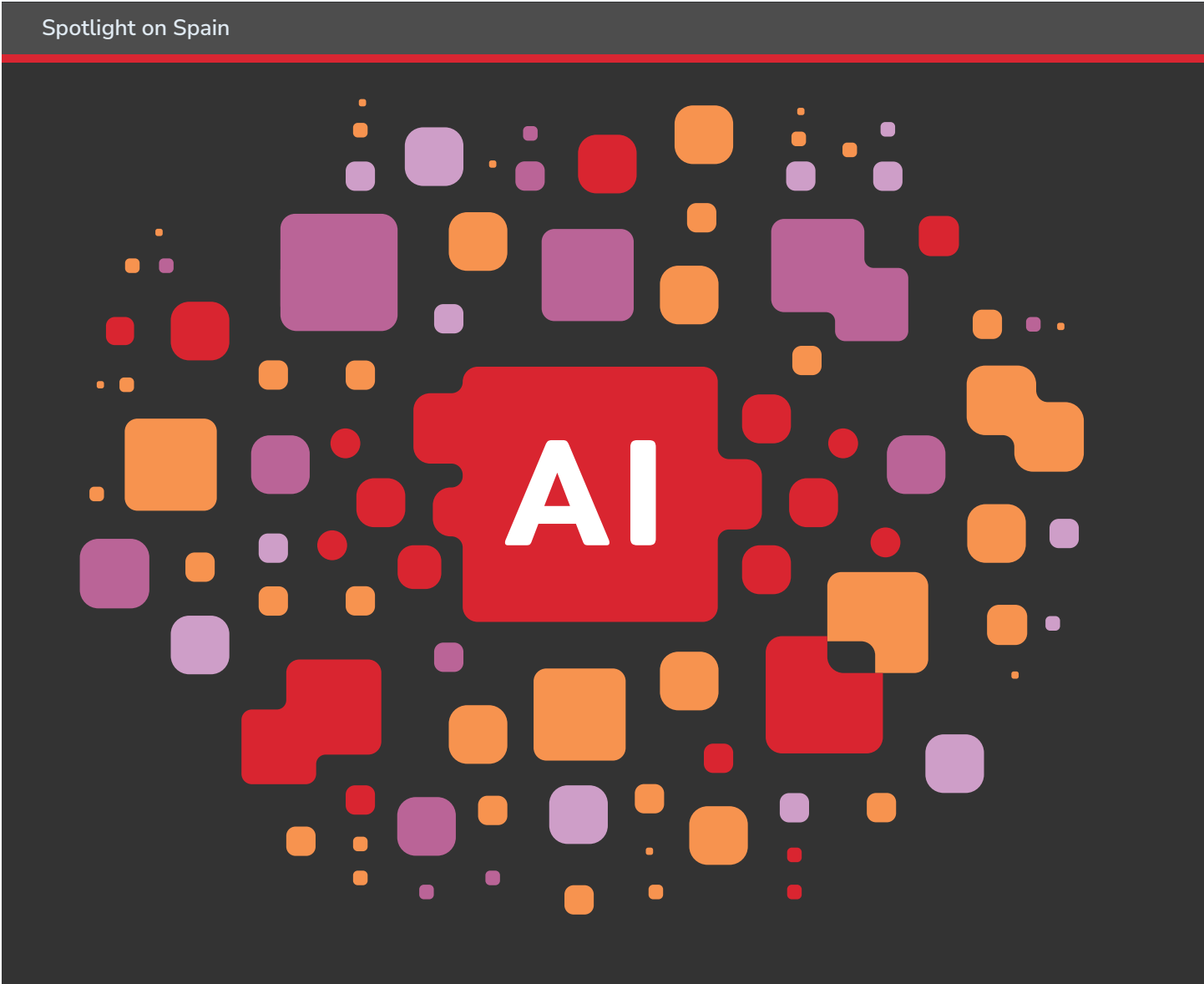# anthology

AI in Higher Ed: Hype, Harm, or Help

The perceptions and realities of AI among university leaders and students

Spotlight on Spain

In the constantly evolving landscape of higher education, the emergence of artificial intelligence (AI), its integration into technology and our daily life, and its use by students have brought incredible opportunities and complex challenges. As universities embrace this new age, understanding the unique viewpoints of students and university leadership—the key stakeholders—is vital in capitalising on the potential of AI while addressing possible ethical, pedagogical, and operational challenges.

