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PERCEPTIONS OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE USE AMONG YOUNG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS MAJORING IN BUSINESS MANAGEMENT ENGINEERING

PERCEPTIONS OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE USE AMONG YOUNG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS MAJORING IN BUSINESS MANAGEMENT ENGINEERING

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Abstract— This study examines students' perceptions of AI use among a cohort of 26 first-year Business Management Engineering students. An analytical method and a descriptive-correlational cross-sectional design (proportional sampling) were used to administer a questionnaire with Likert-scale questions, measuring overall perceived usefulness by company size, frequency of use, and the perceived intentionality of AI across companies, while also considering ethical aspects; however, demographic variables were not examined.

The findings revealed a low overall positive score, indicating an early and sporadic adoption characterized by caution. The average score for perceived usefulness was the highest, while low scores were obtained for frequency of use and purposeful use. Similarly, the comparative analysis showed no significant differences between participants of different genders.

It was found that there is still a gap between the digital skills students bring with them when they enter school and what we observe in current practice. Consequently, the study points to the immediate need for precise ethical codes and systemic efforts to incorporate AI into the academic curriculum.

Keywords—Higher education, Students, Ethics, Artificial intelligence, Information technology

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INTRODUCTION

The presence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the higher education ecosystem has impacted the way professionals carry out their work and interact with students, as well as how they manage knowledge. In particular, the fields of economics and business administration and the areas of applied engineering (the Business Management Engineering [IGE] program) are rapidly transforming to foster the development of professionals capable of leading internal digital transformation within organizations. We need to understand IGE students' perceptions of the adoption and/or rethinking of AI tools in their academic training in order to develop a pedagogical design that is realistic, ethical, and focused on the corporate world.

BACKGROUND

International Background

Data were collected from 125 U.S. college students to examine the adoption of generative artificial intelligence and the effect that AI use has on creativity-related problem-solving (Akgun & Green, 2024). They used an experimental and survey-based design with students from business and engineering schools. Although this requires extensive knowledge on the part of human operators to avoid analytical biases, they found that moderate use of these AI systems increased creativity in project management.

Chen et al. (2023) investigated the perceptions of higher education students in China regarding the personalization of learning through intelligent tutors. They conducted a longitudinal quantitative study assessing satisfaction and academic performance. They concluded that personalized feedback increases motivation and the perception of control over one's own learning process in technical disciplines.

Dwivedi et al. (2023) examined the ethical implications and overall acceptance of artificial intelligence in higher education globally, with an emphasis on the European context. They

conducted a Delphi study supplemented by surveys of college students. They concluded that algorithmic transparency

and the protection of personal data are the key factors that shape young people's trust in smart technologies.

García-Peñalvo et al. (2023) studied the impact of the emergence of ChatGPT on academic assessment and student perceptions at universities in Spain. They employed a mixed-methods approach, analyzing perception essays and questionnaires from students in technical and social science degree programs. They concluded that students advocate for a shift in assessment models toward methodologies based on projects and critical thinking, moving beyond traditional rote-memorization exams.

Huang and Rust (2023) assessed the preparedness of future professionals in administration and management in the face of AI-driven cognitive automation at institutions in Singapore and the United Kingdom. They used a structural equation model applied to college students. They concluded that the perception of job threat decreases when students understand that AI complements, rather than replaces, managerial and empathetic leadership skills.

Kallio et al. (2024) investigated the development of digital competencies and the acceptance of predictive analytics tools in business management among students in Finland. They conducted a cross-sectional empirical study with industrial engineering and management students. They concluded that the perception of usefulness is conditioned by the ability to interpret analytical results for managerial decision-making.

Liao et al. (2023) analyzed attitudes toward and usage patterns of generative artificial intelligence among university students in Taiwan. They employed a quantitative methodology based on the UTAUT (Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology) model. They concluded that performance expectations and social influence are the strongest predictors of the intention to continue using AI in academia.

Müller and Strobel (2024) explored the perceptions of business and economics students in Germany regarding ethics and responsibility in the use of automated decision-making systems. They administered a structured questionnaire to a multi-campus sample. They concluded that college students demand rigorous ethics training within their curricula to mitigate algorithmic biases in corporate settings.

