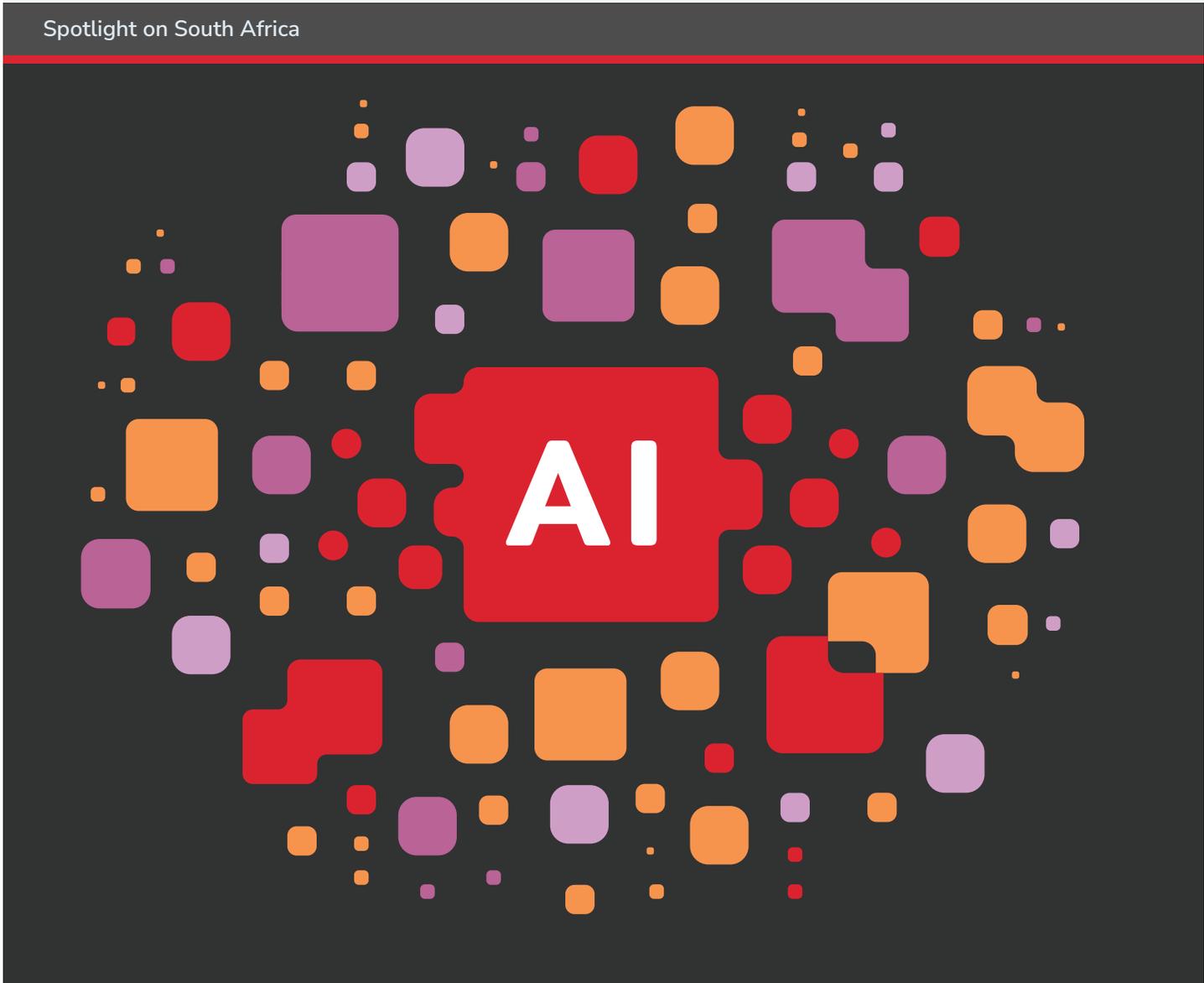




# AI in Higher Ed: Hype, Harm, or Help

The perceptions and realities of AI among university leaders and students

Spotlight on South Africa



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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 11 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 South Africa, including where there are significant differences compared to their counterparts in other countries.

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## Students, Leaders, and Artificial Intelligence

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Based on the survey results, students are split regarding current use of generative AI tools. Twenty-three percent report being frequent users (i.e., weekly) of generative AI, while an additional 25% report using it occasionally (i.e., monthly). This represents fewer than one in two students who at least occasionally use generative AI. On the other hand, the 33% of respondents who are either familiar with the tools but have not used them or are not familiar with generative AI writing tools represented one of the highest percentages in the survey, only behind the United States and the United Kingdom. Therefore, there appears to be some hesitation about using generative AI among students in South Africa.

