How Professionals and Students Use AI for Text and Communication

Survey of writing professionals and high school students in November-December 2025

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CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY CULTURES OF TEXT

AARHUS UNIVERSITY

1. Introduction

As generative AI makes its way into central societal domains such as education, institutions and private firms, the narrative surrounding the technology continues to evolve, while individuals are increasingly confronted with both its benefits and its repercussions. But how is the technology actually being used and experienced? And how do these perspectives differ between demographic groups?

This report presents a comparative analysis of survey results collected by TEXT: *Center for Contemporary Cultures of Text*. The survey targeted two main demographic groups:

(1) Communication Professionals recruited via Rhetor, a rhetorical consulting firm
(2) High school students from Region Southern Denmark and ATU Midt (the Academy for Talented Youth, Central Region of Denmark)

Together, these groups provide insight into contemporary cross-generational differences in how AI is shaping text-based work, education and learning.

Recent studies from DJØF, NOKUT, Danske Gymnasier, and EDUCAUSE all point in the same direction: AI is being rapidly integrated into education, while institutions struggle with adapting to the evolving landscape.[1] The TEXT survey offers a side-by-side comparison between working professionals and students in their perspectives and uses of AI, and offers a window into where their views align and where they diverge. It approaches the comparison by distinguishing between the context of professional work and educational settings.

In professional settings, tasks are typically evaluated in terms of output and efficiency, whereas in educational settings, the process of learning is itself part of the assessment. Generative AI is particularly effective at helping produce text output but not necessarily facilitating deeper engagement with the underlying task. This creates a tension between augmentation and substitution in environments where task engagement is essential, such as educational settings.

[1] https://www.djoef.dk/-/media/documents/a/analyser/djf-undersgelse-2025-ai-og-retningslinjer.pdf, https://www.nokut.no/en/news/artificial-intelligence-as-a-tool-in-analytical-work/, https://eva.dk/udgivelser/2026/feb/elevers-brug-af-ai-i-gymnasiet, https://www.educause.edu/research/2026/the-impact-of-ai-on-work-in-higher-education.

2. Respondents and demography

The surveys compare two distinct groups to assess generational and occupational differences. The Rhetor respondents mainly consist of consultants, speechwriters, copywriters, PR advisors, journalists and communication managers, who all share language and its use as their core professional identity.

On the other hand, the student respondents represent students from a diverse range of studies in upper secondary schools in Denmark. The responses were collected from November 2025 to December 2025. 88 responses from ATU Midt were collected from a cohort in class on November 5, while the remaining majority were collected from mailing lists.

	Rhetor (Professionals)	ATU Midt & Region Southern Denmark (High School Students)
Respondents	155	364
Average age	50 years	17.4 years
Gender (female)	65%	59%
Location	98% Denmark	83% Denmark, 15% Europe
Context	Professional communication	Gymnasium / HHX / HTX / HF
Experience	Avg. 18 years in field	45% in 2.g

3. Adoption and tool choice

The majority of respondents from both groups report generally high AI adoption. 92% of Rhetor respondents use AI tools in their work, while 78% of the students use AI in their schoolwork. This aligns closely with other surveys on student AI use in Denmark but stands in contrast to similar surveys on American students, who tend to use AI tools significantly less.[2]

[2] https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2026/02/24/how-teens-use-and-view-ai/

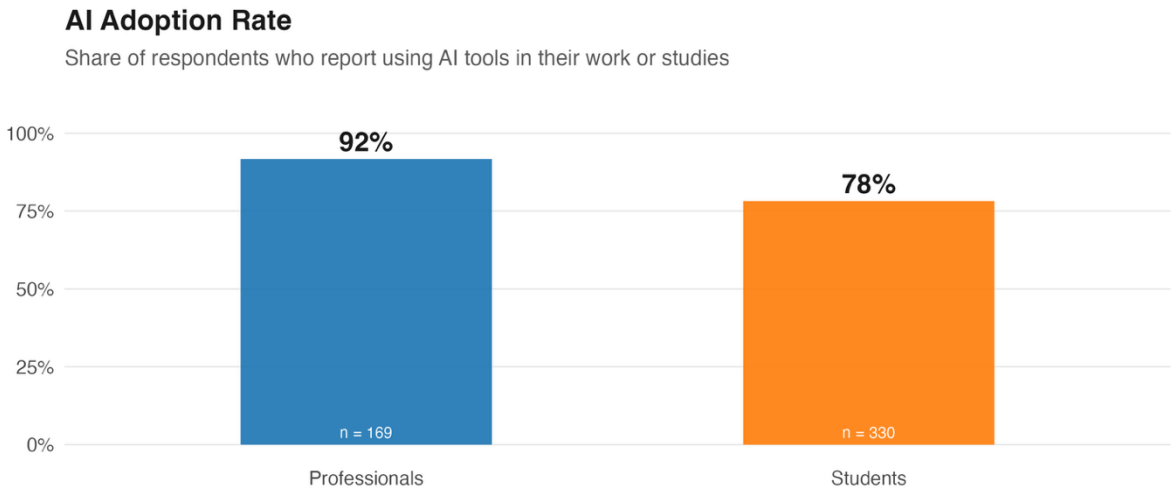

Figure 1: AI adoption rate between groups

Model choices are very similar across the two groups. ChatGPT dominates, especially for students (93% students vs. 86% professionals), as the main choice. Copilot follows (29% students vs. 49% professionals), and Google Gemini is third, used by approximately one in five in both populations. Besides these dominating AI platforms, professionals report Perplexity for research and DeepL for translation, while students mention Grok, Knowunity and other tools focused on homework help. As of March 2026, there are signs that the use of ChatGPT is stalling, but for 2025 its dominance was striking.

