Arab World English Journal
INTERNATIONAL PEER REVIEWED JOURNAL ISSN: 2229-9327

Arab World English Journal (AWEJ) Special Issue on CALL Number 11. July 2025 Pp. 1-4
DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/call11.1A

The Role of Generative AI in Higher Education: Institutional Guidelines, Generational Gaps, and the Grok 4 Challenge

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Abstract

The rapid rise of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools is reshaping higher education worldwide. This article explores how leading universities are responding to the integration of AI through the development of formal guidelines that promote ethical, transparent, and responsible use of platforms like ChatGPT, Bard, Copilot, and Claude. However, the uneven adoption of these technologies across institutions raises important concerns about regulatory gaps, academic integrity, and faculty preparedness. The article also examines the generational divide in digital literacy and the urgent need for faculty development programs. A focal point of the discussion is the recent launch of Grok 4 by xAI, which claims PhD-level problem-solving capabilities and introduces a multi-agent system designed to simulate advanced academic reasoning. While Grok 4 signals a potential turning point in AI-driven research and pedagogy, it also raises complex questions around model reliability, benchmark validity, and educational oversight. The article concludes by calling for stronger governance from academic bodies to ensure that the future of education remains equitable, ethical, and human-centered.

Keywords: Academic integrity, artificial intelligence in education, ChatGPT, digital literacy, educational policy, faculty training, generative AI, Grok 4, higher education, human–machine collaboration, institutional guidelines, massive open online courses, xAI

Cite as: Alzubaidi, K. (2025). The Role of Generative AI in Higher Education: Institutional Guidelines, Generational Gaps, and the Grok 4 Challenge. *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ) Special Issue on CALL (11)*1-4: https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/call11.1A

Higher education globally has been significantly impacted and transformed by the rapid development of digital technologies. Today, learning is no longer limited to the traditional boundaries set by instructors, faculty members, textbooks, or physical classrooms. Instead, institutions have increasingly adopted online and hybrid models of instruction, driven by the growing demand for accessible, flexible, and student-centered learning experiences. A key indicator of this shift is the proliferation of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), which have made education more accessible and allowed for learning on a larger scale. Alongside this evolution is the increasing integration of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies, which are now used to tailor learning experiences according to students' needs, behaviors, and preferred cognitive styles.

The growing incorporation of advanced artificial intelligence (AI) tools into academic settings has raised considerable concerns among universities, research institutions, and scholarly publishing communities. In response, several leading global universities such as Harvard University (2024), Stanford University (2024), and Duke University (2025) have released official guidelines to govern the responsible use of AI technologies, particularly generative tools like ChatGPT, Bard, Copilot, and Claude. These frameworks aim to promote ethical, transparent, and constructive AI use while mitigating risks related to academic integrity, data privacy, authorship attribution, and the authenticity of scholarly work. They often emphasize the importance of disclosing when AI tools are used in research or writing processes.

However, this raises important questions: How many universities worldwide have followed suit? Have institutions beyond the top tier taken proactive measures to regulate AI usage within their academic environments? Moreover, a growing generational divide must be considered, while Generation Z students often adapt quickly to new technologies, but older faculty members may face challenges in understanding and adopting these tools effectively. Therefore, there is a high need for comprehensive training programs that equip educators across generations with the knowledge and skills to integrate AI meaningfully into teaching, research, and assessment. Without such measures, the uneven adoption of AI could widen the digital literacy gap within higher education and hinder its long-term academic and ethical sustainability.

Within the context of technological transformation, the unveiling of Grok 4 by Elon Musk on July 9, 2025, (xAI, 2025) represents a pivotal development in the evolving relationship between artificial intelligence and higher education. Described during the livestream event as “the smartest artificial intelligence in the world” and he added “With respect to academic questions, Grok 4 is better than PhD level in every subject, no exceptions,”, “At times, it may lack common sense, and it has not yet invented new technologies or discovered new physics, but that is just a matter of time.” he added "AI is advancing faster than any human," (xAI, 2025; Shittu, 2025, para.3).

Grok 4 introduces a new generation of AI capabilities designed not only to assist but to actively contribute to research, problem-solving, and knowledge generation.

Grok 4 is offered in two distinct versions: the standard single-agent model and the more powerful multi-agent system, known as Grok 4 Heavy or *SuperGrok Heavy*. The multi-agent architecture allows for cooperative reasoning among AI agents, enabling complex cognitive tasks that extend far beyond traditional chatbot functions (Vincent, 2025). In particular, Grok 4 Heavy is a highly challenging benchmark designed to simulate PhD-level problem solving. According to xAI (2025) and Scientific American (2025), Grok 4 can effectively analyze, interpret, and reason through complex academic and scientific texts typically reserved for trained human researchers

Musk said, "The goal is to make responses 'snappier,' targeting roughly 250 ms round-trip latency",(Smythos, 2025, para 4.).

Questions have been raised regarding the fairness and credibility of Grok 4's benchmark outcomes. Some reports indicate that xAI may have collaborated with third-party vendors to tailor the model for optimized test performance, leading to debate over whether the results demonstrate true general intelligence or merely reflect targeted tuning for specific evaluations (Business Insider, 2025).

Nevertheless, Grok 4's emergence coincides with a broader pedagogical realignment, wherein human-machine collaboration is no longer hypothetical but central to future educational planning. As AI continues to shape digital learning ecosystems from MOOCs to intelligent tutoring systems, models like Grok 4 offer a glimpse into what post-digital higher education might look like: a domain where students, educators, and machines co-construct knowledge in dynamic and evolving ways.

The rollout of Grok 4 was overshadowed by serious controversies and questions about model alignment, bias, and reliability. Researchers from OpenAI and Anthropic accused xAI of launching Grok 4 "without any documentation of their safety testing," (Zeff, 2025, para.6), describing the new AI product as "reckless" and "completely irresponsible." (Wheeler, 2025, para.7).

According to official statements from both companies, Grok is created by xAI serves as a direct competitor to OpenAI's ChatGPT. While both are advanced conversational AI models designed to generate accurate responses, assist with tasks, and engage in natural, human-like dialogue, they reflect distinct design philosophies. ChatGPT is built for versatility, supporting a wide range of applications in education, business, and everyday communication. In contrast, Grok is shaped by xAI's broader vision to explore the nature of intelligence and promote scientific discovery. It presents a more focused interpretation of humanity, aiming to deepen understanding rather than just replicate conversational patterns.

We genuinely hope that education, including students, educators, and the entire teaching and learning experience, does not become collateral damage in the fast-paced and often disorderly race among competing tech companies. It is essential that professional educational bodies oversee and assess emerging technologies to ensure their alignment with academic values and their suitability before being introduced into educational environments.

About the Author:

Prof. Dr. Khairi Al-Zubaidi holds an M.A. and Ph.D. from the U.S.A. He has worked and taught in Iraq, Spain, Oman, Jordan, Syria, Malaysia, and the United States. His research interests include applied linguistics, translation, cultural studies, and media literacy. He has presented and published widely. He is currently Adjunct, Faculty of Arts and Humanities/Lab. University of Marrakesh: Marrakesh, Morocco. ORCiD ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6329-3838

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