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ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE'S IMPACT ON GENERATION ALPHA'S HIGHER EDUCATION EXPECTATIONS

Nurliyana Abas

Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Kedah
liyana322@uitm.edu.my

Hanani Hussin

Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Kedah
hanani12@uitm.edu.my

Azira Rahim

Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Melaka
azira925@uitm.edu.my

ABSTRACT

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly revolutionising the landscape of higher education, particularly in relation to Generation Alpha, students born into an era of ubiquitous online connectivity and intelligent technologies. This commentary explores how AI is transforming higher education, not only through the delivery of academic content but also by redefining expectations, roles, and responsibilities within academic institutions. With the incorporation of AI technologies, including personalised and adaptive learning systems, automation of administrative processes, and the use of generative AI applications like ChatGPT, there is potential to create more responsive, individualised, and efficient learning experiences. However, these advances also raise challenges, particularly those related to data ethics, AI literacy, equitable access, and the preservation of human elements in teaching and learning. Generation Alpha demands unparalleled interactivity, personalisation, and technology integration in educational settings, reflecting their everyday experiences. Consequently, institutions of higher learning are being compelled to redesign curricula, teaching methodologies, and service delivery systems to meet these evolving needs. This paper asserts that a strategic, ethical, and human-centred approach to AI integration is essential to maintain relevance, inclusivity, and significance in the era of smart technology.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Generation Alpha, Higher Education, Personalised Learning, AI Ethics

INTRODUCTION

Artificial Intelligence (AI), as a disruptive force across many sectors including education, healthcare, and industry, has reshaped societal operations and expectations. AI is a multidisciplinary field of computer science focused on developing systems that replicate human cognitive functions such as learning, reasoning, and decision-making (Tiwari, 2024; Zhang et al., 2021). These systems are powered by advanced computational models, including machine learning, deep learning, and natural language processing, enabling intelligent and autonomous actions (Anamica et al., 2024). Initially conceptualised as automation and robotics technologies, especially in military and space applications (Berisha et al., 2023). AI has rapidly advanced due

to digitisation, big data, and cloud computing, becoming a central driver of innovation across industries (Wei, 2018; Zhang, 2022). In educational institutions, AI enhances personalisation, automates feedback, and supports data-informed decision-making, leading to a new paradigm in learning (Fengchao & Xuewen, 2020; Cappello et al., 2023).

For Generation Alpha, born after the early 2010s, AI is not a novelty but an integral part of daily lives. Raised in digital environments with early exposure to AI tools such as voice assistants, chatbots, and adaptive learning platforms (Li et al., 2025; Singh & Hiran, 2022), these students expect personalised, interactive, and technology-rich educational experiences. This paper discusses how AI is reshaping the educational experiences of Generation Alpha and underscores the importance of ethically grounded, inclusive, and strategic AI integration in delivering future-ready education.

AI-DRIVEN TRANSFORMATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Within the context of higher education, the effects of AI can be categorised into distinct dimensions, including automation, individualisation, new learning technologies, and administrative efficiencies. AI technologies are not merely making institutional processes more efficient but are also transforming pedagogical activities and content presentation. These dimensions are shown in Figure 1.0.



Made with Napkin

Figure 1.0 Key Dimensions of AI Impact in Higher Education

1. Personalised and Adaptive Learning

Personalised learning is one of the most significant outcomes of AI in education. Smart teachers and adaptive environments tailor learning materials to individual needs, learning rates, and interests. Such systems not only enhance interaction and understanding but also enhance retention and overall learning (Chen et al., 2020; Ahmad et al., 2021; Escotet, 2023; Fan et al., 2022). As Generation Alpha are used to such personalisation in their everyday technologies, they should be provided with similar flexibility in their studies.

2. Automation and Administrative Efficiency

Outside the classroom, AI automates several back-office activities, such as automatic grading, content suggestions, and forecasts on student performance. These tools enable educators to allocate more time to mentoring, while institutions improve decision-making and implement early intervention strategies (Chen et al., 2020; Escotet, 2023; Fan et al., 2022). These efficiencies align with the expectations of Generation Alpha, who are used to seamless and responsive learning.