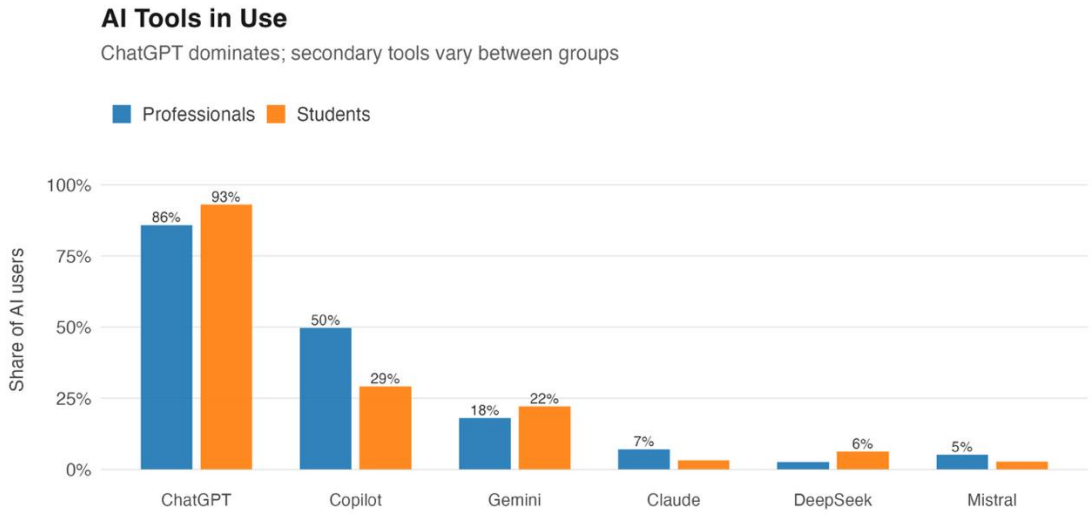

Figure 2: Most used AI tools between groups. Descending from left to right.

Both groups share daily use of AI with around half of each population reporting daily use or more. The distributions between the two groups are remarkably similar and are displayed in Figure 3.

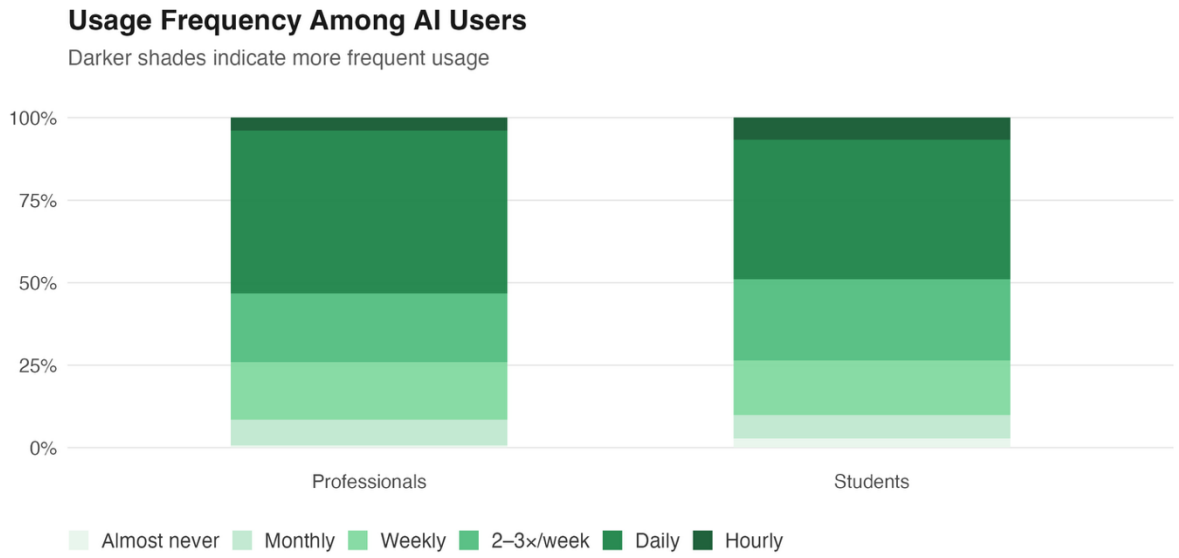

Figure 3: Usage frequency between groups. Darker green indicates more frequent use

4. Use cases of AI

Both populations share similar patterns of usage. Research and information gathering top the list in both groups (71% professionals vs. 72% students), followed by brainstorming, summarizing, editing, and proofreading.

The largest differences are concentrated in production-focused tasks. Professionals report higher use for tasks such as writing first drafts (49% vs 32%), making social media content (32% vs 6%) and writing emails (35% vs. 16%). On the other hand, students are more prone to use AI as an educational tool, in tasks where clear explanations of concepts are central. This tutor function is further highlighted in the open-ended responses for students but is barely mentioned in the Rhetor responses.

