



National Research Report: AI Usage Among Students in Croatia



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Overview and Methodology

This report presents findings from research conducted in Croatia as part of the Erasmus+ project Artificial Intelligence – Literacy, Ethics, and Responsible Navigation. The research aimed to examine students' awareness of Artificial Intelligence, their patterns of AI use, perceived benefits and risks, levels of digital and AI literacy, ethical and privacy-related concerns, and expectations regarding future school support.

The research combined quantitative and qualitative methods and was conducted at the High School Tina Ujevića Kutina. Quantitative data were collected via a Google Forms questionnaire comprising 57 substantive questions. The survey was completed by 349 students, significantly exceeding the minimum expected target of 70 participants. A focus group with 5 students was also conducted to provide further insight into students' experiences, attitudes, and concerns regarding the use of AI in education.

The results provide valuable insight into the experiences and attitudes of participating students.

However, due to the sample's specific composition, the findings should not be interpreted as statistically representative of all students in Croatia.

1. Demographic Information

The student sample consisted of 349 respondents from Croatia. The sample included 249 female students (71.3%) and 100 male students (28.7%). Most respondents were between 15 and 18 years old, representing 95.1% of the sample. The most represented field of study was General High School (Gymnasium), with 225 respondents (64.5%), followed by Economics and Business, with 122 respondents (35.0%). Two respondents selected other fields of study.

The sample represents students in the later stages of secondary education, when independent study habits, digital practices, and future educational or career choices are increasingly important.

2. Awareness of AI

The survey shows a high overall level of awareness of Artificial Intelligence among Croatian students. Students rated their familiarity with the concept of AI at an average of 3.95 out of 5, indicating that AI is already a familiar and visible topic in their everyday lives.

ChatGPT was by far the most widely used AI tool, reported by 98.3% of respondents. Other commonly used tools included Gemini (46.4%), Canva AI (41.5%), Copilot (15.8%), Grammarly AI (8.6%), Midjourney (4.0%), Perplexity AI (3.4%), and DALL-E (3.2%).

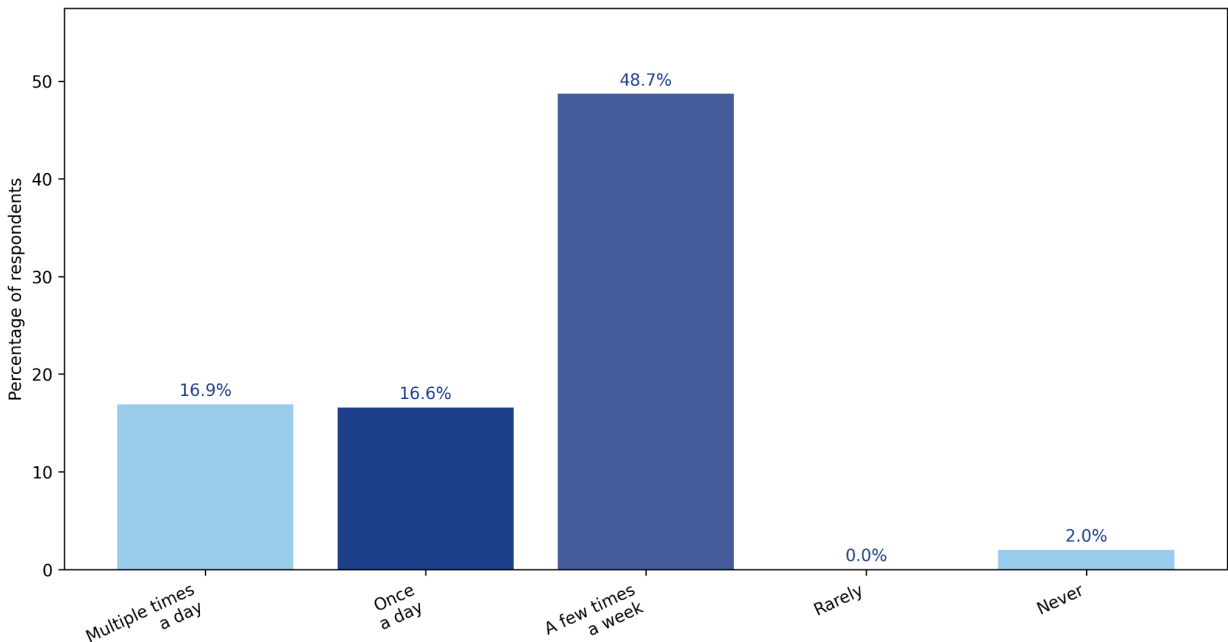
This suggests that students' awareness of AI is currently concentrated around highly visible and easily accessible tools, particularly general-purpose chatbots and content-generation

platforms. However, awareness does not necessarily mean deep conceptual understanding. Only 50.4% of students stated that they understood the difference between Generative AI, such as ChatGPT, and Narrow AI, such as recommendation systems used by Netflix or social media platforms.

