

Social Representations of AI in Algerian Higher Education: Between Fascination, Critical Vigilance, and Pedagogical Challenges

التمثيلات الاجتماعية للذكاء الاصطناعي في التعليم العالي الجزائري: بين الانبهار واليقظة النقدية والتحديات

البيداغوجية

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Abstract: In this article, we examine the social representations of artificial intelligence (AI) within the Algerian university context. Our aim is to analyze how both teachers and students construct their perceptions of this technology, which oscillate between fascination, curiosity, and critical vigilance. We situate our analysis within an academic framework that addresses the pedagogical, cultural, and societal dimensions of AI, while emphasizing the challenges it poses for higher education. This study seeks to contribute to the scientific debate on the integration of AI into Algerian universities and to propose avenues for fostering a critical, contextualized, and responsible appropriation of these technologies.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, Social representations, Higher education, Critical appropriation, Pedagogical challenge.

ملخص: نستقصي في هذا المقال التمثيلات الاجتماعية للذكاء الاصطناعي في سياق الجامعات الجزائرية. وتهدف دراستنا إلى تحليل الكيفية التي يصوغ بها الأساتذة والطلبة تصوراتهم تجاه هذه التقنية، متأرجحين بين الإعجاب والتساؤل واليقظة النقدية. ونؤطر هذا التأمل في منظور أكاديمي يتناول الأبعاد التربوية والثقافية والاجتماعية للذكاء الاصطناعي، مع تسليط الضوء على التحديات التي يطرحها على منظومة التعليم العالي. ومن خلال هذا العمل، نسعى إلى الإسهام في النقاش العلمي حول إدماج الذكاء الاصطناعي في الجامعات الجزائرية، واقتراح آليات لتعزيز تملك هذه التقنيات بشكل نقدي وسياقي ومسؤول.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الذكاء الاصطناعي، التمثيلات الاجتماعية، التعليم العالي، التملك النقدي، التحديات التربوية.

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1. Introduction

The advent of generative artificial intelligence (AI) systems represents a major transformation in our relationship with language and knowledge in the digital age. Tools such as ChatGPT or Gemini are proliferating at an unprecedented pace, offering new capacities for text generation, reformulation, and synthesis. As researchers in language sciences and didactics, we are directly confronted with this evolution, which reshapes not only access to information but also teaching and learning practices.

In the educational field, the promises of AI are considerable. It is often presented as a

lever for individualized learning, automated assessment, or even the dynamic adaptation of pedagogical pathways. However, these potential benefits are accompanied by legitimate concerns: the questionable reliability of certain outputs, the risk of cognitive dependence, and ethical challenges related to transparency and data protection. This paradox -between pedagogical opportunities and ethical concerns- runs through contemporary debates on AI in education.

In the Algerian context, this tension takes on a particular form. On the one hand, we observe a progressive adoption of generative tools by students, who perceive them as valuable aids in their academic activities (Sebbah, 2025, p.11). On the other hand, many teachers express reservations, fearing a weakening of critical thinking, a decline in creativity, or increased dependence on technology (Haddadi & Zidane, 2024; Achili & Zerrouki, 2024). The Algerian university context thus represents an ideal space for observing social representations of AI, situated between technological fascination and critical vigilance.

It is precisely this duality that grounds our central research question: to what extent do the social representations of artificial intelligence among Algerian teachers and students reflect a tension between attraction to its didactic potential and mistrust arising from its ethical and pedagogical risks? We address this question using an empirical approach that combines quantitative survey data and qualitative analysis, thereby bringing general trends into dialogue with individual discourses.

Within this perspective, we formulate three main hypotheses: First, we hypothesize that Algerian students perceive artificial intelligence primarily as a promising didactic resource, associating it with benefits such as learning support, facilitation of academic writing, and rapid access to information. Second, we assume that teachers develop representations marked more strongly by caution, due to the risks they identify on the pedagogical level (weakening of critical thinking, cognitive dependence) and the ethical level (plagiarism, algorithmic opacity, unregulated use). Finally, we posit that these contrasting representations do not exclude one another but coexist, generating an ambivalent social discourse that combines confidence in AI's potential with vigilance regarding its possible risks.