3. Emerging Tools and Learning Modalities

The integration of generative AI (GenAI) platforms, such as ChatGPT and DALL-E, brings new opportunities for co-creation, concept development, and visual learning. These tools show greater creativity, optimise collaborative learning, and empower individuals by democratising content production (Hashmi & Bal, 2024; Huo & Siau, 2024; Escotet, 2023). At the same time, there is an increasing popularity of game-based and experiential ways of learning, particularly at younger stages of education. These approaches help prepare students for the demands of future academic and professional life (Leitner et al., 2023; Estez-ev et al., 2019).

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Table 1.0
AI's integration into education

Opportunities	Challenges
Personalised learning experiences	Ensuring data privacy and ethical use
Enhanced feedback and student support	Building trust in AI systems
Efficient and scalable administration	Preventing cognitive overreliance
Innovative and collaborative tools	Maintaining academic integrity

Integration of AI into learning, as discussed in Table 1.0, presents both opportunities and challenges that must be addressed concurrently. On the one hand, AI ensures the increase in individualised learning experiences, feedback systems, and the emergence of innovative tools that contribute to scalability, responsive education, and the support of individual learners needs. It streamlines administrative processes, allowing teachers more time to work with students. Conversely, the main dilemmas include ensuring data confidentiality, upholding academic honesty, avoiding excessive reliance on AI, and building trust in algorithmic programmes (Airaj,

2024; Huo & Siau, 2024). These issues relate to the necessity for ethical frameworks to govern and balance the capabilities of technology and human controls in the implementation of AI in higher education.

ETHICAL AND HUMAN-CENTRED CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical principles must guide the implementation of AI in education, ensuring transparency, inclusivity, and respect for privacy. The development of AI systems needs to complement the human abilities rather than substitute its abilities. The central position of educators in directing cognitive and emotional growth of students must be maintained, with use to improve the learning experiences (Airaj, 2024; Huo & Siau, 2024). A human-centred approach ensures that technology is used to support pedagogical needs while upholding the values of equity and care.

In order to incorporate the AI ethically into the culturally diverse education systems, institutions must go beyond general ethical principles and implement culturally specific frameworks. For example, in Malaysia, the use of AI in education must take into account the nation's multicultural traditions, religious principles, and focus on equal opportunities. Relevant guidelines include the Malaysian government's AI Ethics Framework, which focuses on fairness, accountability, and cultural sensitivity. It is expected that by translating the priorities of these ethical concerns into the level of AI implementation, universities will be able to create a broader digital transformation in a highly inclusive form, without introducing additional biases or issues related to socio-cultural preferences. Also, the participation of various stakeholders, including educators, ethicists, students, and community leaders, in the policymaking process around AI will imply that technology promotes human dignity and education equity, not harm.

EVOLVING EXPECTATIONS OF GENERATION ALPHA

Generation Alpha requires a rethink in the delivery of education. They seek learning environments that are immersive, individualised, and technology-heavy. This generation will need early training in AI literacy, critical thinking, and ethical reasoning to be successful in a world where AI will radically transform the majority of professional domains (Leitner et al., 2023; Estevez et al., 2019). Institutions of higher learning should be prepared for such developments by implanting digital fluency and interdisciplinary skills in their foundational curriculum.

In the Malaysian and broader Southeast Asian context, the integration of AI into higher education is advancing, but not without disparities. While top-tier universities are adopting AI-enhanced learning platforms and digital tools, challenges such as inconsistent internet infrastructure, unequal access to devices, and varying levels of digital literacy persist, particularly in rural or underfunded areas. Malaysia's initiatives, including the Malaysia Digital Economy Blueprint (MyDIGITAL) and the AI Roadmap 2021–2025, reflect a national commitment to digital transformation in education. However, equitable implementation remains a priority to ensure that Generation Alpha across all socio-economic backgrounds can benefit from AI-driven innovations. These regional realities necessitate localised strategies alongside global best practices to bridge the digital divide and promote inclusive, future-ready education.

CONCLUSION

Artificial intelligence is not just another tool, but it is a game-changing phenomenon in higher education, especially for Generation Alpha. The individualisation of course material, automation of administrative works, and the deployment of generative tools are making a paradigm shift in the way students learn, interact, and are supported. Yet, along with these innovations, there are essential duties to make sure that there is an ethical implementation and the preservation of human-focused education. As Generation Alpha grows up within and is influenced by AI, universities are required to transform and deliver adaptive, ethical, and future-proof education.

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