This finding suggests that many students are familiar with AI in practice but do not yet have a fully developed understanding of how different AI systems function, how outputs are generated, or what their limitations are. AI awareness is therefore mainstream, but deeper conceptual AI literacy still needs to be developed through structured educational activities.

3. Frequency and Purpose of AI Use

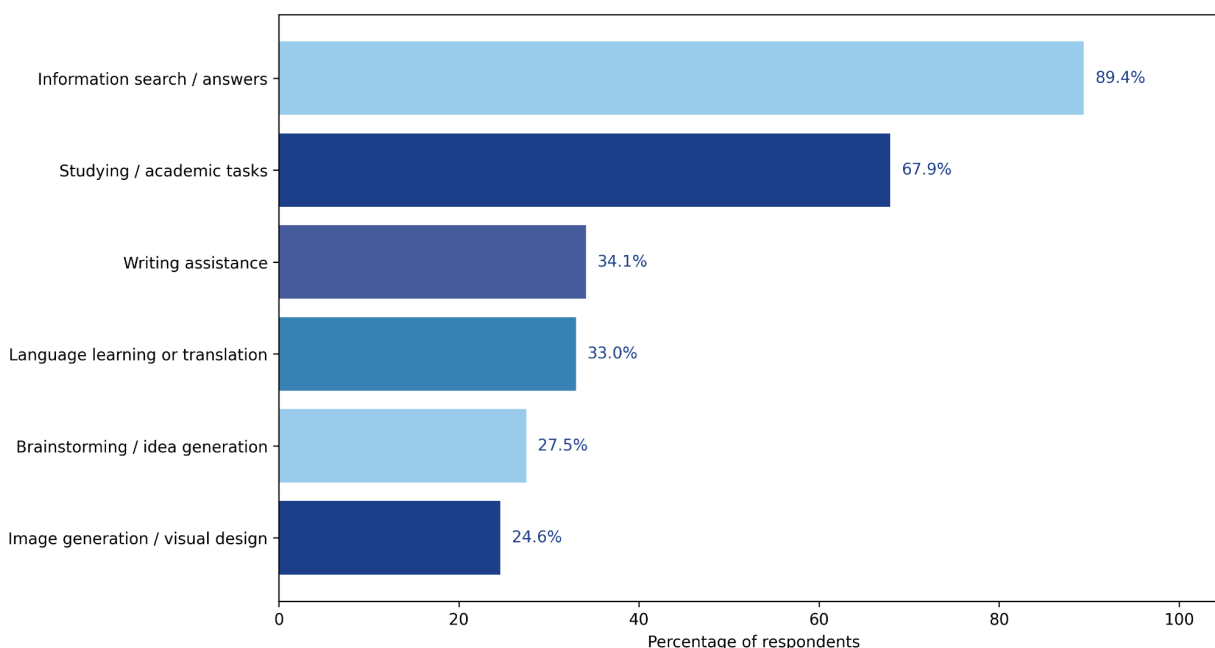
The student data reveal an intensive pattern of AI use. As shown in Figure 1, AI use is already a regular part of students' everyday digital practices, with most respondents using AI tools at least several times per week.



Around 41.0% had used AI for one to two years, while 11.7% had used it for more than two years. This confirms that AI use among students is not simply a recent trend or isolated experimentation, but an established part of many students' digital routines. AI use is strongly connected to education. A total of 78.8% of students reported using AI in schoolwork either regularly or sometimes. Students most commonly use AI for information search and answers

¹ Figure 1. Frequency of AI Use Among Students in Croatia. Source: Erasmus+ Student Survey, 2026 (n = 349).

to questions, followed by studying and academic tasks. Writing assistance, language learning, brainstorming, and image generation were also frequently selected, as illustrated in Figure 2.



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These findings indicate that students are using AI in multiple ways rather than for a single purpose. AI functions both as a learning-support tool and as a quick answer-finding tool. For some students, it appears to provide explanations, clarification, and support with difficult concepts. For others, it offers shortcuts in completing assignments, producing written work, or finding immediate answers.