These hypotheses resonate with several previous studies. Holmes & Tuomi (2022) emphasize both the potential of AI to personalize learning and the need for ethical regulation. Kasneci *et al.* (2023, p.74) show that teachers often perceive generative tools as opportunities while fearing a loss of creativity and pedagogical control. At the international level, several surveys confirm this ambivalence (Roll & Wylie, 2016; Zawacki-Richter *et al.*, 2019). In Algeria, recent studies highlight similar dynamics: while students demonstrate enthusiasm for the use of ChatGPT and other AI tools (Sebbah, 2025), teachers show a more cautious stance, emphasizing challenges of pedagogy, ethics, and institutional adaptation (Haddadi & Zidane, 2024; Achili & Zerrouki, 2024; Abderrahmane & Mebitil, 2025). These findings confirm the relevance of investigating social representations in the Algerian higher education context.

Thus, our objective is twofold: to analyze, in a nuanced manner, the imaginaries and discourses surrounding AI in Algerian higher education, and to propose pathways for a responsible and contextualized integration of these tools into pedagogical practices. To this end, we first present the theoretical framework, mobilizing the concepts of social representations and didactic ecology, followed by the adopted methodology, then the results and discussion. Finally, we conclude by opening perspectives for further research and pedagogical action.

2.Theoretical Framework

2.1. Social Representations: A Conceptual and Operational Framework

The notion of social representations is one of the pillars of our approach. Introduced by Moscovici (1961) and further developed by Jodelet (1989), it refers to the set of knowledge, beliefs, images, and attitudes that a social group elaborates and shares regarding a given object. Far from being mere individual opinions, social representations play a central role in the construction of meaning and in the orientation of collective behaviors.

According to Abric (1994, p.24), social representations fulfill three main functions. First, they enable the interpretation of reality by providing cognitive frameworks that help individuals understand and organize what is new or complex. Second, they guide behaviors by shaping the attitudes and practices adopted by social groups toward a given object. Finally, they justify practices by retrospectively legitimizing choices, decisions, and actions undertaken. These three dimensions make social representations a dynamic system that links knowledge, attitudes, and practices.

We also consider that social representations mediate between scientific knowledge and everyday experience. In this sense, they constitute a relevant conceptual tool for analyzing the appropriation -or rejection- of AI within the Algerian university context. Teachers and students do not position themselves solely in relation to institutional or media discourses; they reinterpret these discourses through their own practices, expectations, and pedagogical values.

Finally, from a perspective applied to the language sciences, social representations are particularly useful for examining how actors engage with the language of AI, whether in terms of lexical trust (for example, the reliability of a machine-generated translation), enunciative stance (the legitimization or devaluation of automated outputs), or overall social discourse (enthusiasm, vigilance, rejection). We therefore consider the concept of social representations an operational lens for understanding the contradictory dynamics that traverse Algerian universities in the face of the rise of generative tools.

2.2. Artificial intelligence in Education: Uses, Debates, and Perceptions

The integration of artificial intelligence into the educational domain opens a wide range of applications that are progressively transforming teaching and learning practices. Among the most widespread applications are pedagogical simulation (enabling interactive and personalized learning environments), automated correction (used for language exercises and formative assessment); assisted translation (particularly relevant in multilingual contexts), and content generation (facilitating the production of instructional materials tailored to learners' needs) (Zawacki-Richter *et al.*, 2019; UNESCO, 2023). These uses,

already observable in several universities, highlight the potential of AI as a lever for didactic innovation.

However, the adoption of these technologies also raises debates, often polarized between enthusiasm and concern. On the one hand, AI is perceived as a driver of educational innovation, fostering personalized learning and optimizing teaching practices. On the other hand, it is viewed as a potential threat, due to risks of knowledge standardization, cognitive dependence, and the weakening of students' critical thinking. Several authors underline the danger of substituting human mediation with technical devices, which may undermine creativity and reduce pedagogical interaction to a purely instrumental logic (Holmes & Tuomi, 2022; Kasneci *et al.*, 2023). These tensions echo broader societal debates on automation and the place of the human regarding the machine.

