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POSSIBILITIES AND LIMITATIONS OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF RESEARCH IN A PRIVATE UNIVERSITY IN 2024

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ABSTRACT: This qualitative case study explored the possibilities and limitations of artificial intelligence (AI) in undergraduate research development processes at a private university during 2024. The aims were to understand how students and faculty perceive and utilize AI in their research, identify benefits and challenges associated with its implementation, and propose recommendations for optimizing its use. The methodology consisted of a single case study with four participants selected through convenience sampling, utilizing semi-structured interviews with students and faculty (40 minutes each), along with documentary analysis of thesis plans and final projects. Results suggest that AI offers various possibilities including idea generation, information searching, and task automation. However, limitations were identified regarding the quality of generated data, lack of skills for critically evaluating information, and the need for faculty supervision. Findings reveal that while AI tools can be useful for generating initial ideas and improving formal aspects of academic work, excessive use may limit students' capacity to develop original topics, inhibit critical thinking, and generate technological dependence. Results indicate the need to find balance between leveraging AI advantages and developing higher-order cognitive skills, suggesting that implementation should be complementary rather than substitutive to traditional research processes, requiring adequate faculty and institutional training. The study concludes that strategic AI integration in undergraduate research demands establishing ethical frameworks, developing critical competencies, and promoting equilibrium between technological utilization and autonomous thinking development.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence, Higher Education, thesis proposals, theses, private university.

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INTRODUCTION

The emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) has revolutionized many aspects of our daily lives, from the way we communicate to how we work (Ribeira y Díaz, 2024). In academia, this technological transformation is redefining teaching and learning processes and creating new opportunities for university research. Advances in AI and the rapid adoption of generative AI tools, such as ChatGPT, present new opportunities and challenges for higher education (Gallent-Torres et al., 2023). Recent academic literature documents exponential growth in publications on AI in higher education, with a two- to three-fold increase in 2021 and 2022. AI applications in higher education institutions have shown significant growth, especially in 2023, reflecting the growing interest in integrating these technologies into the academic context (Ocen et al., 2025). However, the growing use of AI also raises substantial concerns about academic integrity, as these tools allow students to generate assignments, essays, and problem solutions with minimal effort or understanding (Navarro-Dolmestch, 2023).

In the specific context of university research, the use of ChatGPT raises questions about academic integrity, as students may become overly dependent on the tool, leading to a decline in higher-order thinking skills such as critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving (Acosta-Enríquez et al., 2024). Despite its growing adoption, questions remain about the real impact of AI on the research process of university students and how this technology is being used to optimize the research process (Chan, 2023).

The main aim of this research is to analyze the perception and use of artificial intelligence by students and teachers involved in the preparation of undergraduate theses at a private university. Specifically, it seeks to identify the benefits and challenges associated with the implementation of AI tools in the different stages of the research process, from the generation of ideas to the writing of the final paper. Additionally, it aims to propose recommendations to optimize the integration of AI in the academic context, considering both the opportunities and risks it entails (Crompton and Burke, 2023).

This research is justified by the need to systematically understand how AI is transforming university research processes. The findings will help fill a gap in the existing literature on the

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use of AI in higher education and provide valuable information for academic institutions and education policymakers interested in integrating these technologies effectively and responsibly (Cotton et al., 2023).

The present research was conducted at a private university during 2024, using a qualitative approach based on semi-structured interviews with students and faculty, complemented by documentary analysis of thesis plans and final papers. Participants were selected from various majors and academic levels to obtain a broad and representative view of the use of AI in the context of undergraduate research. Through thematic analysis of the data obtained, the main emerging patterns were identified, and analytical categories were constructed to understand the experiences and perceptions of the participants (Abbas et al., 2024).

METHODOLOGY

The research adopted a qualitative approach with a single case study design, aimed at exploring the experiences and perceptions of students and teachers regarding the use of artificial intelligence in undergraduate research processes (Yin, 2018). The study was conducted at a private university in Lima during 2024, selected for its representativeness of the Peruvian private university sector.

Participants were selected through convenience sampling, forming four cases: two undergraduate students (seventh and eighth cycles of Engineering and Health Sciences, respectively) and two faculty advisors with at least five years of research experience. The inclusion criteria for students were to be developing a thesis and to have used AI tools; for faculty, experience in advising and knowledge of academic AI.