This dual role is one of the central findings of the student survey. AI can support understanding and independent learning, but it can also encourage superficial engagement if students rely on generated answers without checking, reflecting, or understanding the content.

The survey also shows that AI is increasingly competing with traditional search engines. When looking for information online, 30.4% of students reported mostly using AI tools, 40.4% reported using AI tools and traditional web searches equally, and 29.2% reported mostly using traditional search engines. This means that more than 70% of respondents already rely on AI either primarily or equally alongside traditional search engines.

4. Perceived Benefits and Risks

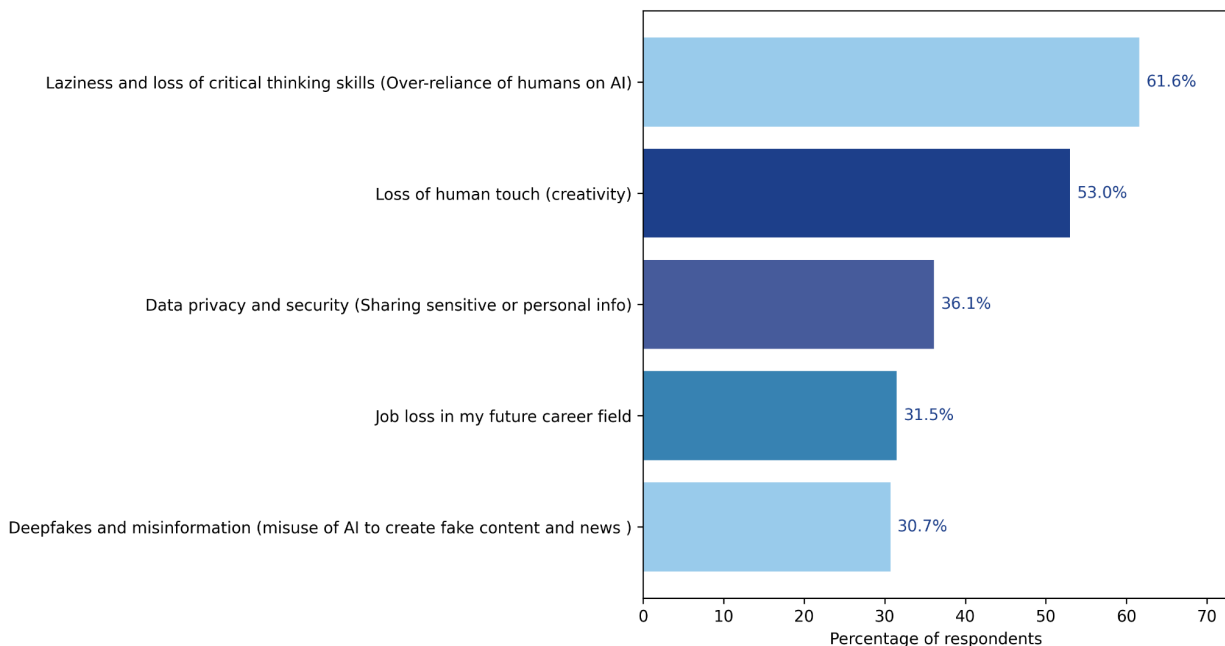
Croatian students clearly recognise several practical benefits associated with AI use. The most frequently identified advantages were:

² Figure 2. Main Purposes of AI Use Among Students in Croatia. Source: Erasmus+ Student Survey, 2026 (n = 349).

- Saving time on repetitive or boring tasks: 61.3%
- Having a tutor available at any time to answer questions: 53.6%
- Help with translation, grammar, spelling, and language learning: 34.1%
- Receiving explanations adapted to one's level of knowledge: 31.5%
- Quickly summarising long texts or large amounts of information: 30.7%
- Checking work for mistakes, logic, or factual problems: 30.1%
- Generating ideas, outlines, or visual concepts for projects: 24.9%

Students primarily perceive AI as a tool of convenience, accessibility, and personalised support. A particularly important benefit is the idea of AI as a constantly available learning assistant. Students value the possibility of receiving explanations outside class time, simplifying difficult content, translating materials, or obtaining immediate support when teachers or classmates are not available.

However, students are far from uncritical in their attitudes towards AI. The most frequently identified disadvantages are shown in Figure 3.



3

The strongest concern was over-reliance. Students appear aware that AI may make tasks easier while also reducing independent thinking, creativity, effort, and confidence in their own abilities. This is especially significant because it shows that frequent AI users are not simply optimistic about the technology. Many recognise a tension between AI's short-term usefulness and its possible long-term consequences for learning quality.