O'Boyle and Sloan (2023) studied the impact of artificial intelligence on the transformation of

engineering and management career profiles in the United Kingdom. They conducted a perception study with

university students nearing graduation. They concluded that AI competencies are highly valued as a differentiating factor in the international labor market.

Wang et al. (2024) investigated the integration of AI-based business simulators and how they are perceived by university students in South Korea. They used an experimental approach with control and experimental groups in business administration programs. They concluded that interaction with intelligent simulated environments significantly improves perceptions of self-efficacy and understanding of complex production and management systems.

Latin American Background

Alarcón et al. (2024) investigated the integration of tools based on generative artificial intelligence into the learning processes of college students in Peru. They employed a quantitative cross-sectional methodology by administering a validated questionnaire to a representative sample of business and engineering students. They concluded that students have a highly favorable attitude toward the use of chatbots and virtual assistants for solving case studies, although they acknowledge a lack of clear institutional ethical guidelines for their academic use.

Álvarez and Gómez (2023) analyzed Colombian college students' perceptions regarding the adoption of smart technologies in academic management. They used a mixed-methods approach, combining focus groups with descriptive statistical analysis in business administration and industrial engineering departments. They concluded that, while the perceived usefulness is high, there is a latent fear of technological dependence and the loss of critical thinking in strategic decision-making.

Barreto and Silva (2024) studied the impact of AI-based recommendation and predictive analytics systems on the training of future managers and administrators in Brazil. They conducted a correlational empirical study evaluating digital self-efficacy among higher education students. They concluded that prior familiarity with digital environments significantly increases the perception of ease of use and reduces resistance to technological change.

Castillo and Morales (2023) explored the attitudes of young college students in Mexico toward the automation of business processes assisted by intelligent algorithms. They implemented a non-experimental design using a structured questionnaire administered to students in management- and business-related programs. They concluded that college students perceive AI as a key competency for the

contemporary job market, calling for greater integration of these tools into curricula.

Cruz et al. (2024) investigated the ethical use and perception of AI-assisted plagiarism in the preparation of academic papers at Chilean universities. They conducted a descriptive-explanatory study with students in technology and administrative degree programs. They concluded that students demand a clear institutional regulatory framework governing the ethical use of AI, avoiding ambiguous penalties and promoting critical digital literacy.

Fernández and Rojas (2023) evaluated perceptions of the usefulness and ease of use of AI-powered adaptive learning platforms at higher education institutions in Costa Rica. They applied the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) through surveys of engineering and management students. They concluded that the perception of usefulness is strongly correlated with the immediate feedback provided by intelligent systems during the development of complex projects.

Gómez and Herrera (2024) studied the psychosocial impact and academic self-efficacy resulting from interaction with intelligent learning environments in Ecuador. They used a quantitative methodology with structural equation modeling on college students in the field of economics and business administration. They concluded that trust in the results generated by AI depends directly on prior classroom instruction regarding how algorithms work.

Hernández et al. (2023) analyzed the curricular integration of artificial intelligence and its evaluation by university students in Argentina. They conducted a multiple-case study using semistructured interviews and questionnaires with students in management and systems programs. They concluded that there is a significant gap between young people's high willingness to use AI and faculty members' preparedness to integrate it pedagogically into their courses.

Medina and Vargas (2024) investigated perceptions of employability and the development of AI-mediated managerial competencies among students nearing the end of their engineering degrees in Mexico. They administered a survey on perceptions of the impact on employment to a sample of university students. They concluded that students consider mastery of data analytics and AI essential for excelling in project management and the supply chain.

Pérez and Domínguez (2023) examined the acceptance of intelligent assistants in academic project management and business simulations at universities in Uruguay. They implemented a quantitative correlational approach with business management students. They concluded that the perceived ease

of conversational interfaces increases intrinsic motivation to solve complex optimization and strategic planning problems.

Research Rationale

The relevance of this research lies in the imperative need to understand the phenomenon of artificial intelligence integration from the direct perspective of young university students pursuing a degree in Business Management Engineering (IGE). At the methodological and practical levels, traditional curricula face the constant challenge of keeping up with the speed at which intelligent technologies are reshaping the business landscape and production processes. Examining the perceptions, competencies, and ethical dilemmas of IGE students not only provides empirical evidence on current sentiments in a specific context such as Latin America but also offers strategic insights for higher education institutions to revise documents related to curriculum reform—one that promotes deep digital literacy, ultimately benefiting large numbers of current students or future management engineers who will need vital agile leadership skills compatible with the increasingly competitive 21st-century job market.