Students describe using AI to understand assignment requirements, to get feedback on grammar, to prepare for oral exams, and in some cases to act as a substitute teacher, when they feel their actual

teacher falls short.

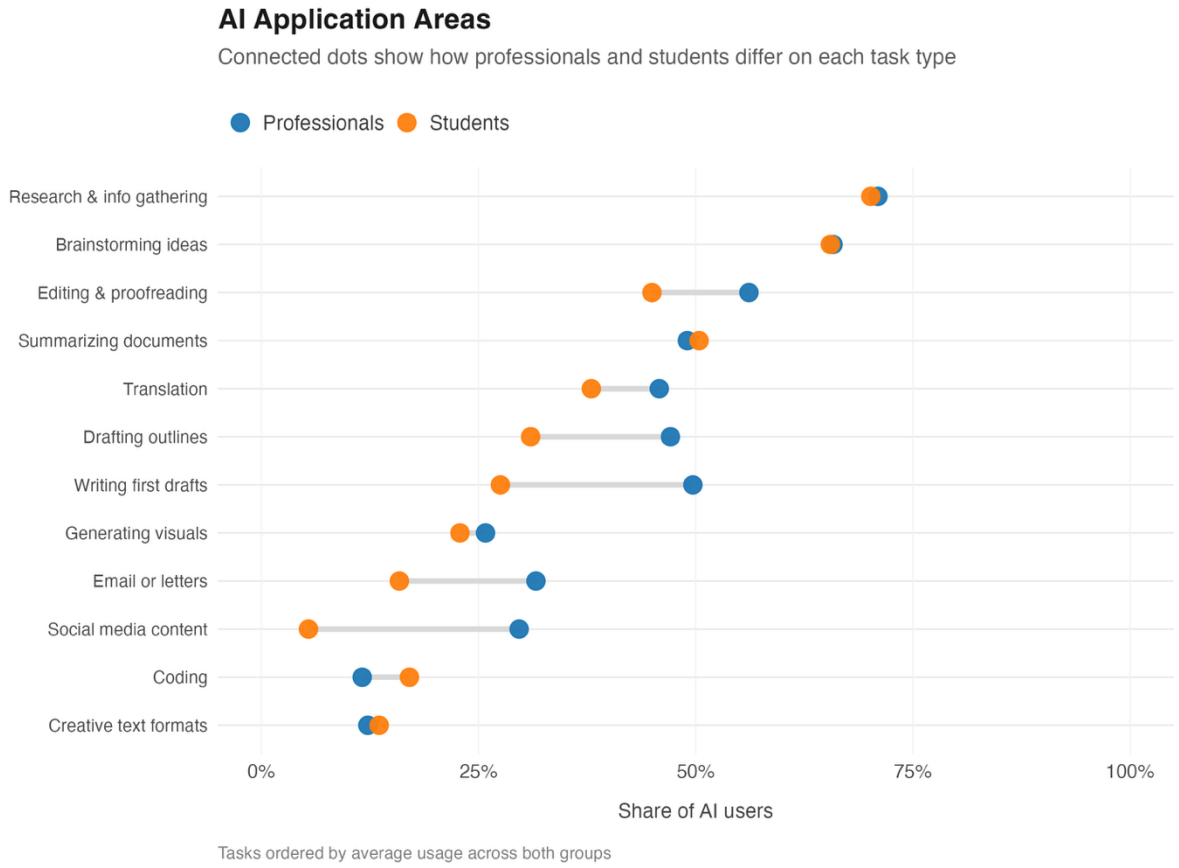

Figure 4: Use cases and most used areas of AI applications

5. The productivity gap

Although the two groups show similar patterns of adoption and use cases, the consequences of its integration differ noticeably.

Professionals

For Rhetor respondents, the image is almost entirely positive. 82% report that AI has increased their overall productivity to some extent, and not a single respondent reports experiencing a decrease in productivity. Responses to quality paint a similar picture with only 2% of professionals reporting a decrease in quality.

The open-ended answers are similarly positive: “I like to embrace AI and see it as a ‘colleague’… It is also my intern”. Because most professionals already have established workflows focused on external output generation, the data suggests generative AI fits well into accelerating these specific tasks with minimal perceived loss of quality when supervised.

Students

Among students, the image becomes more mixed. Although a majority experience increased productivity (54%), almost one third (30%) of students report a decrease in productivity, with 21% reporting a slight decrease and 9% reporting a considerable to high decrease. Student responses on quality depict a similar pattern. 73% experience improved quality, while 10% report declined quality.