At the international level, previous studies on perceptions of AI in education confirm this ambivalence. Several surveys show that teachers welcome the opportunities offered by AI while simultaneously expressing doubts about its relevance and ethical regulation (Roll & Wylie, 2016). In the Maghreb, research remains limited, but emerging studies point to similar dynamics. In Algeria, recent works reveal a marked contrast: students readily adopt ChatGPT and other AI tools as academic support (Sebbah, 2025, p.18), whereas teachers demonstrate heightened vigilance, particularly in disciplines where critical thinking and creativity are essential (Haddadi & Zidane, 2024; Lamjad & Bouhella, 2024; Boulahrouf, 2024; Abderrahmane & Mebitil, 2025). These findings indicate that local perceptions are part of a global trend, but they must be analyzed in light of the sociolinguistic and institutional specificities of the Algerian context.

In sum, artificial intelligence in education stands at the crossroads of two dynamics: a promise of pedagogical innovation and a source of ethical and didactic concerns. To understand how these dynamics are articulated within the Algerian university context, it is necessary to conduct a fine-grained analysis of the social representations of the actors involved -a task to which we devote the present article.

3. Methodology

In order to address our research question and test the hypotheses, we adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative techniques. As Creswell (2014) emphasizes, this type of design allows us to draw on the strengths of both paradigms: quantitative methods provide representativeness and identify general, while qualitative methods offer interpretative depth and rich discourses (through the open-ended questionnaire items). This methodological choice is particularly well suited to capturing the complexity of social representations of artificial intelligence in the university context.

The target population of this study comprised university teachers and students enrolled in different fields: language sciences (French department), social sciences, and technical sciences. These three disciplinary areas are particularly relevant, as they offer differentiated perspectives on AI: an epistemological perspective for language sciences, a societal perspective for social sciences, and a technological perspective for technical sciences. Our sample included 50 teachers and 100 students from three Algerian universities -Laghouat, Sétif, and Batna- selected on the basis of voluntary participation. Although modest, this

sample size ensures a balance between statistical representativeness and the feasibility of qualitative analysis.

For data collection, we used a questionnaire¹ administered both online and in person, combining closed-ended items (using a Likert scale, 1932) with open-ended questions, in order to gather information on general perceptions, concrete uses, and concerns related to artificial intelligence .

Data analysis proceeded in two stages. Responses to the closed-ended items were subjected to descriptive statistical analysis (frequencies, percentages, simple cross-tabulations), which allowed us to identify dominant trends and significant variations between groups. Responses to the open-ended questions, meanwhile, were examined through thematic content analysis (Bardin, 2013, p.65), structured around emergent categories such as technological fascination, ethical mistrust, pragmatic use, and critical vigilance. This dual approach thus provides both a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of social representations of AI within the Algerian university context.

4. Results

The results presented below stem from the analysis of the questionnaires, which enabled the collection of both numerical data and qualitative discourses through the respondents' open-ended answers.

4.1. Positive Perceptions (Fascination)

Category	Group	Percentage (%)
Positive perceptions (fascination)	All respondents (N=150)	72
Neutral perceptions	All respondents (N=150)	14
Negative perceptions (skepticism)	All respondents (N=150)	14
Use of generative tools (ChatGPT, etc.)	Students	80
AI as a complementary pedagogical aid	Teachers	68
AI perceived as a time-saving/efficient tool	Students	74

Table 1. Distribution of AI Perceptions among Respondents

The results of our survey show that artificial intelligence generates significant interest and is generally perceived favorably by a large proportion of participants. Among the 150 respondents, 72% reported perceiving AI as a promising innovation for teaching and learning, while only 14% expressed a neutral opinion and another 14% expressed skepticism. This trend is particularly noticeable among students, nearly 80% of whom

¹ The questionnaire was administered in three languages -English, French, and Arabic- in alignment with the linguistic preferences of the respondents.

indicated that they already use generative tools (ChatGPT, automatic translators, intelligent proofreaders) to support their academic tasks.