Anthology conducted a global survey of more than 5,000 higher education leaders and current students in eleven countries to hear their thoughts about the opportunities, challenges, adoption, and impact of artificial intelligence. The study reveals insights highlighting the need for a collaborative approach regarding AI to help enrich the educational experience and ensure future-ready graduates.

This report focuses on the responses from students and university leaders in Spain, including where there are significant differences compared to their counterparts in other countries.

Students, Leaders, and Artificial Intelligence

Based on the survey results, students in Spain are likely to regularly use generative AI—in fact, a higher percentage report using it than in all but a few of the countries surveyed. Twenty percent of students consider themselves frequent users (i.e., weekly), while an additional 33% consider themselves occasional users. Taken together, every second student uses generative AI at least occasionally, trailing only students in Brazil and at the same high usage as in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. By comparison, only 27% of students in the United Kingdom consider themselves to be frequent or occasional users of generative AI. Students in Spain appear to have embraced generative AI: only about one third of students has never used generative AI writing tools or is unfamiliar with them.

Over six in 10 students in Spain expect their use of generative AI to increase in the next six months

In addition, over six in 10 students in Spain expect their use of generative AI to increase in the next six months, indicating even further interest in using the tools. University leaders in Spain report being significantly less familiar with generative AI than students. Nineteen percent of university leaders consider themselves to be frequent users of AI, which is the third highest of any country surveyed, only behind Singapore and the United Arab Emirates. However, only 12% consider themselves to be occasional users, which is the second lowest of any country surveyed, only ahead of South Africa. Sixty-three percent of leaders indicate that their use of generative AI is likely to increase somewhat or significantly in the next six months, demonstrating increased interest among university leaders. The gap between university leaders and students speaks to the continued opportunity to increase the incorporation of AI tools, including generative AI, into university processes and the classroom.

63% of leaders in Spain indicate that their use of generative AI is likely to increase somewhat or significantly in the next six months
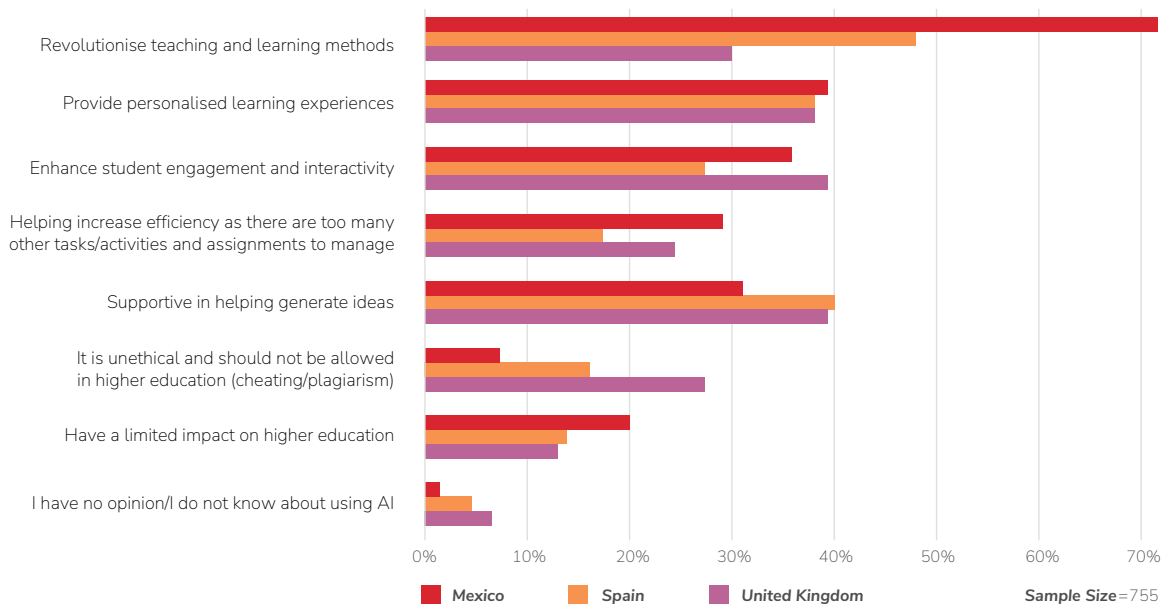
The Role of AI in Higher Education

When asked about opportunities related to AI and its potential role in higher education, students and leaders in Spain appear excited about the ways that AI, including generative AI, will impact higher education.

