The State of AI in European National Schools of Public Administration: Insights from the DISPA Network

As Artificial Intelligence (AI) reshapes both administrative processes and educational delivery, this report highlights the state of AI use in institutions represented within the DISPA network. Through the survey responses of 24 DISPA members, the following presents key insights relating to AI in education – both as a tool for improving internal processes and learning outcomes, and as a subject of curriculum.

Perceptions and Behaviours Relating to Artificial Intelligence

Attitudes towards AI

The complex interplay between individuals' attitudes, perceptions, and behaviours towards AI is critical for AI adoption and uptake and therefore, should be a consideration towards effective AI integration in the workplace.[1]

Among DISPA members, attitudes towards AI systems remain positive, but varied. Specifically, 75% of the respondents report having a positive view of AI's present and future impact on their institution's mandate, compared to the 21% who are neutral, and the 4% who report having negative attitudes towards AI (see Figure 1). A textual analysis of responses elaborating on those with positive attitudes towards AI revealed key words associated with their sentiments, including "transformation", "efficiency", and "automation", for example (see Figure 2).
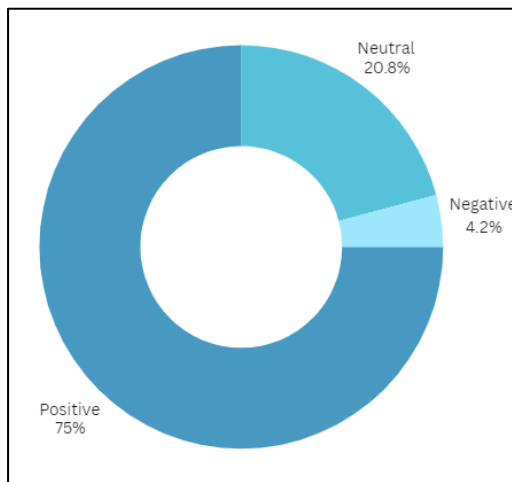

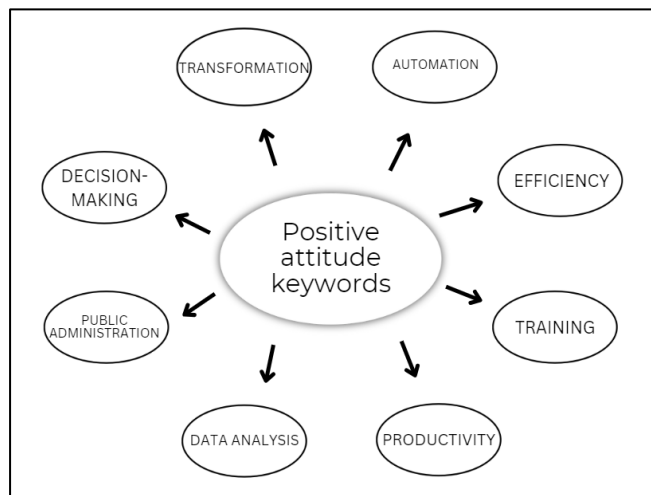*Figure 1. Attitudes towards AI systems*

Figure 2. Positive attitude keywords

In general, the DISPA network recognises a great deal of potential for AI in their work, reporting that they are most curious about exploring AI applications for teaching (83%),

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[1] Jiyoung Park, Sang Eun Woo, and Jeong Jin Kim, 'Attitudes towards Artificial Intelligence at Work: Scale Development and Validation', *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology* 97, no. 3 (2024): 920–51, https://doi.org/10.1111/joop.12502.

data analysis for learning development (79%), and automated assessment and feedback (75%) (see Figure 3).
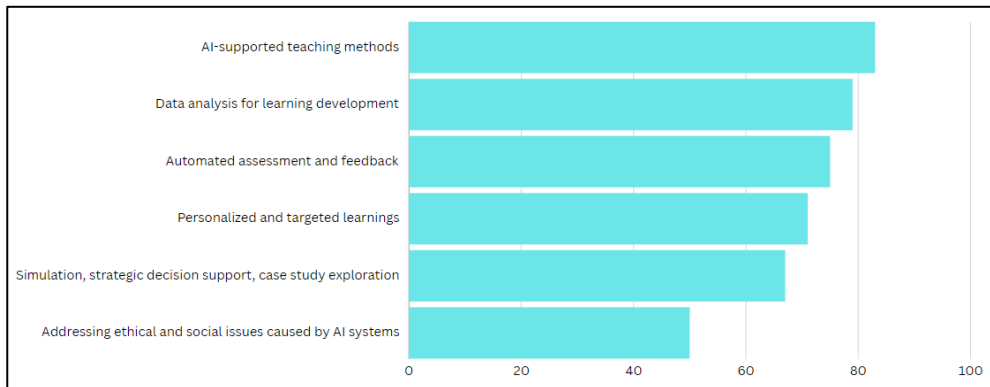