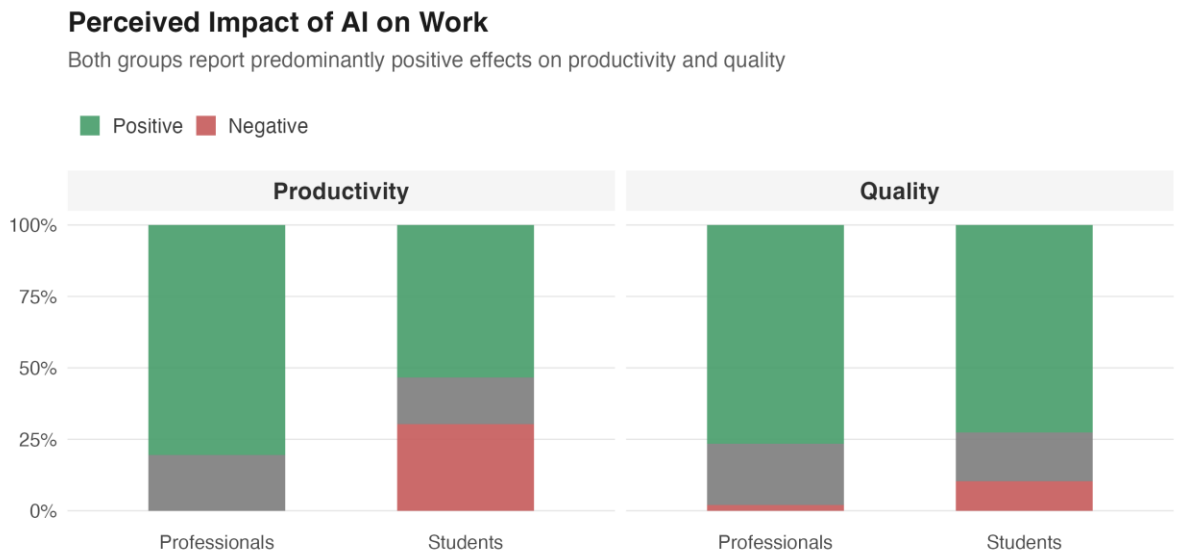

Figure 5: Impact on productivity and quality between groups

The contrasting distributions highlight several ways in which AI impacts the two groups, shaped by the differing purposes of their work. In educational settings, the primary objective is learning. Productivity cannot be understood solely in terms of the final output but also encompasses the process of engaging with and understanding the material. By contrast, professional tasks are largely evaluated on the delivery of a result, regardless of how that result is produced.

Simultaneously, the student responses point to a form of cognitive offloading as their primary concern with AI use. They are aware of their decreased engagement with the crucial skills they are meant to learn, while not necessarily being able to opt out of using it, creating an internal, subjective friction. One student writes:

“*I feel a little dumber every time I use it,*”

while another mentions that

"*It has become the easy choice without being the best choice.*"

Professionals, on the other hand, developed their skills before this kind of cognitive offloading was an option, making current AI tools less of a threat to their agency and engagement in their work.

Productivity impact	**Rhetor**	Students
Increased (any level)	82%	54%
No change	17%	16%
Decreased (any level)	**0%**	**30%**

6. Trust, skepticism, and editing

The differences in productivity and quality are tightly intertwined with how respondents evaluate, edit and incorporate AI output into their workflows. Despite increased self-reported productivity and quality, both groups express a general low confidence in the reliability of AI output. 47% of professionals rate their confidence in AI reliability as low, and 42% are neutral.

The responses from students are somewhat similar (37% and 42%). Only a minor percentage of each group declare strong confidence in AI reliability, although students ascribe higher confidence (9% of professionals vs 20% of students).

In both surveys, the majority edit AI output to some extent. 59% of professionals and 54% of students report doing extensive editing almost always. Another 35% (professionals) and 26% (students) edit frequently. Almost no respondents use AI output without revision. A Rhetor respondent says:

"It can help with 80%, but texts still need to be read carefully, and I do not trust the facts".

This suggests that dependence is not widely perceived by professionals as a major concern.