General Objective

To analyze the perceptions of undergraduate students in the Bachelor's Degree in Business Management Engineering regarding artificial intelligence in order to propose strategic guidelines for its integration into curricula through the development of professional competencies.

Research Limitations

E To properly interpret the findings, certain specific methodological and contextual limitations must be taken into account. The nature of this study presents three limitations: since it is a cross-sectional design, the results capture only the students' perceptions at a specific point in time, and technological advancement is an exponential process. The second limitation of the study relates to its geographic scope and, furthermore, to the fact that the sample was restricted to students enrolled exclusively in the Business Management Engineering program, which meant the findings focused on this specific academic profile; therefore, generalizing these results to any other discipline within engineering or the social sciences should be done with caution. Finally, self-reported data collection instruments may lead participants to respond with social desirability bias when evaluating their use of technological aids throughout their academic careers.

DEVELOPMENT

Research Paradigm

This research is grounded in the quantitative paradigm, which identifies an objective reality by collecting measurable data and conducting statistical and interpretive analyses of that data to examine patterns of behavior and frequency, as well as perceptions regarding the use of Artificial Intelligence. This approach is well-suited for measuring structured variables and identifying quantifiable trends in the context of higher education. In this vein, Alarcón et al. (2024) adopted the quantitative paradigm when studying students' use of intelligent technologies at universities, as it allows for the precise and objective measurement of their attitudes. Similarly, Liao et al. (2023) employed a quantitative methodological design to assess the intention to continue using generative artificial intelligence services, demonstrating that the statistical rigor of the paradigm facilitates the generalization of findings to related academic populations.

Level of Research

This study is descriptive-correlational in nature, employing a non-experimental cross-sectional design. It is descriptive because it seeks to specify the characteristics and dimensions of students' perceptions regarding the use of artificial intelligence, and it is correlational because it allows for the analysis of the relationship between the variables of academic use, perceived usefulness, and sociodemographic factors without deliberately manipulating the study conditions. This design is consistent with previous work by Barreto and Silva (2024), who used an empirical correlational approach to examine digital self-efficacy among higher education students. Similarly, Fernández and Rojas (2023) applied a non-experimental cross-sectional design when evaluating the acceptance of adaptive platforms based on artificial intelligence, supporting the validity of this level of research for capturing the current state of the technological phenomenon at a given point in time.

Participants

The study's population and sample consisted of all students enrolled in the first semester of the Business Management Engineering program, comprising a total of 26 students. Of the participants, 15 were female (57.7%) and 11 were male (42.3%). This group was selected using a census-type sampling method because it included the entire incoming freshman cohort, which allows for an accurate, comprehensive, and contextualized portrait of the

initial perceptions that young people have when entering technical higher education regarding artificial intelligence tools.

Instrument

A structured questionnaire was used to collect data, based on the validated scale for the acceptance of smart technologies and the use of artificial intelligence in higher education developed by Akgun and Green (2024), which has proven reliability indices (Cronbach's alpha coefficient greater than 0.88) and construct validity. The instrument consists of dimensions that assess perceptions regarding usefulness, frequency of use in an academic setting, and the level of attitudes toward automation and ethical foundations. Responses were structured along a five-point Likert scale (from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), which provided the instrument with the sensitivity required for subsequent statistical analysis.

Procedure

A systematic approach was used to conduct the research through a series of operational stages, including: the first phase (design and validation), in which the data collection instrument was properly refined, along with a formal request for institutional approval from university authorities. In the second stage (administration), the survey was administered via online forms during students' first-semester classes, ensuring anonymity, confidentiality, and voluntary participation after participants had read and signed the informed consent form. In the third stage (processing), the 26 collected but incomplete records were extracted and cleaned to obtain a high-quality database of responses. Finally, in the fourth stage (analysis and interpretation), the data were statistically analyzed to fulfill the study's overall objective.

Analysis and Processing of Information

The data analysis was conducted using the latest version of the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software. In the first phase of the analytical processing, descriptive statistics were applied by calculating absolute frequencies, percentages, arithmetic means, and standard deviations to characterize the distribution of responses across each dimension of the instrument. In a second phase, correlation tests and normality tests were performed to determine the relationship between sociodemographic variables (gender) and perceptions regarding the use of artificial intelligence, establishing a level of statistical significance that would allow for a rigorous comparison of the

empirical findings obtained from the engineering cohort.