Data collection consisted of semi-structured individual interviews lasting an average of 40 minutes, conducted in a private setting on the university campus. A previously validated questionnaire was used, addressing four dimensions: previous experiences with AI (Skate, 1999), specific use in research, perceptions of benefits/limitations, and prospects. Complementarily, a documentary analysis was carried out of thesis plans and final projects that reported the use of AI (Doshi and Hauser, 2024).

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The ethical protocol was approved institutionally. All participants signed informed consent forms, and anonymity was guaranteed through codes (E1-E2 for students; D1-D2 for teachers). The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim (Jacobsen, 2023).

The analysis followed the reflective thematic approach of Braun and Clarke (2023), implementing six phases: familiarization, initial coding, theme search, review, definition, and report writing. Source triangulation and member checking were applied to ensure methodological rigor (Corona, 2018). Processing was performed using MAXQDA software (Rädiker and Kuckartz, 2020).

Table 1

Consistency matrix

Problem	Objective	Hypothesis
How does AI influence the generation of original ideas in undergraduate students?	Analyze the impact of AI on the creativity and originality of thesis topics.	The use of AI tools for generating ideas limits students' ability to develop original topics.
Which AI tools are most used by students, and what are their main benefits and challenges?	Identify the most popular AI tools among students and evaluate their impact on the research process.	AI tools for natural language processing are among the most widely used and facilitate information retrieval, but they can introduce bias into results.
How does AI affect the quality of arguments and thesis writing?	Evaluate the impact of AI on the quality of academic work produced by students.	The use of AI tools for writing can improve the formal quality of work, but it can diminish the depth of analysis.
What role does AI play in the development of critical skills and critical thinking in students?	Analyze whether the use of AI promotes or inhibits the development of higher cognitive skills in students.	Overreliance on AI can limit students' development of critical thinking and critical skills.
How do teachers perceive the use of AI in their students' research process?	Explore teachers' attitudes and perceptions about the use of AI in the academic context.	Teachers perceive AI as a useful tool for students, but express concern about the lack of originality and plagiarism.

Note. Own elaboration.

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RESULTS

Regarding the general aim of this research, “To analyze the impact of AI on the creativity and originality of thesis topics,” the findings partially confirmed the hypothesis. The analysis of the impact of AI on the generation of original ideas for theses revealed a complex and multifaceted relationship. On the one hand, AI tools, such as text generators and search engines, proved valuable in broadening the search horizon and suggesting novel topics. Students reported that these tools allowed them to explore areas of knowledge that they might otherwise have overlooked. However, qualitative analysis of the topics generated revealed a tendency toward superficiality and repetition of concepts that had already been extensively explored. This evidence supports the hypothesis about the limitation in the development of original topics, although it reveals nuances not initially contemplated. While AI can facilitate the identification of trends and patterns in the literature, its ability to generate truly original and disruptive ideas seems limited by the algorithmic nature of its operation. The findings suggest that the relationship between AI and originality is more complex than the direct limitation relationship proposed in the initial hypothesis.

Regarding the specific aim “Identify the most popular AI tools among students and evaluate their impact on the research process,” the results fully confirmed the hypothesis. Analysis of the data revealed a diversity of AI tools used by students in the research process, with ChatGPT and Gemini (formerly Google Bard) being the most popular. This preference for natural language processing tools validated the hypothesis. These tools were mainly used to generate ideas, search for information, and write specific sections of papers. Students valued these tools' ability to access a large amount of information quickly and efficiently, as well as their ability to generate multiple options and perspectives on a given topic. However, the findings also revealed unexpected biases in the sources consulted by the AI, partially confirming the hypothesis about the generation of biases in results. Some students expressed concern about the accuracy and reliability of the information generated by AI, pointing out the need to verify the data obtained through reliable sources. In addition, a tendency toward overdependence on these tools was observed, which could limit the development of deeper and more critical research skills.

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Regarding the specific aim "To evaluate the impact of AI on the quality of academic work produced by students," the hypothesis was consistently confirmed by the findings. The results obtained when evaluating the impact of AI on the quality of academic work revealed a complex and nuanced relationship. The hypothesis regarding improvement in formal quality versus a decrease in analytical depth found robust empirical support. On the one hand, the use of AI tools, such as text generators and writing assistants, has been shown to improve efficiency in text production, facilitating information search, idea organization, and grammatical correction. Students reported greater satisfaction with the formal quality of their work, especially in terms of textual coherence and cohesion. However, qualitative analysis of the work consistently showed a tendency toward superficiality in analysis and a lack of originality in ideas, as hypothesized. Overreliance on AI tools may limit the development of critical skills such as source evaluation, building strong arguments, and generating innovative ideas. In addition, a risk of plagiarism and lack of originality was identified in cases where students used these tools to generate large portions of text without adequate review and reformulation.