However, seven in 10 students expect their use of generative AI to increase in the next six months, indicating growing interest in using the tools. But overall, even with growing interest, students in South Africa are not heavy users of AI. The highest reported usage of generative AI tools was by students in Australia and Brazil (35% and 32% rated themselves as frequent users, respectively). University leaders in South Africa report being even less familiar with generative AI than students, with only 13% being at least occasional users of generative AI tools. In fact, only 3% of university leaders consider themselves to be frequent users of AI, the lowest among all surveyed countries and in line with the United States and the United Kingdom. Only an additional 10% consider themselves to be occasional users, which was the lowest among any country surveyed. However, 58% of leaders indicate that their use of generative AI is likely to increase somewhat or significantly in the next six months, which is an indication that adoption among university leaders is likely to increase. This speaks to the continued opportunity to increase the incorporation of AI tools, including generative AI, into university processes and the classroom.

## The Role of AI in Higher Education

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When asked about opportunities related to AI and its potential role in higher education, students and leaders in South Africa appear excited about the ways that AI, including generative AI, will impact higher education with only 17% of students and 12% of leaders feeling that AI will have a limited impact on higher education.

In fact, six in 10 students feel that AI will revolutionize teaching and learning methods, and one in two see AI as playing a role in enhancing student engagement and interactivity, with nearly as many pointing to it being supportive in helping generate ideas (47%). Notable is that students in South Africa were among the most confident that AI would also help increase efficiency with tasks and activities (42%), only trailing students in Singapore (43%).

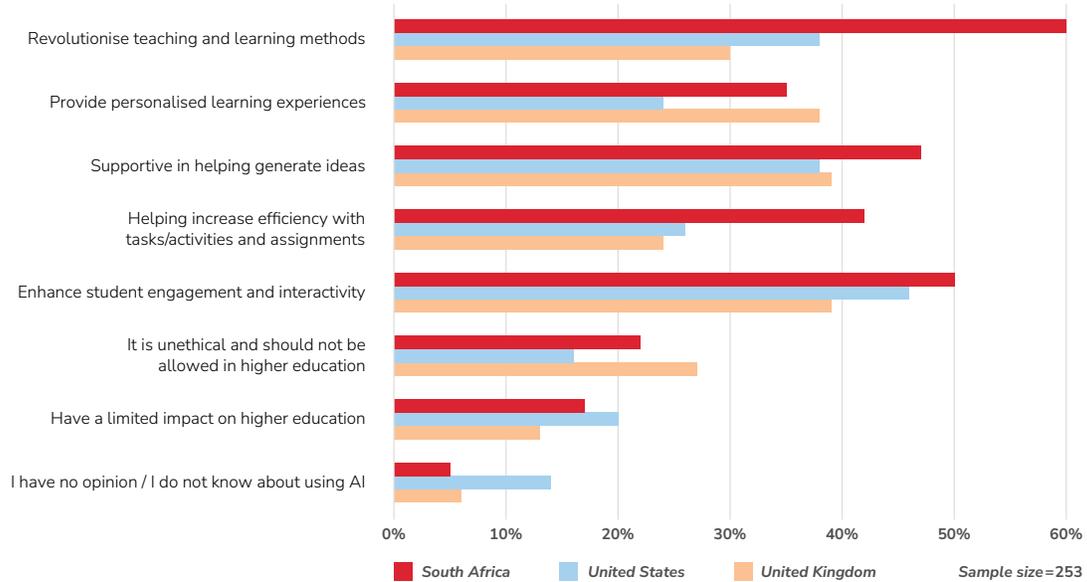
At the same time, slightly less than one in four students feels that specifically generative AI is unethical and should not be allowed in higher education—in line with results from most other countries. Overwhelmingly though, students in South Africa are positive about the impact AI will have on higher education.

Perhaps interesting to note is that students in South Africa are not as comfortable using AI chatbots to get quick answers to questions, with 60% stating that they are comfortable or very comfortable using chatbots,

compared to more than 75% of students from Australia, Brazil, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, and Singapore. There may still be an opportunity for universities to introduce chatbots to help better serve students, but this would also likely require communication and encouragement, given students' level of comfort in engaging with chatbots.