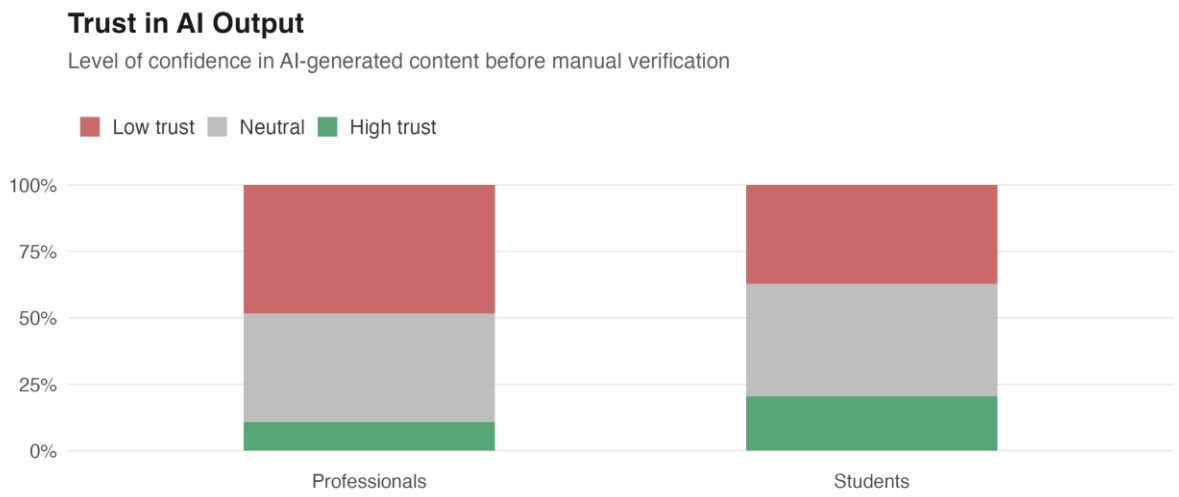

Figure 6: Trust in output

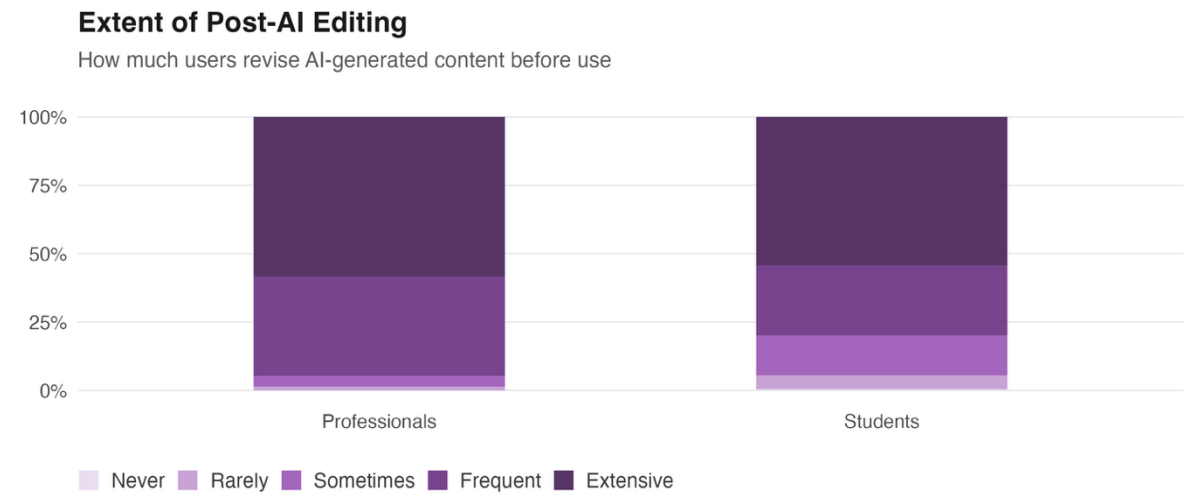

Figure 7: Extent of post-editing of AI output

The most significant difference between the two groups surfaces when considering trust and editing patterns together with productivity. Figure 8 visualizes how students with high-trust and low-editing report negative productivity outcomes (-0.67), while professionals remain positive across all combinations.

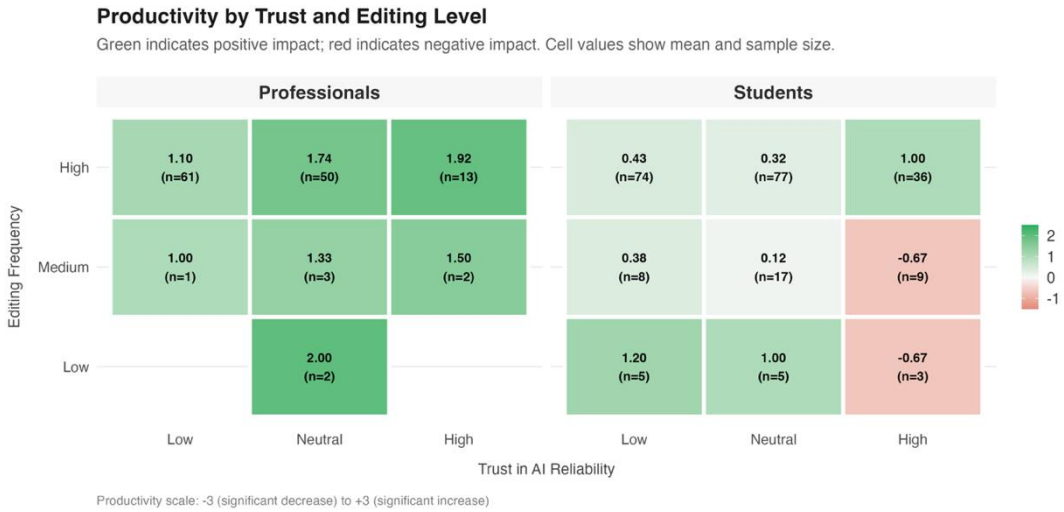

Figure 8: Heatmap showing impact of trust and editing frequency on productivity

These concurrent reports point to a possible pattern where AI is more readily accepted as a shortcut in educational settings, which might correspond to lower perceived productivity. Adopting without revising the output suggests a potential cycle where reduced engagement and higher trust could dilute perceived quality and feelings of productivity. The gaps are thus not primarily driven by who uses AI, but the intersections between the use context, the psychological factors and how the output is handled.

For professionals, lower trust and extensive editing align closer to a pattern of augmentation, where AI supports already established workflows.

For students, higher trust and less editing resemble substitution, where AI replaces active engagement with the task, potentially worsening perceived productivity. This may indicate that the difference doesn't lie in access to tools or the frequency of use, but the workflows and approaches they are integrated into.

7. Challenges and concerns

Across both groups, respondents point to a shared set of concerns, including unreliable answers, lack of transparency, overreliance, and uncertainty about appropriate use. For professionals, these concerns are often in relation to privacy, accuracy, and reputational risk. For students, they are more closely intertwined with dependency, confusion, and the possibility that AI may weaken independent learning.

Students highlight the lack of clear guidelines for when and how they are allowed to use AI tools, blurring the lines between usefulness and cheating. Here, the emotional dimension resurfaces with student concerns revolving around guilt, dependency and anxiety about skill loss, combined with the inconsistent guidelines.