The enthusiasm observed is primarily expressed as cognitive curiosity: several respondents mentioned in the open-ended responses their willingness to ‘test,’ ‘experiment with,’ or ‘explore’ the possibilities offered by these new tools. For example, a student in the social sciences wrote: ‘AI is like a laboratory at my fingertips; it allows me to learn faster and try out new methods of working.’

AI is also widely perceived as a valuable aid to teaching and learning. Sixty-eight percent of teachers surveyed believe that these technologies can play a complementary role in language correction, in simplifying complex concepts and in diversifying teaching materials. As one language sciences teacher explained in an open-ended response: ‘AI helps me quickly generate examples for my classes, which saves me preparation time and allows me to adapt my materials to different student profiles.’

Finally, respondents emphasized dimensions of efficiency, speed, and innovation. For 74% of students, AI is synonymous with time savings and easier access to information. As one technical sciences student noted in an open-ended response: ‘Instead of spending hours looking for resources, I can ask AI directly and get a clear answer, which I then complement with my own research.’ This view echoes the comments from several teachers, who regard AI as a form of ‘logistical support’ that enables them to focus more on the creative and critical aspects of their profession.

These findings therefore highlight a widely shared fascination with AI in the Algerian university context, articulated around curiosity, pedagogical usefulness, and perceived efficiency. However, fascination does not exclude tensions and reservations, which we address in the next section devoted to critical perceptions.

4.2. Expressed Concerns

Concern	Teachers (%)	Students (%)
Loss of critical thinking and creativity	65	38
Excessive dependence on AI tools	—	54
Ethical issues: plagiarism	58	—
Ethical issues: reliability of generated content	47	—
Ethical issues: knowledge standardization	42	—
Substitution of teachers	28	—

Table 2. Distribution of Concerns Regarding AI among Teachers and Students

While the majority of participants expressed curiosity and enthusiasm toward artificial intelligence, our survey also revealed significant concerns that nuance the discourse of fascination. 65% of teachers and 38% of students reported fearing that intensive use of AI may lead to a loss of critical thinking and a reduction in creativity. As one language sciences teacher wrote in an open-ended response: ‘AI can provide correct answers, but if students simply copy them, they no longer develop their own reasoning.’

Another major concern relates to excessive dependence on technological tools. Fifty-four percent of students surveyed admitted that they might ‘struggle to do without’ AI for tasks such as writing or information retrieval. One student noted: ‘When I don’t have access to AI, I feel like I’m wasting time, as if I’ve lost my bearings.’

Ethical issues also occupy a central place among the concerns expressed. Fifty-eight percent of teachers pointed to the risk of plagiarism facilitated by generative tools, while 47% questioned the reliability of AI-produced content, which can sometimes contain factual errors or inaccuracies. In addition, several respondents (42%) feared a standardization of academic output, which could erase local cultural and linguistic specificities.

Finally, distrust regarding a potential substitution of the teacher is present. As one social sciences instructor put it: ‘We are told that AI will not replace humans, but if it corrects, translates, and explains, then what will our role be?’ This concern reflects a fear of professional devaluation, although it remains a minority position (explicitly mentioned by about 28% of the teachers).

4.3. Variations in AI Perceptions by Profile

Profiles	Favorable (%)
Students	72
Teachers	46
Technical sciences	82
Humanities and Social sciences	56
Teachers < 40 years old	62
Teachers > 50 years old	31

Table 3. Distribution of Favorable Perceptions of AI across Different Profiles

Statistical and qualitative analysis also reveals marked differences according to participant profiles. First, a clear divergence emerges between teachers and students: while 72% of students report being generally favorable toward AI integration, only 46% of teachers share this view, with the majority emphasizing risks rather than benefits.

Second, disciplinary background influences perceptions. “Students in technical sciences display significantly more positive perceptions (82% favorable), whereas those in humanities and social sciences (56% favorable) appear more divided in their evaluations, placing greater emphasis on ethical issues and potential threats to critical thinking.