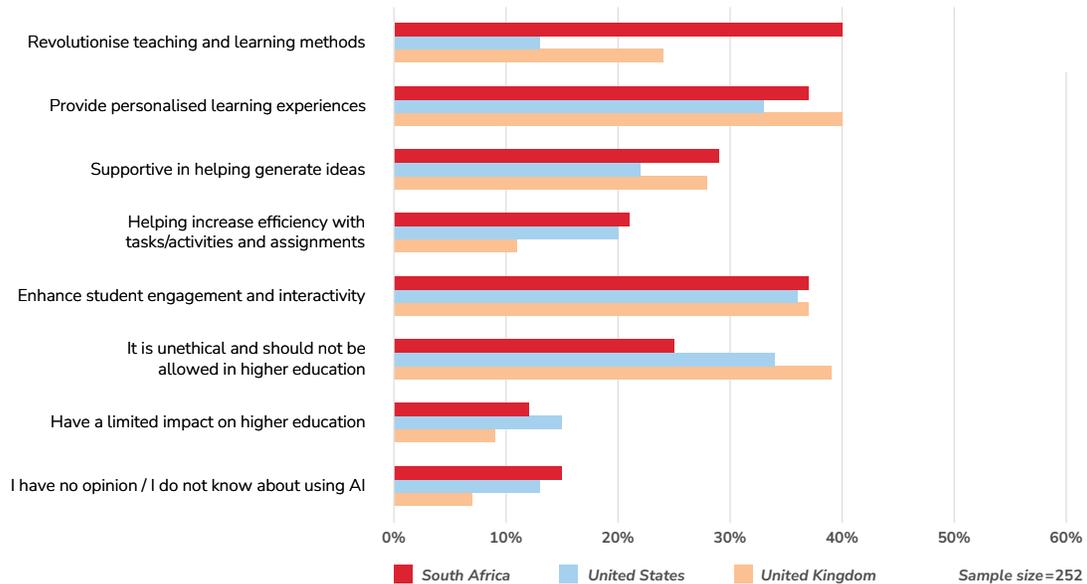
## Students' View of the Role of AI in Higher Education

What role do you think artificial intelligence (AI) will play in higher education?



## University Leaders' View of the Role of AI in Higher Education

What role do you think artificial intelligence (AI) will play in higher education?



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 are the students in South Africa, university leaders are a bit more hesitant regarding the role that AI will play in higher education when compared to their counterparts in other countries. Four in 10 leaders point to AI being able to revolutionise teaching and learning methods, which was the highest role selected (but a 20% gap compared to students). University leaders also felt that AI can enhance student engagement and interactivity (37%) and that AI can provide personalised experiences (37%). The next highest area at 29% was the role AI could play in helping generate ideas. Leaders, therefore, have a different perception of AI than students, with a higher percentage pointing to AI creating personalised experiences than students indicated, as well as a 13-point gap between leader and student expectations of enhancement of the student experience. In addition, one in four university leaders in South Africa feel that generative AI is unethical and should not be allowed in higher education. In addition, the highest percentage of university leaders among countries surveyed indicated that they had no opinion on the role that AI will play in higher education, or do not know about using AI. This again speaks to a gap among university leaders given the development of AI and indicates a need for additional education. The identified differences between student sentiment and that of university leaders are, therefore, opportunities for continued conversation about the possibilities to seek closer alignment of 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, one in three leaders pointed to the potential to use AI to draft assessment questions aligned to learning outcomes—the highest of any country surveyed—while one in five indicated that it could be helpful in expanding thinking by assisting with brainstorming (21%) as well as assisting with course building (20%). On the other hand, 27% also expressed concern that it may create new challenges in identifying plagiarism in assessment. There was less potential seen in using AI to query data to develop retention and student success campaigns, or enrolment or admissions campaigns. This highlights varying perspectives on the most significant ways that AI tools will impact higher education in South Africa and opens up opportunities for continued discussion.

While more than half of university leaders report that their university has taken a proactive approach and developed and rolled out an AI policy, this is among the lowest of the countries surveyed, only ahead of Spain. In fact, 12% of leaders feel that their university will not develop a policy in the foreseeable future, the highest percentage of any country surveyed. This highlights a potential dichotomy in South Africa related to the use of AI and university leaders should continue to advocate for developing AI policies to help students, instructors, and the university community as a whole understand how AI should and should not be used.

Based on these results, even though there is apparent hesitation among a subset of respondents to adopting generative AI and other AI tools, South Africa is on a path to more broadly incorporate AI into higher education both from the student and university leader perspective. There are 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 those students.

## **Opportunities**

- Continue to develop and refine university policies related to the appropriate use of AI
- Review ways that AI can help enhance the student experience based on expressed student sentiment
- Consider and implement ways that AI can be used to enhance the educational experience both inside and outside of 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

## Methodology

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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, the 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 South Africa, 253 students and 252 university leaders responded to the survey.

## About Anthology

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Anthology offers the largest EdTech ecosystem on a global scale for education, supporting more than 150 million users in 80 countries. With a mission to provide dynamic, data-informed experiences to the global education community through Anthology Intelligent Experiences™, we help learners, leaders, and educators achieve their goals by offering over 60 SaaS products and services designed to advance learning. Discover more about how we are fulfilling our mission for education, business, and government institutions at [www.anthology.com](http://www.anthology.com).