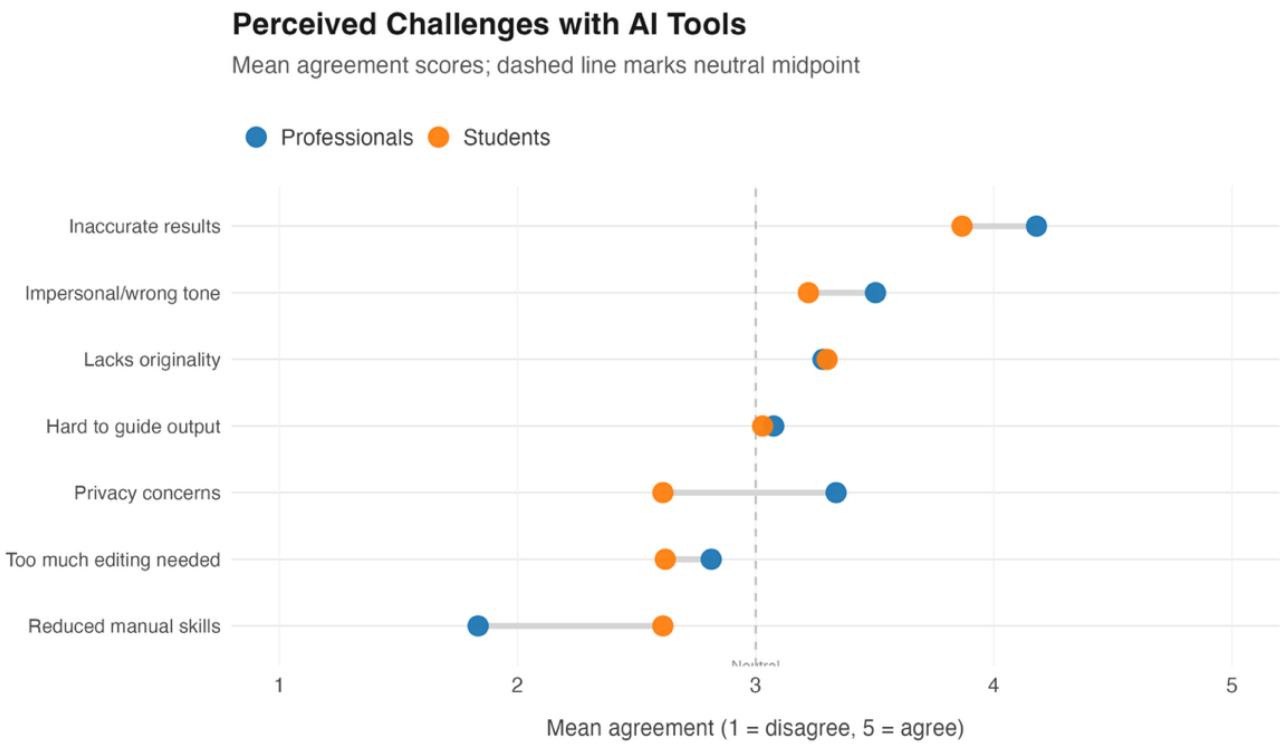

Figure 9: Challenges of using AI tools

8. The training asymmetry

The presented differences in behavior should also be viewed in the context of unequal training and institutional support. Among professionals, 71% have received some form of AI training, while only 33% of students have. Two out of three high school students who use AI daily have never had any formal training in how to use it as an educational tool.

The desire for training furthermore varies considerably between the two groups. Among professionals, 82% want more training. Among students, only 36% have the same desire. Many students express that they do not need training, and they are better off by learning from doing. One student writes

"Training is mostly for older generations for whom digital tools don't feel intuitive."

The answers illuminate a mixed picture where some students demand clearer educational frameworks for using AI, while they at the same time do not wish to receive AI training - a component that often is a central part of educational frameworks for specific uses of tools. This highlights a structural tension of AI integration that the educational system is currently grappling with. The current training frameworks may not align with the actual usage of the tools or address the moral and emotional dilemmas students face when using it.