In fact, nearly one in two students feel that AI will revolutionise teaching and learning methods (48%), with four in 10 pointing to it being supportive in helping to generate ideas (40%), while nearly as many feel that it will help to provide personalised learning experiences (38%). Compared to other countries surveyed, students in Spain were the least confident that AI would help to enhance student engagement and interactivity. On the other hand, among the fewest number compared to other countries feel that AI will only have a limited impact on higher education (14%). At the same time, a similar number (16%) feel that specifically generative AI is unethical and should not be allowed in higher education—a lower percentage than in most other countries. Students in Spain are positive about the impact AI will have on higher education, especially as it relates to enhancing teaching and learning methods.
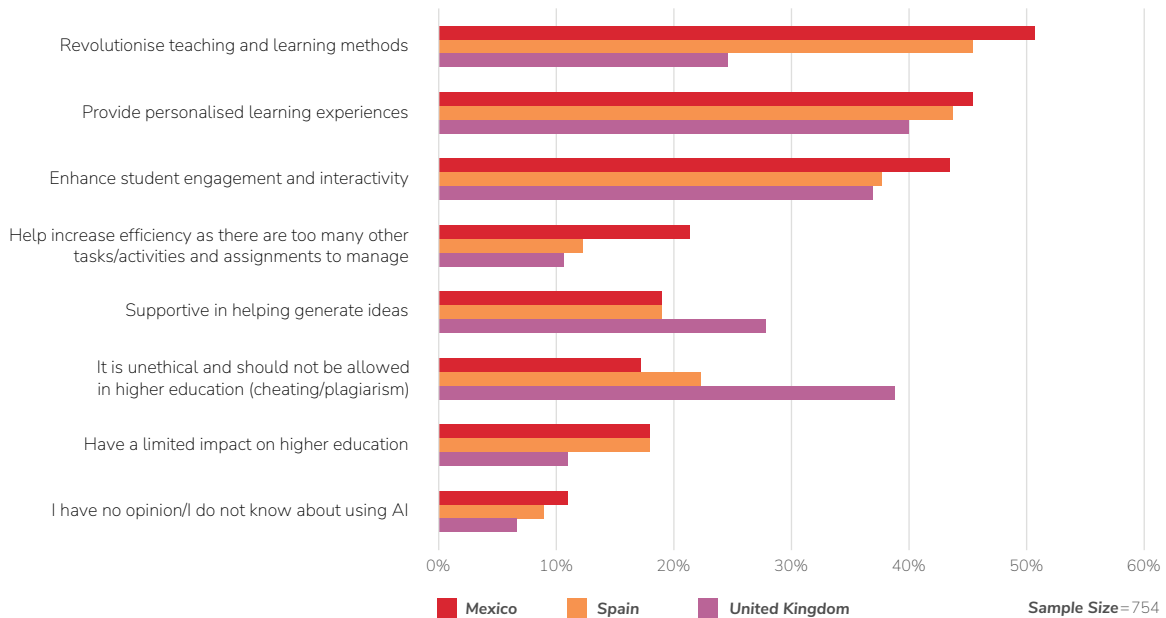
Students' View of Role of AI in Higher Education

What role do you think artificial intelligence (AI) will play in higher education?
(Please select all that apply.)

University Leaders' View of Role of AI in Higher Education

What role do you think artificial intelligence (AI) will play in higher education?
(Please select all that apply.)

While it is to be expected that students more quickly adopt new technology, including generative AI, in this case, it is especially important that university leaders and faculty members familiarise themselves with this technology, as it presents new opportunities to adjust their approach to teaching.