Students' views on academic integrity were also conditional rather than absolute. The largest group, 49.3%, believed that AI use becomes cheating only when a student copies an answer without understanding it. A further 22.6% considered AI a modern tool that is not

³ Figure 3. Perceived Risks of AI Among Students in Croatia. Source: Erasmus+ Student Survey, 2026 (n = 349).

automatically cheating, while 15.8% believed that AI becomes cheating when a teacher has explicitly forbidden its use. Only 12.3% stated that AI use is cheating because the work is not original. The results also demonstrate the need for clearer school-level guidance on acceptable and unacceptable AI use, transparency, authorship, and citation. Students were also cautious about AI's long-term impact on education. Nearly half of respondents, 48.2%, expected AI to have a mostly negative or significantly negative effect on the quality of education. Only 26.9% expected a mostly or significantly positive impact. This finding is important because students do not interpret their own frequent use of AI as proof that AI will automatically improve education. Instead, many recognise that the educational value of AI depends on how it is used, whether it supports genuine learning, and whether schools are able to preserve critical thinking, human interaction, and academic integrity.

5. Self-Assessed AI and Digital Literacy

The students generally rated their digital skills positively. The average self-assessment of digital competence was 3.88 out of 5, with 72.8% rating their digital skills at level 4 or 5. Self-assessed AI literacy was slightly lower, with an average score of 3.67 out of 5. Around 62.2% rated their AI literacy at level 4 or 5. Students' confidence in using AI tools independently was lower again, with an average of 3.52 out of 5.

These findings suggest that students generally feel comfortable using digital tools and AI platforms.

Trust in AI-generated information was moderate rather than unquestioning, with an average trust score of 3.21 out of 5. This indicates that students are not fully convinced that AI always provides reliable answers. However, their actual fact-checking habits remain inconsistent.

When asked how often they verify facts provided by AI using a secondary source:

- 45.6% said they do so rarely
- 39.0% said they do so often
- 10.6% said they always do so
- 4.9% said they never do so

This is one of the most important findings in the survey, as it points to a significant gap between regular AI use and consistent critical evaluation.

Students' source-checking behaviour was also mixed. When AI provides a source or link:

- 37.0% open the link and check whether the information actually exists there
- 26.4% only check whether the link looks legitimate
- 20.6% use AI only for explanations rather than sources
- 9.7% trust the AI and use the source without checking
- 6.3% reported encountering fake or broken AI-generated sources

In addition, only 51.0% of respondents stated that they knew how to cite an AI tool in a project or paper. Taken together, these findings suggest that students are relatively confident AI

users, but their literacy is stronger in practical use than in critical, academic, and ethical dimensions. They know how to access and use AI tools, but many are not yet fully equipped to evaluate AI outputs, verify sources, identify hallucinated citations, cite AI transparently, or understand the limitations of generated information.

6. Privacy, Personal Use, and Responsible AI Use

The survey also explored students' awareness of privacy and personal data issues. More than half of respondents, 52.7%, stated that they were aware that prompts and data entered into AI tools may be used to further train models and that they were careful about what they shared. Students reported sharing a range of information with AI tools:

- School assignments or essay drafts: 75.1%
- Medical symptoms or health-related questions: 37.0%
- Personal feelings, moods, or secrets: 25.5%
- Future plans and career goals: 16.9%
- Daily routines and habits: 16.6%
- Photos of themselves or other people: 11.2%
- Personal information such as name or location: 6.0%

A total of 56.7% of students also reported asking AI for advice or help with personal problems at least rarely. This included areas such as relationships, mental health, life choices, and personal concerns.

These findings highlight an important area for future educational work. Students may understand that privacy risks exist, but this awareness does not always prevent them from sharing sensitive, emotional, medical, or personal information with AI systems.

Future AI literacy activities should therefore address privacy, personal data protection, emotional reliance, and the limitations of AI-generated advice. Students should understand that AI tools are not substitutes for teachers, parents, trusted adults, medical professionals, counsellors, or mental health support services.