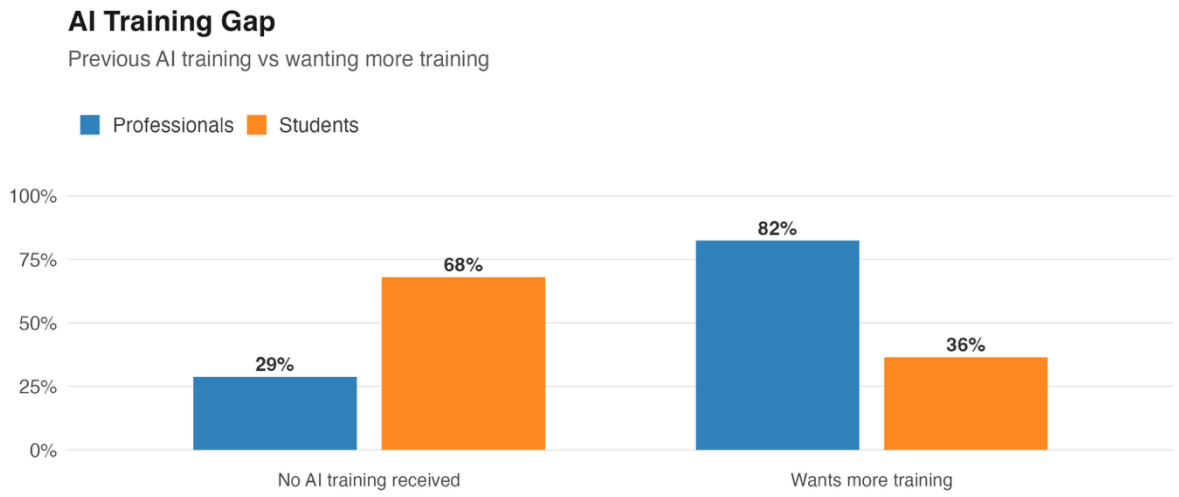

Figure 10: Difference in training experience and desire for training between groups

Training	Rhetor	Students
No training received	29%	68%
Want more training	82%	36%
Estimated automatable %	32%	54%

9. Automation and job concerns

The two groups differ noticeably in how they view the future impact of AI on work. Students estimate a larger share of tasks as automatable (54% mean), while professionals appear somewhat less inclined to see their own work as easily replaceable (31% mean). This may reflect differences in experience, task knowledge, and confidence in the value of human expertise.

Professionals may either view their experience in the field as making them less replaceable or hold a less pessimistic view of AI's current and future capabilities. They emphasize that the last 20% of their tasks requires human judgment, creativity, and understanding that currently remain out of AI's reach. Students, on the other hand, are entering a job market that is increasingly adapting to generative AI as an embedded work component. At the same time, the current assignment and exam forms are not adapted to AI use and are therefore more easily completed with AI.

Despite the differences, both groups recognize that AI is likely to reshape rather than simply remove text-based work.

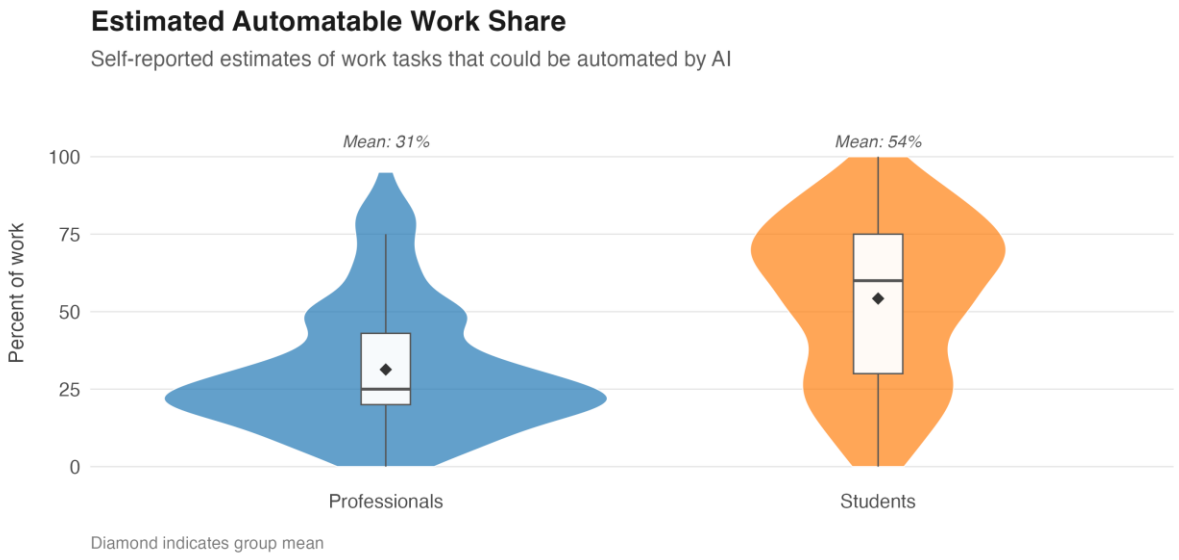

Figure 11: Automatable work

When examining professional answers in isolation, an interesting inconsistency appears. While they express moderate concern about AI job replacement in their field, this concern does not seem to include their own position. This suggests a third-person effect, where risks are perceived as affecting others more than oneself.