Finally, age and professional experience play a decisive role. Among teachers surveyed, 62% of those under 40 perceive AI as a pedagogical support tool, whereas among those over 50, this figure drops to 31%, with most expressing concerns about the dehumanization of teaching. As one senior teacher noted in an open-ended response: ‘We learned to teach through direct interaction with students; I fear these tools may blur that connection.’

These differences underscore that social representations of AI are not homogeneous: they are constructed at the intersection of generational, disciplinary, and institutional variables, confirming the importance of a contextualized approach to analysis.

4.4. Cultural and Linguistic Diversity

Response	Teachers	Students
Yes	25 %	40 %
No	45 %	20 %
Partially	30 %	40 %

Table 4. Perceptions of AI in Relation to Cultural and Linguistic Diversity (%)

The analysis of responses concerning whether AI tools consider cultural and linguistic diversity reveals a contrast between teachers and students. A significant proportion of students (40%) view AI as potentially contributing to the valorization of local languages, whereas teachers are more reserved (25%). Teachers are proportionally more likely to state that AI does not take into account Algeria's cultural and linguistic plurality (45% vs 20% of students). Finally, a substantial proportion of both groups (30% of teachers and 40% of students) chose the intermediate option ('partially'), reflecting nuance and uncertainty.

In open-ended responses, some students emphasized opportunities offered by AI for multilingual learning and cultural openness, while several teachers highlighted risks of marginalizing local languages and standardizing knowledge.

These results confirm that linguistic diversity is a sensitive issue in integrating AI within the Algerian university context. While students appear more inclined to consider its positive uses, teachers place greater emphasis on risks to cultural and linguistic specificities.

5. Discussion

The analysis shows that social representations of AI in the Algerian university context are complex and ambivalent, oscillating between fascination and critical vigilance. This duality appears in both the quantitative data (closed-ended questions) and qualitative insights (open-ended responses).

5.1. Fascination and Appropriation

A large majority of students (72–80%) and those in technical disciplines (82%) perceive AI positively. Open-ended responses enrich this finding by highlighting motivations and uses: cognitive curiosity, experimentation, and time-saving benefits. Several participants noted that AI facilitates course preparation, information retrieval, and task organization.

These results align with international studies (Holmes & Tuomi, 2022; Kasneci *et al.*, 2023), which presents AI as a lever for pedagogical innovation and easier access to information. In Algeria, appropriation varies by discipline: technical sciences adopt these tools more readily, whereas social and humanities sciences remain cautious.

5.2. Concerns and Critical Vigilance

Alongside enthusiasm, participants expressed concerns. Data reveal worries about loss of critical thinking, tool dependence, ethical issues, and fear of teacher substitution. Open-

ended responses show some teachers warning against standardization and loss of creativity, while students point to potential dependence.

This vigilance must be understood in a specific institutional and cultural context. University education emphasizes critical thinking, and Algeria's cultural and linguistic plurality requires careful use of generative technologies. Even amid fascination, nuanced or negative perceptions remain influential.

5.3. Generational, Disciplinary, and Institutional Differences

Perceptions vary with age, discipline, and status. Senior teachers are less favorable toward AI (31%) and raise concerns about dehumanization, while younger teachers and students stress efficiency and pragmatic use. Technical disciplines adopt AI more easily, whereas humanities and social sciences focus on ethical and pedagogical issues.

Open-ended responses explain these differences: some teachers fear AI may blur pedagogical relationships, while younger respondents value time-saving benefits and emphasize analysis and creativity. Social representations of AI are thus heterogeneous, shaped by experience, discipline, and institutional context.

5.4. Cultural and Linguistic Diversity

Cultural and linguistic diversity is a transversal issue in AI integration. Students are more likely to see AI as supporting local languages (40%), whereas teachers are more reserved (25% favorable, 45% unfavorable). Open-ended responses illustrate this ambivalence: students highlight opportunities for multilingual learning and cultural openness, while teachers warn of uniformization and loss of cultural specificity.

These findings suggest that successful AI integration depends not only on technical adoption but also on sensitivity to cultural and linguistic issues, which are central in the Algerian university context.