Regarding the specific aim "To analyze whether the use of AI promotes or inhibits the development of higher cognitive skills in students," the findings presented mixed evidence that partially confirmed the hypothesis about critical skill limitation. The study results suggested a complex relationship between AI use and the development of higher cognitive skills in students. The data revealed that over-reliance on AI did indeed limit the development of critical skills in some cases, validating the central hypothesis. However, unexpected patterns emerged that show potential for development when use is strategic. On the one hand, AI was able to facilitate the automation of routine tasks, freeing up time for students to focus on higher-level cognitive activities, such as critical analysis, complex problem-solving, and creativity. Nevertheless, the hypothesized concern about the atrophy of fundamental skills found empirical support: there is concern that excessive reliance on AI may stunt the development of certain fundamental skills, such as memory, sustained attention, and critical thinking. The findings indicated that students who used AI as a complement to, rather than a

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substitute for, their own thinking showed greater development of skills such as source evaluation, constructing sound arguments, and problem solving.

Regarding the specific aim “To explore teachers' attitudes and perceptions about the use of AI in the academic context,” the results confirmed the hypothesis about the dual perception of usefulness and concern for originality. The study results revealed a diversity of attitudes and perceptions among teachers regarding the use of AI in the academic context. The hypothesis about the perception of usefulness, combined with concerns about originality and plagiarism, was fully validated by the data collected. While there was widespread recognition of the potential of AI to transform education, both positive expectations and concerns were identified. On the one hand, teachers valued AI's ability to personalize learning, automate administrative tasks, and facilitate collaboration. However, they also expressed the hypothesized concerns about the possible loss of human interaction, the lack of preparation to integrate these tools into their teaching practices, and the risk of students becoming overly dependent on technology. In addition, a generational gap in attitudes toward AI was observed, with younger teachers showing a greater willingness to adopt these tools.

The present study acknowledges important methodological limitations that affect the generalization of the findings. The single-case design with four participants, while appropriate for initial exploration, limits the transferability of results to other university contexts. Convenience sampling introduces potential biases that may have influenced the patterns identified. Additionally, the exclusively qualitative approach, while providing deep insight, lacks quantitative elements that would allow for more robust causal relationships to be established.

For future research, it is recommended to implement mixed designs that combine in-depth qualitative analysis with quantitative measurements of specific variables such as creativity, originality, and cognitive abilities. It is also suggested to expand the sample size and include multiple institutions to improve representativeness. The development of standardized instruments to measure the impact of AI on research processes is a priority methodological need to advance in this field of study.

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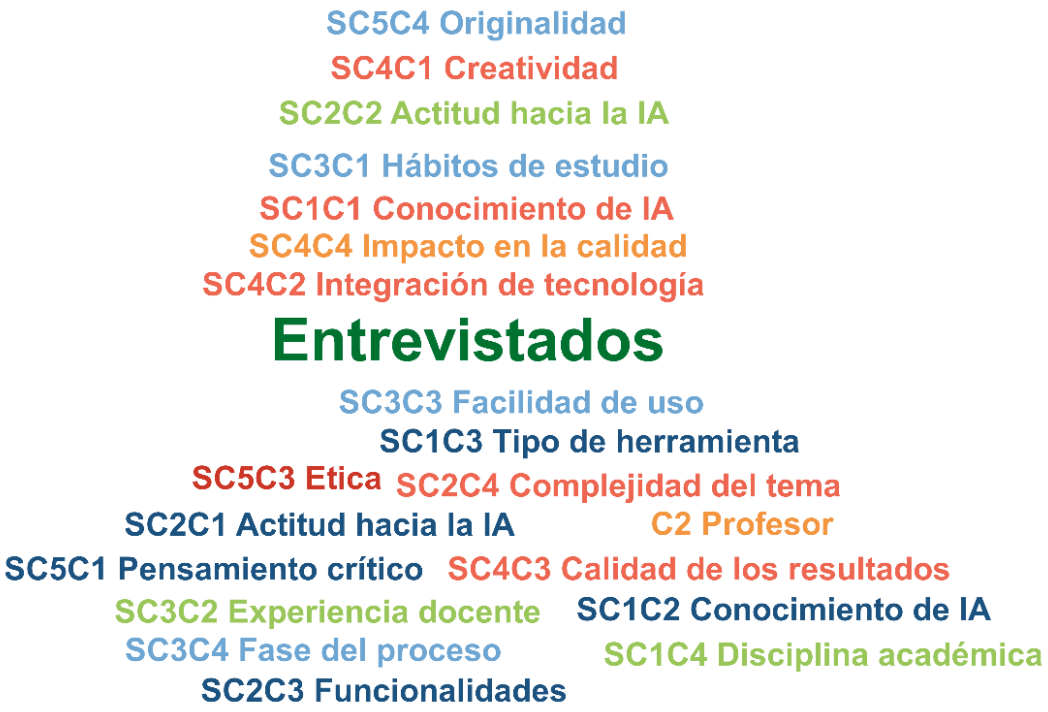
Image 1