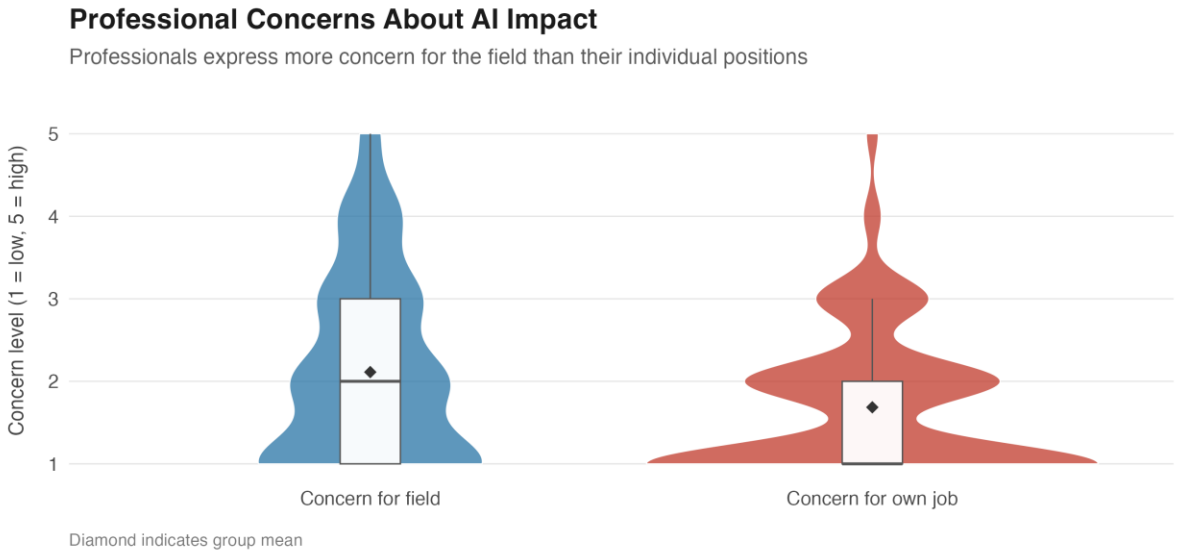

Figure 12: Professional concerns for the field and their own position

10. Implications for education and policy

A core finding of the report is that the adoption of similar tools does not inevitably lead to similar practices or outcomes. While both groups use the same platforms, their perceived experiences and integration of AI differ considerably. Professional use suggests a pattern closer to augmentation, used to support existing workflows. In educational settings, it appears more difficult to constructively integrate AI into current frameworks, which sometimes results in a substitutional role that can challenge the learning process.

These findings emphasize a need for context-specific approaches. In professional settings, the focus typically remains on supporting effective tool integration. In education, the institutional challenge is more complex: discovering how to support learners in using AI without bypassing the learning process itself; a tension that involves guidelines, training, and evolving teaching formats.

Students are already using AI extensively, regardless of varying allowance from the administrative units. The high adoption rate of 78% combined with the untrained rate of 68% represents a clear gap between usage and institutional backing. The results indicate that teachers should focus on integrating forms of AI use that preserve agency and engagement with the task and material itself. As one student points out:

"Instead of continuing to fight something that only gains more influence on our everyday lives, perhaps the focus should be on how AI can actually make teaching better and more relevant."

The tension between students and teachers regarding AI use is evident in the data. Multiple students express frustration with their teachers who frame all AI use as a means of cheating:

"*Right now there are many adults, especially teachers, who are extremely against AI because they expect we will become less creative and less capable of independent thinking. That only happens if we keep putting so much focus on warning against AI instead of teaching about and with it".*

Regardless of its truth, the statement echoes a growing frustration from students over the strictly prohibitive approach to AI from teachers, which might alienate students from the technology rather than benefitting them.

For policy relevance, the lack of training particularly for students (68%) represents a gap that development programmes and AI policy can and should address. Secondly, the emotional distress from students on AI use should also give rise to concern. The feelings of guilt, anxiety about skill loss, pressure from peers, and unclear signals from teachers all suggest that technological literacy and emotional well-being should be integrated into policy plans of AI implementation.

11. Limitations

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the results. Firstly, both sample groups are narrow representations of their broader population. The ATU respondents are members of the Academy for Talented Youth, which comprises the academically high-performing students of Danish high school students. This sample bias produces a skewed representation of the average Danish high school student, partly excluding the perspectives of students who face academic challenges and who might experience AI use differently. Moreover, 88 of 364 student responses came from a single in-class cohort, which may produce clustering effects from shared context, social dynamics or instructions.

The Rhetor group is also narrow, as it consists only of communication professionals. While we do not generalize the findings from the Rhetor respondents to working professionals in other fields, this distinction is crucial to address when interpreting the results.

Secondly, the two samples are imbalanced in size, with 155 Rhetor respondents and 364 student respondents. While this asymmetry does not affect descriptive statistics, it limits the accuracy of direct comparisons between the groups, and the smaller Rhetor sample is more sensitive to the influence of individual responses. Reported percentage differences between groups should therefore be read as indicative rather than definitive.

Thirdly, respondent self-report is a central metric in interpreting the results. Although valuable, self-report on dimensions such as productivity and quality are not necessarily corresponding to objective evaluations of the underlying metric. This caveat applies both to the quantitative ratings and to the open-ended answers, where respondents describe their perceived experience rather than measured performance.

Finally, the survey did not capture the content or format of the training that respondents had received. This makes it more difficult to interpret the differences in training received and divergence in desire for future training, as the same term may refer to very different experiences across respondents.

12. Conclusion

The survey shows that generative AI is already highly used in both educational and professional text practices, but its consequences vary significantly across contexts. The report's strongest findings center on the notable perceived productivity gap between the groups, the divergent patterns of trust and editing, and the substantial training asymmetry.

For professionals, AI is mainly experienced as a productivity tool. For students, the picture is more ambivalent: AI can support learning, but it can also create shortcuts that weaken engagement and understanding. The central policy question is how institutions can shape its use so that efficiency does not come at the expense of quality, responsibility, and learning.

The gap between these two groups can partly be interpreted as an inherent difference in the task contexts between the two groups. Because professionals integrate AI into already established workflows, while students use it in contexts where learning itself is the goal, the central issue is not simply training. It is how AI is integrated into educational practice without replacing the cognitive work that education is meant to develop.

Acknowledgments

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