6. Synthesis and Implications

Integrating quantitative and qualitative data from the questionnaire reveals that AI represents both an opportunity and a challenge for higher education in Algeria. Students adopt AI with enthusiasm and curiosity, while teachers -particularly more experienced ones- express reservations grounded in pedagogical and ethical concerns. Open-ended responses contextualize these perceptions, illustrate actual behaviors, and nuance the raw figures.

These findings have implications for university training: it is essential to develop frameworks that integrate AI as a complementary tool while strengthening ethical awareness, creativity, and intellectual autonomy. A contextualized and critical approach is needed to ensure that AI serves education and promotes cultural and linguistic diversity, rather than standardizing it.

Conclusion

Through this study, we have highlighted the complexity of social representations of artificial intelligence in Algerian higher education. Two major dynamics emerge: technological fascination, driven by the promises of speed, efficiency, and innovation, and critical vigilance, motivated by pedagogical, ethical, and sociocultural concerns. Our findings show that students view AI as a valuable didactic support, whereas teachers express

stronger reservations, particularly regarding creativity, plagiarism, and cognitive dependence. These contrasts, amplified by age, professional experience, and disciplinary background, underscore the need for a contextualized approach that takes into account both enthusiasm and caution.

In a context marked by multilingualism and uneven digital infrastructures, AI cannot be reduced to a mere technical tool; it also constitutes a social and cultural object that reshapes educational practices and challenges academic responsibilities. By confirming international analyses while highlighting local specificities, our study invites a rethinking of university training so as to integrate AI education that goes beyond technical mastery, fostering ethical awareness, intellectual autonomy, and sensitivity to cultural and linguistic diversity.

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Appendix: Research Questionnaire

Part 1: General Information

1. Age: ☐ Under 25 ☐ 25–39 ☐ 40–49 ☐ 50 and above
2. Gender: ☐ Female ☐ Male
3. Status: ☐ Student ☐ Teacher
4. Field of study: ☐ Language Sciences ☐ Social Sciences
☐ Technical Sciences
5. University: ☐ Laghouat ☐ Sétif ☐ Batna

Part 2: General Perceptions of AI

6. Overall, how would you assess your perception of AI?

☐ Very positive ☐ Rather positive ☐ Neutral ☐ Rather negative ☐ Very negative

7. AI arouses curiosity and enthusiasm in me.

☐ Strongly agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree

8. AI is a useful tool in teaching/learning (e.g., correction, translation, content generation).

☐ Strongly agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree

Part 3: Concerns Related to AI

9. I am afraid that AI may lead to a loss of critical thinking.

☐ Strongly agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree

10. I am afraid that AI may reduce students' and teachers' creativity.

☐ Strongly agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree

11. Regular use of AI may create excessive dependence.

☐ Strongly agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree

12. I have concerns about:

Plagiarism facilitated by AI: ☐ Yes ☐ No

Reliability of generated content: ☐ Yes ☐ No

Standardization of knowledge: ☐ Yes ☐ No

Substitution of the teacher's role: ☐ Yes ☐ No

Part 4: Concrete Uses of AI

13. Do you regularly use AI tools (ChatGPT, translators, automated proofreaders)?

☐ Yes, very often ☐ Yes, sometimes ☐ Rarely ☐ Never

14. For which activities do you use AI? (multiple answers possible)

☐ Assistance in academic writing ☐ Linguistic correction

☐ Translation ☐ Information search ☐ Generation of teaching materials ☐ Others (specify):

Part 5: Cultural and Linguistic Diversity

15. Do you think AI sufficiently takes into account Algerian cultural and linguistic diversity?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Partially

16. In your opinion, what risks might AI pose for the preservation of cultural and linguistic richness?

→ Open response

Part 6: Open-Ended Questions (Qualitative)

17. In your opinion, what are the main advantages of AI for teaching and learning?

→ Open response

18. What are your major concerns regarding the integration of AI in universities?

→ Open response

19. What would you recommend to ensure a responsible use of AI in Algerian higher education?

→ Open response