

Nordic AI Meet 2026

P1: AI, Society, Governance, Education & Working Life

11. Early Career Researcher Perceptions and Use of Generative AI for Academic Work: Results from a Survey at a Norwegian University

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Abstract: The use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) systems in higher education has dramatically increased as these systems continue to advance in capability and become more mainstream. There have been many recent studies focused on the AI acceptance and use of learners, teachers, professors, and researchers; however, there is less literature focused on researchers in the early stages of training and career (i.e., PhD candidates & postdoctoral researchers). Understanding the current relationship between early-career researchers (ECRs) and AI is important as it allows supervisors and institutions to effectively guide ECRs in appropriate use, strategize how to promote and protect key disciplinary knowledge and skills, and craft better policies that promote innovative use while setting clear expectations and guardrails for young researchers. This study utilized survey methodology to investigate: (1) How is AI being used by ECRs at a Norwegian university? (2) What feelings do they report associated with AI use? (3) What are their perceived excitements and concerns about AI use in research? (4) Do differences exist between age groups and/or career stages? The data collection window was open from November 2025 until March 2026. Multiple avenues of recruitment were taken targeting PhD candidates and postdoctoral researchers across faculties. The final sample included 20 completed surveys with seven PhD candidates (35%) and 13 postdocs (65%) participating, with a fairly even split of each category between age groups. Eleven participants (55%) were under 35 and nine participants (45%) 35 or older. Due to sample size restrictions, findings detail quantitative descriptive findings and basic group comparisons by age and career stage. Thematic coding was utilized for open-ended responses on perceived concerns, benefits, and emotional responses to use. Preliminary results indicate that participants utilized generative AI more at work (50%) than in their personal lives (75%), but that most are not utilizing it collaboratively (80%). The most common uses for generative AI in research included proofing writing (55%), brainstorming ideas (45%), and debugging code (45%). Only 25% of respondents reported feeling pressure to use generative AI in their academic work but 60% reported being worried that AI use might undermine their academic integrity. Surprisingly, only 55% reported feeling accountable for the AI outputs they use in their work. A practical (but not statistically) significant difference ($p=0.10$, $r=0.36$) was found in confidence levels with those under 35 reporting less confidence in their use of AI in their work than participants 35 and older. Additional results, including the qualitative thematic results, will be reported upon acceptance. This work is co-funded by the European Union, GA#101126560; University of Bergen research and training program for future AI leaders across the disciplines, LEAD AI.