Figure 3. Interest in applying AI tools (%)

Additional analysis of responses relating to AI attitudes reveals that there is a combination of fears, concerns, and excitement among respondents. For instance, while some highlighted the potential for AI to increase overall quality of research and training for public administration, as well public administration's own processes and functions, others cited inaccuracies, misuse, and privacy concerns.

Conflicting attitudes about AI are equally present regarding AI's impact on their job roles and responsibilities. Again, while there is a generally positive view among 42% of respondents, 38% of survey participants report having staff that are neutral towards AI in their workplace, while, interestingly, no respondents report having staff with negative perceptions of AI relating to their job role and responsibilities (see Figure 4).
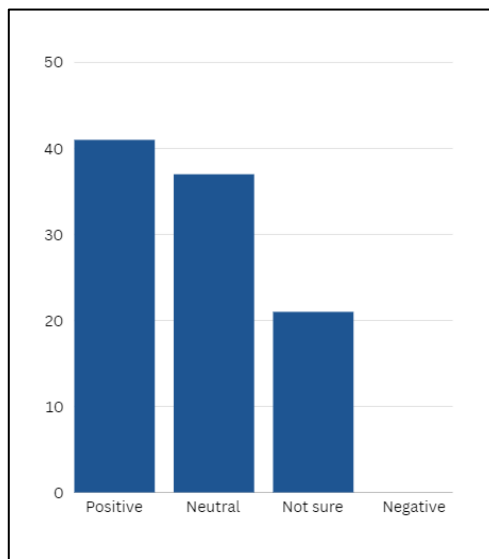

Figure 4. Staff's perception of AI on their role and responsibilities (%)

Nevertheless, members of the DISPA network may consider efforts for better understanding and addressing staffs' perceptions of AI before embedding them into internal processes. Based on their responses, 21% of DISPA members do not know how their staff perceive AI's present or future impact on their jobs and responsibilities. This, in turn, could create future challenges where unaddressed fears and pessimistic attitudes towards AI systems may foster resistance and fragmentation in its implementation.

Usage of AI tools

According to respondents, 58% of DISPA members have already begun experimenting with AI tools for tasks like drafting, translation, and productivity (see Figure 5). Of these respondents, 50% are using AI tools on a weekly basis, suggesting these tools are indeed helpful for recurring tasks (see Figure 6).
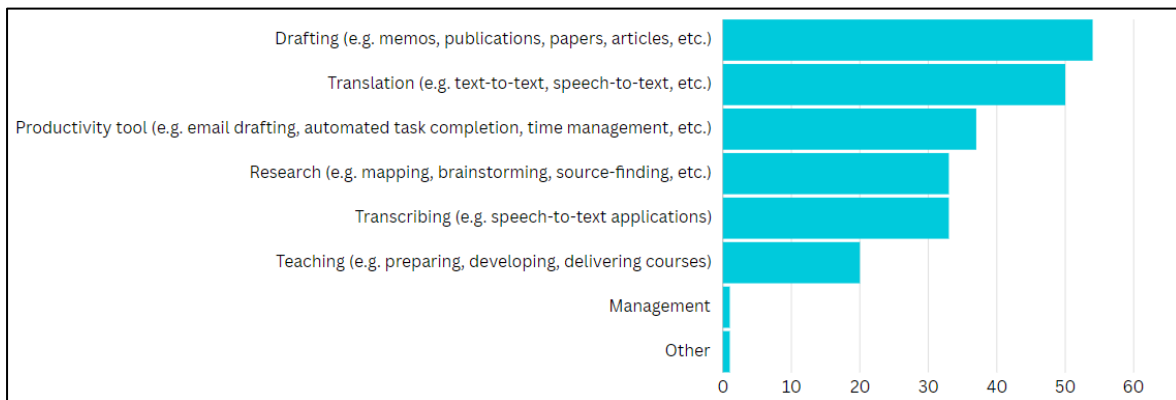

Figure 5. Purpose of AI tools usage (%)