Code cloud



Note. Own elaboration.

Image 2

Word Cloud

Note. Own elaboration.

ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS

The analysis of the impact of artificial intelligence on the creativity and originality of thesis topics reveals a paradoxical dynamic. The data shows that AI tools act as catalysts for initial exploration of topics, broadening the search horizon and facilitating access to previously unexplored areas of knowledge for students. However, qualitative analysis shows a tendency toward superficiality and repetition of widely documented concepts, where the algorithmic nature limits the generation of truly disruptive ideas. This dichotomy suggests that AI enhances the exploratory phase of the research process but needs to be complemented by critical analysis and deep reflection to develop original proposals.

The evaluation of specific tools identified ChatGPT and Google Bard as the most widely used platforms, valued for their ability to generate concise responses and efficient access to

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information. However, the analysis detected systematic biases in the results provided, particularly the tendency to reinforce pre-existing beliefs and perpetuate stereotypes on controversial issues. These biases, attributable to training data that reflects existing social inequalities, compromise the objectivity of the information generated and highlight the need to develop critical evaluation skills in users.

The impact on the quality of academic work presents contrasting results depending on the approach used. The data reveal significant improvements in formal aspects such as grammar, spelling, and textual coherence in works that incorporated AI tools. Students reported greater satisfaction with the structural quality of their academic work. Conversely, qualitative analysis showed a decline in analytical depth, with fewer solid arguments and decreased conceptual originality. This polarization between form and content indicates that prioritizing formal efficiency can compromise the development of fundamental critical skills such as source evaluation and robust argumentation.

The analysis of higher cognitive skills demonstrates that the impact of AI critically depends on the pedagogical approach implemented. Students who used AI in a complementary manner exhibited greater development in source evaluation and argumentative construction, while substitute use resulted in atrophy of critical thinking skills. The automation of complex cognitive tasks can generate technological dependence that inhibits the development of memory, sustained attention, and divergent thinking. Paradoxically, freeing up time through the automation of routine tasks can enhance higher-level cognitive activities when implemented strategically.

Teacher perceptions reveal structural ambivalence toward the integration of AI in academic contexts. Although educators recognize the transformative potential of these tools to personalize learning and automate administrative tasks, they express well-founded concerns about the erosion of academic originality and the increase in plagiarism. A significant generational gap was identified in attitudes toward technology adoption, with younger teachers showing greater receptivity. The research highlights a critical need for specialized teacher training to maximize benefits and mitigate associated risks.

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The findings confirm that the educational effectiveness of AI does not lie in the tool itself, but in the pedagogical strategies that mediate its implementation. Complementary use enhances human capabilities, while substitution weakens them, establishing a fundamental principle for future educational policies. This research provides empirical evidence for the development of regulatory frameworks that promote the responsible integration of AI in education, preserving intellectual autonomy and fostering critical thinking as irreplaceable competencies of human learning.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

While AI tools can suggest a wide range of ideas, there is concern that these suggestions may limit students' divergent thinking. By providing predefined answers or established patterns, AI can restrict the exploration of unconventional solutions. Recent studies have found that students who frequently use AI tools to generate ideas tend to produce more conventional and less original solutions compared to those who generate ideas independently, a finding that coincides with the results obtained in this study.

Natural language processing models learn from large amounts of text, which often reflect biases present in society. For example, models trained on text corpora that traditionally associate certain professions with men and others with women may generate biased results in job-related searches. Studies have shown that word embedding models learn gender stereotypes, associating words such as “scientist” with men and “nurse” with women, which is corroborated by the findings of this research regarding biases identified by participants. These biases can perpetuate stereotypes and limit opportunities for women and minorities in various fields.