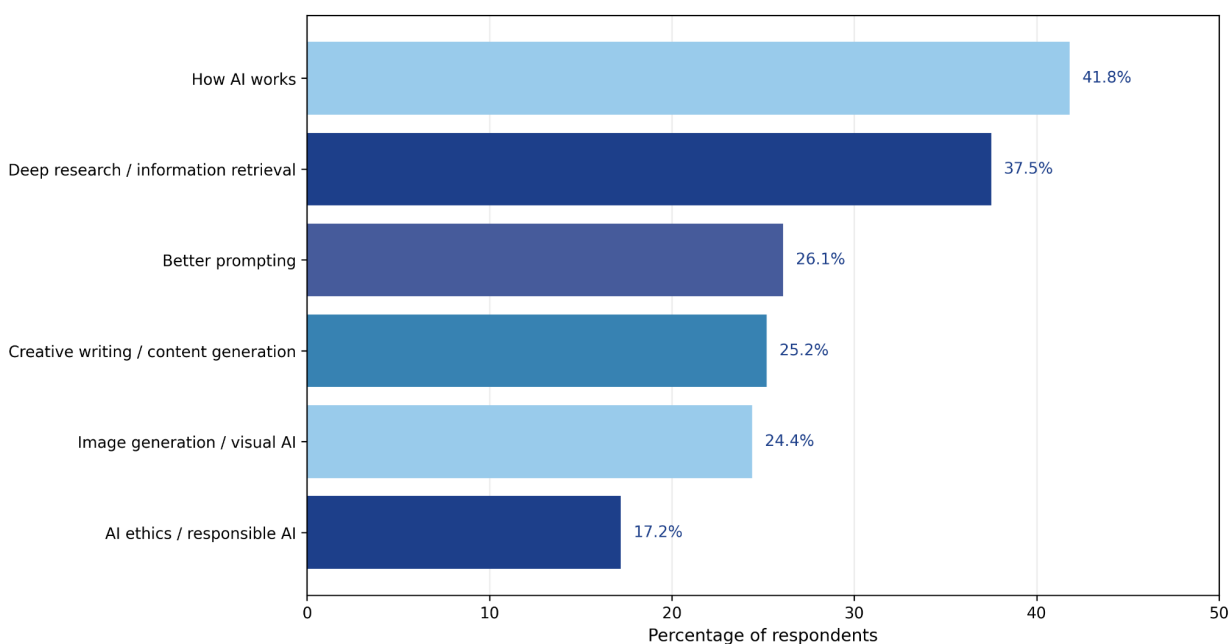
7. Training Needs and Future Expectations

Formal AI training remains limited among students. Only 14.3% of respondents had attended an AI-related course or training, while 85.7% had not received any formal education on AI use. Most students learned to use AI informally:

- By experimenting independently: 42.4%
- By simply starting to use AI without structured learning: 31.5%
- From friends, colleagues, or peers: 17.5%
- By reading articles or guides: 4.9%

- Through tutorials or online courses: 3.7%

As shown in Figure 4, students were most interested in learning how AI works (41.8%), deep research and information retrieval (37.5%), and better prompting (26.1%). At the same time, 23.8% of respondents stated that they did not want to learn anything more about AI. This suggests that future activities should be practical, relevant, and clearly connected to students' everyday learning needs.



4

Students were cautious about the formal integration of AI into the official curriculum. Around half of the respondents, 50.4%, preferred AI to be included only through extracurricular activities. A further 33.0% did not support its inclusion in the official curriculum, while 16.6% supported formal curriculum integration. Students were also divided on whether AI would be a required skill for their future profession. Exactly 50.4% believed it would be required, while 49.6% did not. This suggests that students recognise AI as increasingly important, but they remain uncertain about how universal its relevance will be across different professions and fields of study.

Conclusion

The Croatian student survey presents a picture of high AI exposure, frequent AI use, and growing but incomplete critical awareness. AI is already embedded in the everyday learning

⁴ Figure 4. Areas in Which Students Would Like to Learn More About AI. Source: Erasmus+Student Survey, 2026 (n = 349).

practices of most respondents. Students use it regularly for information search, studying, homework, writing support, translation, brainstorming, and visual content creation. They clearly value AI for saving time, providing explanations, supporting language learning, and functioning as an always-available assistant. At the same time, students are not naïve about AI. Many are concerned about dependency, reduced critical thinking, misinformation, privacy, loss of creativity, and the broader effect of AI on the quality of education. Their views on cheating are generally conditional, suggesting that they distinguish between AI as a learning support tool and AI as a substitute for independent work. However, fact-checking practices, source verification, citation knowledge, conceptual understanding, and privacy awareness remain uneven. This shows that widespread practical AI use is not always accompanied by equally strong critical literacy. The findings strongly support the need for future project activities focused on critical AI literacy, fact-checking, source evaluation, academic integrity, privacy protection, responsible use of AI tools, and clear school-level guidance. Croatian students do not primarily need more exposure to AI, because AI is already widely present in their lives. They need structured support in using it critically, ethically, transparently, and in ways that genuinely support learning.