However, despite an overall positive perception of AI among respondents, 42% of participants reportedly do not actively use AI tools, indicating substantial room for adoption. This is also confirmed by the occasional users who rarely use AI tools. Of those who are using AI tools, 54% report being only "somewhat satisfied" with the outputs and performance of AI tools, while a smaller proportion, around 21%, express being "very satisfied" (see Figure 7), indicating a minority of highly satisfied users.
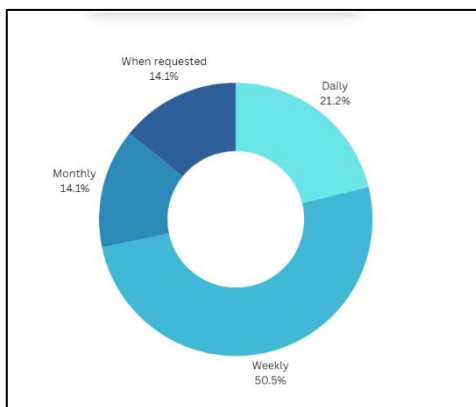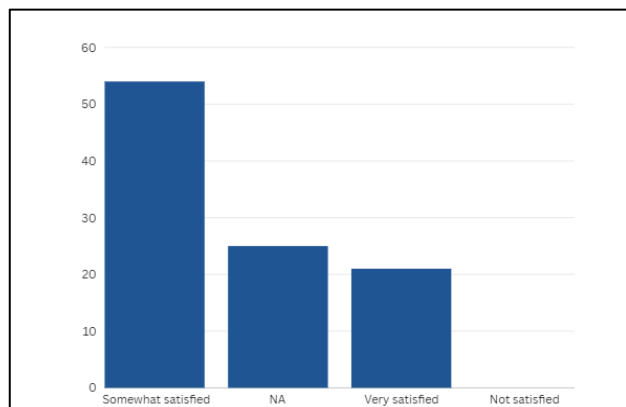

Figure 6. Frequency of use of AI tools

Figure 7. Satisfaction rate of AI tools (%)

The most commonly used tools are generative AI systems like ChatGPT, DeepL, and Microsoft Co-Pilot. For educators, generative AI tools can be used as a source of inspiration, where ideas for course content, engaging assignment design, or new methods for learning assessments can be developed. In general, the DISPA network demonstrates a willingness to use AI-generated training ideas that can be further refined and customised by trainers. Similarly, respondents see value in AI-enabled personalised learning and recognise how using AI can enable course development that is adapted to learners' needs both synchronously and asynchronously.

Nevertheless, generative AI systems, like those used by the DISPA network, are limited in their capabilities and rely heavily on access to high quality data to perform well. This makes generative AI systems well suited for generating new content, but less capable of providing data-driven insights and analyses. Many institutions around the world are, therefore, exploring how to harness AI-driven analytics to boost learning and information retention.[2] By utilising AI systems beyond generative AI, the institutions represented by the DISPA network have new opportunities to leverage a wider range of AI technologies to generate high quality data and enhance data-driven approaches to education.

Discrepancies in results relating to AI

Although a majority of respondents have a positive view towards AI technology, less are actively using AI in their work (see Figure 8), representing a discrepancy between attitudes relating to AI and actual uptake of AI among DISPA members. There are many possible explanations for this. For instance, individuals may believe AI has positive transformative abilities, but for reasons like lack of resources or prohibiting its use in the workplace, may not be able to use the AI tools and systems they desire or need for their work. Alternatively, there may also be cases whereby individuals are using AI systems and simply are not aware of it, causing them to report limited use when this is not actually the case. Finally, respondents may view AI as having a positive impact on education as a whole, but fail to identify ways to use it in their daily work, resulting in its limited use among those individuals.

There is also a discrepancy in the institutions who have identified AI as a priority and those who have implemented a strategy or mandate for its adoption (see Figure 9). While integration of AI in educational and administrative processes is recognised as important among respondents, initiatives for advancing AI activity remain low. For example, while 88% of institutions indicate that AI is a priority, only 42% have initiated a strategy for implementing AI in their institution. Of those, 60% were introduced within the last 12 months. When asked if they have introduced a governance model for its use within the institution, even less report doing so, at 29%. This reflects a diverse approach to AI