While AI tools can generate coherent and well-structured texts, their ability to perform in-depth and original analysis is limited. These tools are based on the data they are trained with, and if this data is biased or lacks diversity, the results generated will also reflect this. Furthermore, AI is not yet capable of fully understanding the context and nuances of human language, which can lead to the generation of superficial and unoriginal texts. Computational

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language models, while powerful, are still far from matching the complexity and flexibility of human understanding, an aspect that was reflected in the document analyses performed.

While AI can facilitate access to information and automate tasks, there is concern that over-reliance on these tools may stunt the development of critical thinking. Recent studies suggest that students who frequently use AI tools to perform academic tasks may be less likely to engage in deeper cognitive processes, a finding consistent with the patterns identified in this research on critical skills limitations.

The findings of this study confirm that teachers recognize the potential of AI to improve education, but also express concern about the impact of these tools on originality and academic integrity. Participating teachers expressed fears similar to those documented in the literature that students may use AI to generate texts without making a significant intellectual effort, which could lead to a decline in critical thinking skills and creativity. This convergence with previous studies reinforces the validity of the findings and suggests universal patterns in teachers' perceptions of educational AI.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this research confirm the hypothesis regarding the dual impact of artificial intelligence tools in education. AI tools proved useful for generating initial ideas, improving formal aspects of writing, and personalizing learning, but their indiscriminate use poses significant risks to the development of higher cognitive skills.

The analysis revealed that excessive reliance on AI tools leads to convergence toward conventional solutions, limiting the development of divergent thinking. Although there was a quantitative increase in the ideas generated, these tended to be less innovative compared to those developed without artificial assistance. This homogenization of thought manifests itself in analytical superficiality and the repetition of previously explored concepts, suggesting a potential atrophy of critical skills when AI replaces natural cognitive processes.

The results reveal a fundamental paradox: while the tools improve the efficiency and formal quality of academic production, they can simultaneously inhibit essential analytical skills.

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ChatGPT and Google Bard, identified as the most popular tools, facilitated the organization of ideas and grammatical correction, but students expressed concerns about the accuracy and reliability of the information generated. The observed overdependence could limit the development of in-depth research skills and the construction of solid arguments.

The research confirms the existence of inherent algorithmic biases in natural language processing tools, which can perpetuate stereotypes and social inequalities. These biases, originating in training data and algorithms, require regulatory and pedagogical frameworks that promote the responsible use of these technologies.

The analysis of teacher perceptions revealed ambivalent attitudes: recognition of the transformative potential of AI coexisting with concerns about the loss of originality and academic integrity. A generational gap in technology adoption and a critical need for teacher training for the effective integration of these tools were identified.

Students who used AI in a complementary manner showed greater development in source evaluation and argumentative construction, while its use as a substitute resulted in a decrease in critical thinking and analytical skills. This differentiation suggests that the educational value of AI depends fundamentally on the pedagogical approach employed.

Limitations identified include the specific context of the study and the limited sample, requiring further research to generalize results. Nevertheless, the findings provide sufficient evidence to guide future pedagogical strategies.

The research suggests that the future of education requires a paradigm shift that positions AI as an auxiliary tool, not a substitute, for human learning. This demands the development of critical digital skills, the implementation of pedagogical strategies that encourage original thinking, and the creation of more transparent and equitable algorithms. The consolidation of critical digital literacy emerges as a fundamental skill, where the ability to evaluate, synthesize, and create original content will constitute the differentiating pillars of human learning in an AI-mediated educational ecosystem.

In summary, this research establishes that the responsible integration of AI in education requires a careful balance between technological advancement and the preservation of

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essential human cognitive abilities, setting a frame of reference for future research and educational policies.

