant 12 stated:

*"AI should be integrated into higher education curricula because AI literacy is becoming essential in academic and professional settings".*

Most participants felt that higher education systems must support the students regarding responsible AI practices through proper ethical policies or guidelines, AI awareness programs and academic support.

#### 5.5. Digital Inequality and Privacy Concerns

The findings related to digital inequality and privacy concerns address the fifth objective of the study. Digital inequality and privacy concerns are significant problems related to usage of AI in higher education (Köbis& Mehner, 2021). Majority of the respondents of the study emphasised unequal access to AI tools or platforms like paid AI technologies, internet connectivity and digital literacy(Gallent-Torres et al., 2023).Also, who have better or advanced technological access can perform well rather than economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The respondents stated that students who do not have a good financial condition or who do not have access to a lot of technology may only have ability to using AI tools within their academic institutions only which leads unequal access. So, digital inequality is a major concern for integrating AI in higher education.

Participant 1 stated:

*"AI may create inequality because students with stronger internet access and paid AI subscriptions have greater advantages in learning and research".*

Participant 6 explained:

*"AI may also create educational inequality because not all students have equal access to advanced technologies and digital resources".*

Previous studies have highlighted that the major issues related to AI in education is privacy, cyber security, confidentiality and misuse of data (Atchley et al., 2024). Many students are not aware of how AI platforms are managing their data (Eke, 2023). Participants of the study also reveals their concern about data privacy risks and misuse of academic information which uploaded into AI systems without completely understanding it.

Participant 10stated:

*"AI may create inequality because students with stronger internet access and paid AI subscriptions have greater advantages in learning and research"*

Participant 13 explained:

*"AI may also create educational inequality because not all students have equal access to advanced technologies and digital resources"*

The results show that even though AI provides benefits for education the respondents in the study are still concerned about not everyone having equal access to technology and the potential risks related to privacy, data security and digital inequality in higher education

## **6. CONCLUSION**

The qualitative study explored the perceptions of research scholars regarding AI in higher education system. The finding of the study reveal AI has both benefits and challenges in academic settings. Benefits include AI serves as a supporting tool for academic productivity, assisting literature reviews, simplifying complex concepts, grammar correction, improves academic writing and increases access to information(Crompton & Burke, 2023; Luo et al., 2025). At the same time respondents revealed the significant concerns like plagiarism, misinformation, academic dishonesty, Overdependence on AI- generated content(Eke, 2023; Gallent-Torres et al., 2023). They believed that excessive use of AI will negatively affect the creativity, cognitive thinking, self-learning and academic credibility of the students. So, students must use AI in a responsible way. The findings further highlighted the concerns related to digital inequality, privacy risks, misuse of data and unequal access to AI technologies among students.

The findings show that AI should be used as a tool to help students learn rather than replace the way people think to come up with new ideas and work hard to achieve their academic goals. The study suggests that it is very important to use AI in a fair way in higher education by being open, carefully evaluating information, and giving students adequate support. This study has implications for the way higher education policy and curriculum design are. Institutions should make rules and guidelines for using AI in teaching, learning, and research. They should also teach students about how to use it in a way to help them think critically, analyse information, and be aware of ethical issues when they use AI technologies. The study also points out how important it is to have responsible rules for using AI in higher education. Academic institutions should have programs to raise awareness about ways to monitor AI use and protect student data to make sure AI tools are used in a safe and responsible way. They

should also try to reduce the gap between students who have access to technology and those who do not by giving all students access to computers and the internet, no matter what their background is.

Overall, the study says that AI can really change education for the better, but only if it is used in a way that is fair, responsible, and focused on people, not just technology. Artificial Intelligence can be a tool for higher education, but it needs to be used in a balanced and ethical way to really help students learn and grow. AI has transformative potential in higher education, but it must be used in an ethical, balanced, and supportive manner without replacing human effort.

### **LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

1. This study was conducted only among 15 PhD scholars from Kasaragod district of Kerala by using purposive sampling method. Therefore, we cannot generalise the findings to all students, scholars, or higher education institutions.
2. The study adopted a qualitative approach based on semi-structured interviews. So, the findings are based on respondents' own ideas and experiences, which may involve a subjective bias.
3. The study focused only on research scholars and did not include the perspectives of teachers, undergraduate students, administrators, or policy makers, which may limit a broader understanding of AI usage in higher education.
4. AI technologies and institutional policies are rapidly changing. Therefore, the findings reflect the perceptions and practices only during the period in which the study was conducted.

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