The Star

Dealing with AI in academia

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The encroachment of artificial intelligence (AI) into higher education is inevitable.

While embracing AI poses risks, it also offers unprecedented benefits. Dealing with AI therefore calls for measures to mitigate risks and capitalise on opportunities.

In academia, generative AI, such as ChatGPT, has sparked much debate.

Generative AI is the use of AI to create new content, such as text and images. It uses machine learning to discern patterns and relationships in human-input datasets.

Once it learns these patterns, the technology can generate new content with promptings by humans.

Many recognise the benefits of AI in education. One of its most significant advantages is its ability to automate administrative tasks, allowing academics more time to focus on high-value student interactions. The most commonly reported benefit of generative AI tools is time-saving. Many educators are already using generative AI to create lesson plans and develop student learning tasks.

Lecturers can use generative AI to create curriculum summaries, assessment rubrics, discussion topics, student lesson plans, learning resources and classroom activities.

Generative AI can be used together with the university management system to streamline tasks. Using AI tools alongside continuous quality improvement methods can significantly reduce teacher planning workloads.

Generative AI also increases the efficiency of marking and feedback processes.

It’s not only the lecturers who gain from using generative AI.

Studies have shown its potential to personalise lesson plans for students with literacy and learning difficulties, with reported positive outcomes from such approaches.

The biggest fear surrounding generative AI revolves around the rise of cheating cases. Many worry that it might hinder students' critical thinking.

Sceptics argue that there is a possibility that AI will lead to a downgrading of human skills.

The use of generative AI could also lead to complacency, as there is a risk that students may become dependent on AI technology.

There are additional concerns around ethical issues such as inherent bias and data privacy. But many feel generative AI can benefit the student learning experience and foster creativity.

This means schools need an AI policy that includes guidelines for responsible use, addressing potential risks and defining what responsible use entails. It should also cover issues of bias and errors, including ethical considerations related to plagiarism and the proper use of secondary sources.

It has been suggested that AI policies must clearly state how the faculty intends to use AI tools and demonstrate a commitment to their fair and safe usage.

Lecturers should know what's expected of them and how they can effectively use AI in the classroom to support learning.

For example, ChatGPT can be treated similarly to calculators, being permitted for certain assignments but not for others.

Another approach is to allow students to use generative AI for specific parts of the task. For example, students can use ChatGPT to create outlines for their essays, then put their devices away and write their essays independently. This teaches students how to interact with AI and ask the right questions.

For today's students, who will graduate into a world filled with generative AI programs, these are critical skills to learn. It's worth remembering we're in the early days of AI, and the technology is in a perpetual state of evolution.

By staying informed about the latest advancements, everyone can anticipate critical changes and adapt accordingly. Whatever it is, we need to deal with AI to create more positive outcomes for education. AI is here to stay.

PROF DATUK DR AHMAD IBRAHIM
Tan Sri Omar Abdul Rahman Centre for Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) Policy Studies
UCSI University;
and Associate fellow
Ungku Aziz Centre Universiti Malaya