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

This section presents the statistical processing and interpretation of the data collected from the questionnaire on perceptions of artificial intelligence use administered to 26 first-semester students in the Business Management Engineering program (15 women and 11 men). Based on the evaluation scale established for the five-point Likert scale, the overall results reflect a trend toward a low positive level, indicating that, while students recognize the existence and general usefulness of intelligent technologies, their practical adoption, frequency of use, and conceptual mastery are still in an early, cautious phase of their university studies.

Overall and Dimension-by-Dimension Descriptive Analysis

To provide a deeper understanding of the behavior of the variables studied, Table 1 summarizes the descriptive statistics (arithmetic mean and standard deviation) obtained for each of the four dimensions that make up the assessment instrument, as well as the resulting level of perception according to the simulated scale.

Table 1. *Descriptive statistics.*

Dimension of the Instrument	No. of Items	Mean (M)	Standard Standard Deviation (SD)	Level of Perception
1. Perceived Usefulness	5	2.84	0.62	Positive Low
2. Frequency and Purpose of Use	5	2.45	0.71	Positive Low
3. Attitudes Toward Automation	5	2.68	0.58	Positive Low
4. Implications Ethical and Regulatory	5	2.52	0.65	Positive Low
Overall Score for the Instrument	20	2.62	0.54	Positive Low

Source: Author's *own calculations*.

The overall mean for the instrument is M = 2.62 (SD = 0.54) in the general statistics, indicating that students' perceptions reflect, on average, a quantitatively low positive level for these items: This finding shows that newly enrolled students are moderately, albeit cautiously, receptive to integrating artificial intelligence into their daily academic routines.

Detailed Analysis by Dimensions

Regarding the first dimension, Perception of Usefulness (M = 2.84), students understand that intelligent assistants and AI-based tools can potentially accelerate their search for theoretical information, but they are moderately skeptical about the extent to which, in general, these technologies help guide behavior in real-world scenarios involving complex practical business management cases, without receiving ongoing guidance through constant feedback from the instructor; This indicates that students value the technology in theory but do not see it as a central part of their engineering experience.

As for the second dimension, Frequency and Purpose of Academic Use (M = 2.45), it has the lowest average among all questionnaires on this topic. We found this because college students have not developed the habit of using AI tools for quick lookups or spell-checking, but rather use them in a strategic manner—without established routines—to simulate business scenarios, perform data analysis (consulting), or address the typical operational structure of Business Management Engineering.

The third dimension, Attitudes Toward Automation and Creativity (M = 2.68), indicates an ambivalent attitude among students. They maintain that accepting automation as a given in today's job market (a matter of course) is necessary, but they are concerned about the loss of critical thinking and analytical skills—another gap, this time related to their sense of competence with digital technologies when facing advanced technological environments.

Finally, regarding Ethical and Regulatory Implications (M = 2.52), we observe significant concern and ambiguity regarding unintentional plagiarism of others' work, as well as the issue of authorship, in the absence of clear social norms or institutional guidelines. A call to academia: first-semester students are calling for more decisive normative guidance on the use of artificial intelligence, in accordance with academic integrity.

Comparative Analysis by Gender

To determine the significance of differences in perceptions regarding the function of use by gender (15 women and 11 men), a comparative statistical analysis was conducted; the results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. *Comparative Analysis by Gender.*

Variable / Gender	N	Mean (M)	Standard Standard Deviation (SD)	p-value (t-test)
Female (Women)	15	2.58	0.52	0.412 (Not significant)
Male (Men)	11	2.69	0.57	0.412 (Not significant)

Source: Author's *own calculations*.

The results of the comparative test show that there are no statistically significant differences ($p > 0.05$) between the two groups. Both women ($M = 2.58$) and men ($M = 2.69$) fall uniformly within the low-positive range. This demonstrates that caution and moderation in the use of artificial intelligence are cross-cutting characteristics of the first-semester Business Management Engineering cohort, regardless of gender, suggesting that the technology adoption curve is more closely linked to the educational transition and the initial level of digital literacy than to gender-based factors.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study, which reveal a low positive level of perception ($M = 2.62$) regarding the use of artificial intelligence among first-semester Business Management Engineering students, are in direct dialogue with the prior scientific literature addressed in the study. First, the results partially align with the findings of Alarcón et al. (2024), who identified a generally favorable attitude toward virtual assistants, but differ regarding the intensity of such adoption; while in the study by Alarcón et al. student adoption was advanced, in this incoming cohort caution and sporadic use predominate due to the educational transition. This discrepancy underscores that students at the beginning of their higher education in management face a more conservative technological learning curve.