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[2] For example, see The World Economic Forum, 'Shaping the Future of Learning: The Role of AI in Education 4.0', Insights Report (The World Economic Forum, 2024); OECD, 'The Potential Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Equity and Inclusion in Education', Policy paper, OECD Artificial Intelligence Papers (Paris: OECD, August 2024); Ezequiel Molina et al., 'Artificial Intelligence Revolution in Education: What You Need to Know', Brief, Digital Innovations in Education (World Bank, 2024).

implementation, where institutions with different strategic focuses—whether on growth, operational efficiency, or academic excellence— are preparing for AI in different ways. Those currently without a strategy or framework for AI implementation cited high costs and rapid change in development, a limited insights and information, and a lack of a formal strategy in relevant national administration as reasons for the absence of their own related mandate.
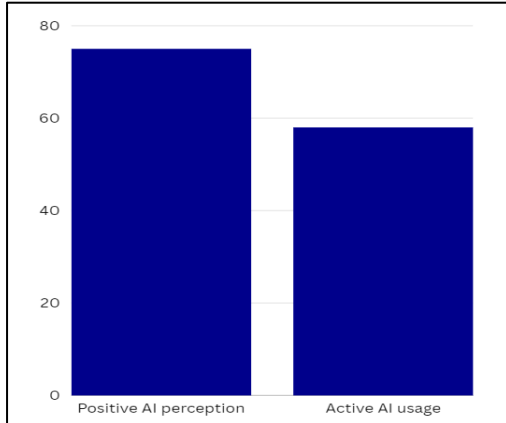

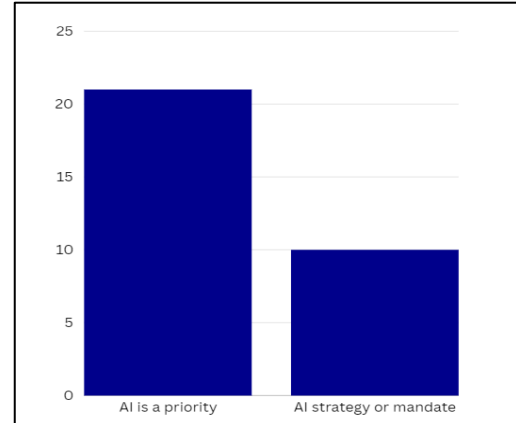Figure 8. AI positive perception vs. active AI usage

Figure 9. AI prioritisation vs. AI strategy/mandate implementation

Strengthening AI Skills and Competencies in Public Administration: Opportunities and Challenges

AI trainings and offerings

In response to the growing need to develop AI competencies and skills, many institutions have already begun designing and delivering AI trainings. Within the DISPA network, 70% of respondents report offering such courses in their current catalogues. Several institutions provide introductory courses covering the basics of AI, while others are focused on specific AI tools and skills, such as using ChatGPT or deploying effective prompt engineering. Finally, some institutions offer more specialised, in-depth courses, covering ethical and legal dimensions, for instance.

Learning methods among institutions are also diverse. Some respondents depend on asynchronous teaching methods, such as Mass Online Open Courses (MOOCs), while others offer tailored synchronous content, developed for a more specific audience. Unsurprisingly then, the duration of course also varies. Respondents report offering courses ranging from 1 hour to 60 hours, therefore allowing some to be completed in a single day while others require multiple weeks of enrolment.

AI skills and knowledge for public administrations

In order to determine skills and competency needs, the DISPA network is utilising a variety of tools and assessments. Most commonly it is through the use of Training Needs Assessments (TNAs) and via targeted requests from their administration, which are depended on by 75% and 71% of respondents, respectively. Less common are the use of competency frameworks (67%), feedback from public administrations or participants

