Book Review of S. Popenici, J. Rudolph, F. Ismail, & S. Tan (Eds., 2026). The Handbook of Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education. Edward Elgar.

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Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has undoubtedly had a transformative effect on many aspects of society, including in higher education (HE), and I therefore looked forward to the opportunity to read and comment on the book which is the subject of this brief review. The Handbook of Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education, edited by Stefan Popenici, Jürgen Rudolph, Fadhil Ismail and Shannon Tan, is perhaps best described as a 'tome'. The editors have managed to compile a comprehensive discussion of AI in higher education settings, examining intersecting currents in the form of six key areas – conceptual perspectives on AI in HE, critical AI literacy, issues pertaining to teaching, learning and assessment, issues pertaining to work and employability, and discipline and country-specific studies of AI in HE. The book spans across 39 chapters, with contributions from 79 authors working in HE settings across the world – Asia-Pacific, Europe, the United Kingdom, and North America. In this sense, the collection is not only thematic, aiming to appraise some of the major issues surrounding the adoption and implementation of AI in HE, but also international, contextualised, and nuanced in scope and orientation. This latter aspect of the book must be especially praised, as it foregrounds the experiences of academics from a variety of national or cultural backgrounds engaged in the very challenging task of integrating the technology into their professional circumstances. The fact that many of these circumstances have been and continue to be subjected to a range of social, economic, and/or political pressures makes the book's contributions all the more remarkable.

Accordingly, it must be noted that the expertise which underpins the book's contributions is significant. The editors themselves all have considerable expertise in the field, with some having published extensively on the subject in focus and all being involved in the Journal of Applied Learning and Teaching – which has and continues to publish extensively on the same. In the introductory chapter (p. 3), the editors state the book aims to provide "evidence-based analysis, critical reflection, courageous introspection and intellectual incursions that are vital for a rethink of higher education at a time when the entire world is reconsidering foundational models, values and the kind of education we need for our new societies, for the new existential challenges and our immediate future".Additionally, the editors state the book aims to provide readers with the "knowledge and strategies to critically engage with AI's transformative possibilities while confronting the risks it carries", and to "fill a vital gap in the literature by providing rigorous guidance, incisive analysis and thought-provoking critique on the ethical and social consequences of AI adoption in higher education". By and large, my view is that these aims are comprehensively attained, although I do tend to feel there is some room for 'critique' to be explored and sharpened – I return to this latter point towards the end of the review. The following section provides a review of all the main parts of the text, except the part on critical AI literacy, which I particularly highlight in the concluding section.
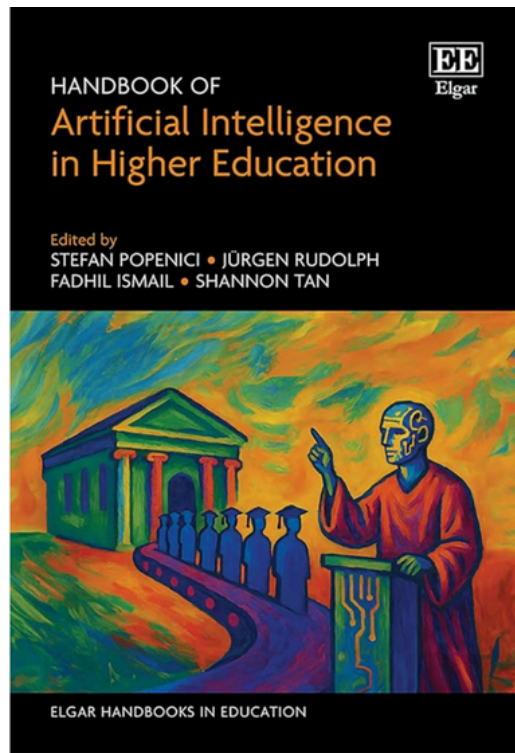
Figure 1: The book cover of *Handbook of Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education.*