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ANEXOS

Tabla 2

Categorías y subcategorías

Categoría	Subcategoría	Descripción
Estudiante	Conocimiento de IA	Nivel de conocimiento sobre herramientas de IA y sus aplicaciones en investigación.
	Actitud hacia la IA	Percepción general sobre la utilidad y los riesgos de la IA en el ámbito académico.
	Hábitos de estudio	Uso habitual de herramientas tecnológicas en el proceso de investigación.
	Creatividad	Capacidad para generar ideas originales y resolver problemas de manera innovadora.
	Pensamiento crítico	Habilidad para evaluar información, identificar sesgos y tomar decisiones fundamentadas.
Profesor	Conocimiento de IA	Nivel de conocimiento sobre herramientas de IA y sus aplicaciones en la docencia.
	Actitud hacia la IA	Percepción general sobre la utilidad y los riesgos de la IA en el ámbito académico.
	Experiencia docente	Años de experiencia docente y tipo de institución donde ha trabajado.
	Integración de tecnología	Grado de integración de tecnologías en sus clases.
	Apoyo institucional	Percepción del apoyo institucional para el uso de la IA en la docencia.
IA	Tipo de herramienta	Herramientas de IA utilizadas (generadores de texto, asistentes de investigación, etc.).
	Funcionalidades	Funcionalidades más utilizadas de las herramientas de IA.
	Facilidad de uso	Percepción de la facilidad de uso de las herramientas de IA.
	Calidad de los resultados	Evaluación de la calidad de los resultados obtenidos con las herramientas de IA.
	Ética	Preocupaciones éticas relacionadas con el uso de la IA en la investigación académica.
Tesis	Disciplina académica	Área de conocimiento en la que se desarrolla la tesis.
	Complejidad del tema	Nivel de complejidad del tema de investigación.

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	Fase del proceso	Etapa en la que se utiliza la IA (planificación, investigación, redacción, etc.).
	Impacto en la calidad	Percepción del impacto de la IA en la calidad de la tesis.
	Originalidad	Grado de originalidad de la investigación realizada con el apoyo de la IA.

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Instrumento

A continuación, encontrará una serie de preguntas relacionadas con el uso de la Inteligencia Artificial (IA) en la elaboración de INVESTIGACIONES de pregrado. Por favor, responda cada pregunta de manera abierta y detallada, expresando sus opiniones y experiencias personales.

1. Estudiante: ¿Qué nivel de conocimiento consideras que tienes sobre herramientas de IA y sus aplicaciones en investigación?
2. Estudiante: ¿Cuál es tu percepción general sobre la utilidad de la IA en el ámbito académico? ¿Ves algún riesgo en su uso?
3. Estudiante: ¿Qué herramientas tecnológicas utilizas habitualmente para tus estudios y cómo crees que estas te ayudan en tu proceso de investigación?
4. Estudiante: ¿Consideras que la IA puede fomentar tu creatividad en la generación de ideas para tu tesis? ¿Por qué?
5. Estudiante: ¿Cómo crees que la IA puede influir en tu capacidad para analizar información de manera crítica y tomar decisiones fundamentadas?
6. Profesor: ¿Qué nivel de conocimiento tienes sobre las herramientas de IA disponibles para apoyar el proceso de investigación de tus estudiantes?
7. Profesor: ¿Cuál es tu opinión sobre la utilidad de la IA en el ámbito académico? ¿Ves algún riesgo en su uso por parte de los estudiantes?
8. Profesor: ¿Cuántos años de experiencia tienes como docente y en qué tipo de instituciones has trabajado? ¿Cómo ha evolucionado tu práctica docente a lo largo de los años?
9. Profesor: ¿En qué medida integras tecnologías en tus clases? ¿Qué tipo de tecnologías utilizas con mayor frecuencia?
10. Profesor: ¿Consideras que tu institución brinda el apoyo necesario para que los docentes puedan utilizar herramientas de IA en sus clases? ¿Por qué?
11. IA: ¿Qué tipo de herramientas de IA has utilizado o conoces que podrían ser útiles para el desarrollo de una tesis?
12. IA: ¿Cuáles consideras que son las funcionalidades más útiles de las herramientas de IA que has utilizado?

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13. IA: ¿Qué tan fácil te resulta utilizar las herramientas de IA que has probado? ¿Qué aspectos podrías mejorar?
14. IA: ¿Consideras que los resultados obtenidos con las herramientas de IA son de buena calidad? ¿Por qué?
15. IA: ¿Qué preocupaciones éticas tienes sobre el uso de la IA en la investigación académica?
16. Tesis: ¿En qué área de conocimiento se centra tu tesis?
17. Tesis: ¿Consideras que el tema de tu tesis es complejo? ¿Por qué?
18. Tesis: ¿En qué etapa del proceso de elaboración de tu tesis utilizaste o consideraste utilizar herramientas de IA?
19. Tesis: ¿Crees que el uso de la IA ha mejorado la calidad de tu tesis? ¿De qué manera?
20. Tesis: ¿Consideras que el uso de la IA puede comprometer la originalidad de tu investigación? ¿Por qué?

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