(58%), and through assessments of the skills and expertise of educators (42%) (see Figure 10).
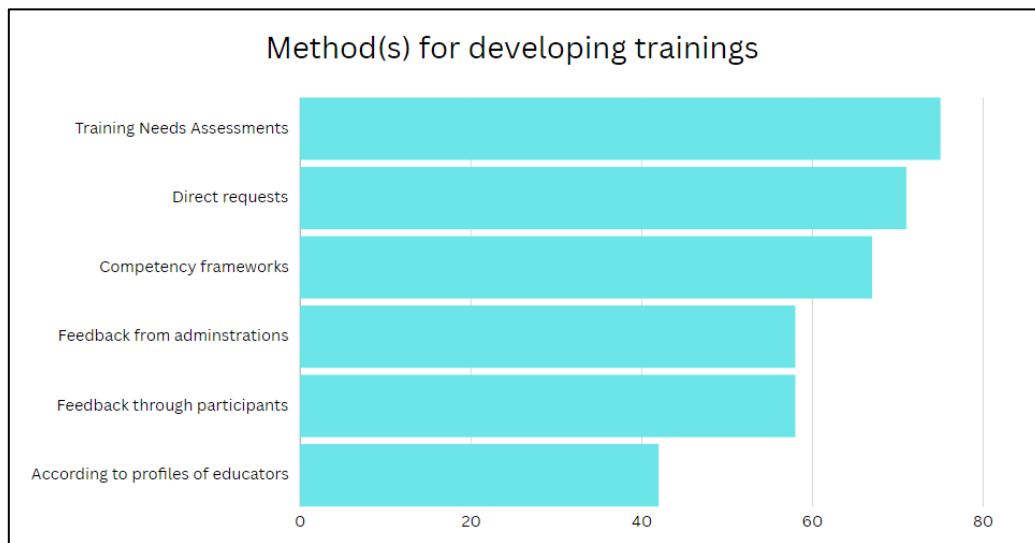

Figure 10. Method(s) for developing trainings

According to these methods, respondents have identified the most and least relevant AI competencies needed for public officials. While skills related to data governance, ethical AI use, and digital planning are seen as critical for enabling AI initiatives, other technical skills, such as software development and AI model-building, are regarded as less essential in the public administration.

With regards to AI-enabling roles within public administrations, respondents overwhelmingly agree that legal, privacy, and civil rights professionals are more important for enabling AI projects and initiatives. Second, are professionals such as data scientists, statisticians, and computer scientists who build and test AI models, which is consistent with trends in rising numbers of data scientists in the public sector.[3] These are followed by AI-focused programme managers who direct rollouts and change management for new AI products and tools. Conversely, technical professionals who are tasked with building, developing and retaining a strong and diverse AI workforce, product managers developing ideas for AI models, and software engineers building AI systems are found to be less relevant for public administration.

Challenges for building AI capacity in public administration

A majority of respondents report feeling the pressure of the rapid pace of AI advancements, citing it as a major barrier for strengthening AI capacity in public administrations. When asked to elaborate, respondents acknowledged the importance of AI trainings, but consistently mentioned that a lack of clear training needs, shortage of

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[3] Dutch Government, 'Investing in People, Organisations and Changes in Corporate Culture', accessed 3 September 2024; Lukas Lorenz, 'The Hybrid Work of Public Sector Data Scientists', *Journal of Professions and Organization* 10, no. 3 (1 October 2023): 226–42, https://doi.org/10.1093/jpo/joad017.

qualified experts, and keeping up with the pace of change remain serious hurdles for building AI capacity in public administrations.

These challenges are not disconnected. In the absence of clear learning objectives and market analyses, educational institutions will likely struggle to adequately train individuals with necessary and future-proof AI skills. When left unaddressed, a shortage of experts and specialised skills can arise, creating a persistent issue of high demand, but low supply of necessary AI trainings designed specifically for public administrators.

Conclusion

The integration of AI within educational institutions and public administration presents both significant opportunities and challenges. While the potential for AI to enhance productivity, streamline processes, and provide personalised learning experiences is clear, the success of its implementation depends heavily on educators' and staff's interactions with AI systems and their willingness to use AI responsibly.

The excitement around the positive potential AI for education is evident. However, the ways in which educational professionals use AI remain less obvious. In the earliest stages of AI deployment, educators are struggling to determine their own relationship to AI technologies and applications and yet, are tasked with the responsibility of developing future-proof AI literacy and skills. In the absence of clear guidance and governance, educators may find it difficult to achieve coherence in the integration of AI, both in the curriculum and within the classroom, introducing new opportunities for inconsistencies in the way learners interact with AI systems and develop the necessary skills and competencies to effectively use such systems safely.

The DISPA network can play a vital role as a forum for discussions surrounding the integration of AI from an operational, legal and ethical perspective, within educational environments. The potential for the DISPA network to foster dialogue on this increasingly important topic is obvious for the DISPA members who recognise the network's value in fostering knowledge and experience sharing, underscoring the value of the community in enabling opportunities for enhancing AI capacity in public administrations. Through commitments to strengthening AI skills and competencies, both among trainers and learners, DISPA presents a unique opportunity to identify good practices and standards towards establishing AI literacy among European public administrations and could act as a catalyst supporting their preparedness for the AI transformation.

Acknowledgement

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