As in other countries, the large majority of university leaders feel that AI will play a role in the future of higher education. University leaders are closely aligned with students when it comes to AI helping to revolutionise teaching and learning methods, as 45% of university leaders felt that this would be the case, compared to 48% of students. However, there is not as much alignment with AI providing personalised learning experiences, as university leaders selected this as the second priority and at a higher rate than students (43% of leaders compared to 38% of students). Among university leaders, the third most selected option was that AI would help enhance student engagement and interactivity (38%), while this was of lower importance to students (27%). On the other hand, only 19% of university leaders felt that AI would be supportive in helping generate ideas, which is in stark contrast to the student perspective. Leaders, therefore, have a somewhat different perception of AI than students, even though they agree that the primary way that AI will impact higher education is by impacting the teaching and learning experience.

As in other countries surveyed, a higher number of university leaders than students in Spain feel that generative AI is unethical and should not be allowed in higher education at 22%, compared to 16% of students. However, when compared with other countries, university leaders in Spain are among the least

likely to feel this way, only trailing leaders in Mexico and Brazil. On the other hand, nearly one in five university leaders feel that AI will have a limited impact on higher education, which is the highest among all countries surveyed. This clearly shows a disconnect compared to the student population, as well as a larger group of leaders who feel that AI will have an impact. There is likely opportunity for continued conversation among university leaders about AI, as well as opportunities for workshops on the potential of AI to ensure that university leaders are prepared for the future. The differences between students and university leaders are also opportunities for continued conversation about the possibilities to seek to more closely align their expectations regarding AI and its impact on higher education.

When asked to anticipate the most significant ways AI tools will impact higher education and university operations, nearly three in 10 leaders pointed to the ability to use AI to assist in course building, while nearly the same number felt that AI would be helpful in drafting assessment questions aligned to learning outcomes, and in expanding thinking by assisting with brainstorming. Spanish university leaders were among the most hopeful of university leaders surveyed as to AI's impact on course building and on drafting assessment questions. Therefore, university leaders in Spain recognise the potential for AI to create efficiencies, which is further underlined by over one in five also feeling that AI will increase efficiency through automating grading or administrative tasks, which was the highest of any country surveyed. On the other hand, nearly one in four also expressed concern that it may create new challenges in identifying plagiarism in assessment. Even though this was a lower number than in the majority of countries surveyed, it continues to indicate concern about the negative potential of AI. Overall, this shows that perspectives continue to vary among university leaders in Spain, even though there is general alignment in some key areas on how AI tools may impact higher education.

Universities in Spain seem to generally be taking a more reactive approach to addressing the potential implications of AI, as 47% of leaders reported that their universities have rolled out a university-wide policy with respect to generative AI writing tools like ChatGPT, which is the lowest of any country surveyed. Although it does seem that that work is in progress, as 30% of leaders state that their universities are actively developing such policies—the highest of any country surveyed. Continuing to indicate different amounts of progress or thought about AI policies among universities in Spain is that 9% of university leaders do not expect their university to develop an AI policy—second highest among countries surveyed, only behind South Africa. Given the high level of interest, especially from students, in AI, universities that have not already done so may want to consider developing policies related to AI use at the institution. This will help guide faculty members and students in understanding how AI should or should not be used.

Based on these results, Spain is on a path to more broadly incorporate AI into higher education both from the student and university leader perspective, although there is still opportunity for growth. There are, of course, continued opportunities for reflection and conversation to more closely align expectations and to ensure that AI tools will meet the needs of students and the university in strengthening the educational experience for students.

Opportunities

- Review ways that AI can help enhance the student experience based on student sentiment

- Consider and implement ways that AI can be used to enhance the educational experience both inside and outside the classroom

- Foster dialogue between and among students and university leaders around the opportunities AI presents, as well as potential drawbacks or other impacts

- Educate students on the use of AI and encourage its continued use where appropriate, while also working toward the development of AI policies at the university

Methodology

Data collection was conducted online among university leaders and students across 11 countries in August 2023, including Australia, Brazil, Mexico, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Africa, Spain, the United Kingdom, United Arab Emirates, and the United States. Separate questionnaires with similar questions were utilised to enable comparisons. To qualify, student respondents had to indicate that they were currently enrolled at a higher education institution and were pursuing a degree or diploma. University leader respondents had to indicate that they were currently senior leaders (dean, provost, rector, etc.) at a higher education institution. In total, 2,617 university leaders and 2,728 students qualified for and completed the survey. In Spain, 250 students and 251 university leaders responded to the survey.

About Anthology

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