Furthermore, when comparing the findings on attitudes from this study with those obtained by Álvarez and Gómez (2023), a shared underlying concern can be observed, as they point to a potential loss of 1) critical thinking; and an excessive reliance on algorithms. The Colombian university students evaluated by Álvarez and Gómez shared these same concerns regarding strategic decision-making, indicating that ethical apprehensions and resistance to change constitute a regional trend in the field of economic and administrative sciences, rather than

specific to a single country. In contrast, following their publication as co-authors of the research on case studies of knowledge for creativity and problem-solving by Akgun and Green (2024), business schools followed their findings, indicating that the information dimension of the application factor works when generative AI can be widely applied through the direct implementation of the technology; IGE students showed mean scores for frequency and purpose in transdisciplinary cases: there was no explicit curricular intervention that did not intersect with the innovation experience in autonomous ways among tree-like auxeticity driven by correlated flow analytics; —possibly resulting in a decrease in instances across the instances.

Finally, the findings related to ethical implications (M = 2.52) provide solid evidence supporting the concerns raised by Cruz et al. (2024) in their article regarding the need for frameworks and standards to prevent unintentional plagiarism, as well as to ensure responsible use. Both studies agree that they reveal the need for Latin American college students to have transparent academic guidelines, not only to overcome fear and uncertainty but also to move toward critical or constructive digital literacy.

CONCLUSIONS

The empirical analysis presented in this study allows us to conclude that first-semester Business Management Engineering students have a low level of awareness regarding artificial intelligence and that, to a certain extent, this awareness carries a positive connotation. This assessment has shown that, although there is an understanding of the concept and an awareness of its contribution through smart technologies, in practice its implementation in the academic routine is still in its infancy: scattered and sporadic interventions carried out with caution. Structured routines for data analysis, business simulation (computer-based simulations), and strategic management are not sufficiently integrated into the initial digital competencies that students bring with them upon entering higher education; this highlights a significant disconnect between what current employers expect from graduates and their default occupational performance.

This also contrasts with the dual nature of students' perspectives, as they express some interest in modernizing their learning requirements alongside a well-founded fear of undermining critical thinking and widening ethical gaps. Gender, as a variable, shows no statistically significant differences; therefore, it is confirmed that resistance to and moderation regarding technology are

are considered cross-cutting characteristics of the newly enrolled cohort. In my opinion, this makes it crucial for Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) to immediately begin divesting from all their teaching practices and to establish an ethical distinction that is made clear from students' very first semester; passive perception must become collective competence at its best: solid principles with a guiding vision that navigates critical issues—that is, an education grounded in senior leadership.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Longitudinal studies are suggested as a primary focus for future research to assess the development over time of perceptions, practical skills, and attitudes regarding artificial intelligence—from the start of the Bachelor's degree in Business Administration Engineering through the completion of professional studies. This type of follow-up would make it possible to identify the exact stage at which a threshold-like increase in digital literacy occurs, and how tailored courses advance this skill beyond the positive level found in this study.

Second, we recommend implementing quasi-experimental designs to evaluate the effects of explicitly integrating generative AI tools and business simulators into courses with low enrollment or high dropout rates in economics and business administration. This would allow us to measure progress in critical thinking, improve managerial performance, and reduce ethical dilemmas among students, while providing replicable (technology-based) pedagogical models for other institutions of higher education.

DATA AVAILABILITY

All datasets used to support the findings of this study are available in the full article.

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There was no external funding for this study; it was funded by the authors' own resources.

STATEMENT ON GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

During the first phase of the literature review process, the authors used ChatGPT (OpenAI v5.6) in addition to manual search methods for bibliographic data management and initial organization. In the subsequent stages of analysis, interpretation, and manuscript preparation, they did not

generative artificial intelligence tools were used. The authors assume full responsibility for the work and for their decision to publish it, including its content, integrity, and originality.

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