Review of the Handbook

Following the introductory chapter, Part 1 of the book is entitled "AI and Higher Education: The Big Picture". This draws together eight chapters that, in one way or another, provide the reader with broader frameworks for appreciating and navigating the impact of AI on HE. In the leading contribution of the book, Waring, for instance, discusses three different scenarios pertaining to how AI may be situated within the university of the future. This discussion is prefaced by an 'imaginary', or fictional story, that illustrates how AI may shape the future practice of HE in the form of networked interactions between human and non-human actors (the latter taking the form of AI systems). Waring's interrogation and analysis of the three different scenarios ultimately settle on what he refers to as the 'AI Embrace' scenario, wherein he anticipates that core activities in HE settings will be more extensively transformed by the technology, in part due to the pressure of needing to conform to market and sector-wide demands. Another notable chapter in this part of the book is by Luckin and Bagshaw, who outline a practical strategy for implementing AI in HE settings. This strategy, which the authors term 'The 4 Quadrant Framework', is detailed and appears to be informed by classical ideas in strategic planning and change management (e.g., Kotter's model). The inclusion of a stage in the framework that identifies AI use cases is especially interesting, as it highlights the potential for the framework to be flexibly applied across different settings in line with operational goals and needs.

Part 3 of the book includes nine chapters that focus on the impact of AI on teaching, learning and assessment – matters that are the 'bread and butter' of many academics and that have been subjected to considerable pressures by the impact of AI in HE. Topics covered in this part of the book include the pedagogical implications of AI in the "digital age", practical applications of AI in the classroom to enhance teaching and learning, and ethical and technological considerations for the use of AI in HE. Here, two chapters stood out. First, the chapter by Sullivan was interesting because it examines how our traditional understandings of academic misconduct, along with institutional policies and procedures in this area, are being transformed by learners' misuse of AI. Second, the chapter by Hassoulas valuably discusses how the critical matter of assessment is being transformed by AI. HE settings across the world, including my own, have indeed been forced to adapt to a 'moving target', given the rapid acceleration of the technology and wider uptake among the general population of learners. Hassoulas explores a r-

-ange of issues, including the opportunities and challenges associated with integrating AI into different modes of assessment. One particular theme that emerged from my reading of this part was the issue of academic work intensification wrought by the transformations imposed by AI. One does wish it had been explored more by contributors, especially as this issue is at odds with how the technology is often positioned by its advocates as being 'facilitative' or 'enabling'.

Part 4 of the book is relatively shorter compared to the others, comprising just four chapters, but explores the broader and important issue of how AI can shape employability outcomes of HE learners. In this part of the book, Bearman et al.'s chapter was especially interesting as one of the few empirical contributions. These authors report on a study which utilised survey data to understand how Australian professionals working in healthcare, education, and legal settings. Findings from this study were intriguing, with the authors describing similarities and differences across participant accounts from the different contexts. In particular, the authors draw attention to how broader discourses around AI, such as those perpetuated by governments and businesses, do not necessarily align with how people understand and use it. This, in turn, draws attention to the need for more fine-grained understandings of how people in a range of settings understand the technology as they use it in their respective work functions. Another chapter in this part, by Adarkwah, was notable for focusing on adult learners. Here, the key pillars for empowering adult learners to utilise AI are briefly discussed, with a focus on overcoming fear and resistance to the technology.

Part 6 presents discipline and country-specific contributions that discuss the use of AI in specific topical areas of geographical regions. As an academic specialising in leadership and management teaching and research, I was naturally interested to read the contribution by Noor and colleagues. This chapter provides overviews of how the authors have responded to AI in their respective disciplinary areas of marketing, business law, economics, and human resource management (HRM), along with a research agenda on the impact of AI on higher education for these topics. Utilising an autoethnographic approach, the authors describe how AI has been integrated into classroom teaching and learners' skill development, modes of assessment to develop students' critical thinking skills, and the creation of lesson content. The section on HRM was especially interesting to read, as the authors discuss how the teaching of AI in HRM subjects "should not only encompass technical skills related to managing AI but also emphasise the preservation of empathy, ethical values, and an understanding of the diverse human elements that characterise HR processes" (p. 509). Other chapters in this final part of the book explore the topic of teacher education or focus on the national contexts of China, Hong Kong, Japan, and Turkey.

Concluding thoughts

Overall, Part 2 of the book, which deals with critical AI literacy, stood out to me as the most compelling section, due to its focus on the social, economic, and political dimensions of the technology's use in HE settings. For instance, I found the chapter by Rudolph to be especially notable, with its discussions of 'hidden labour' and how corporate interests and 'big tech' have undergirded the development and diffusion of AI on a global scale. This discussion reminds us that the technology is not 'inevitable' as some corporate and political actors or institutions would have us believe, and that discursive formations premised on such inevitability can over-ascribe agency to the technology in ways that undermine our own as human actors (see Bareis & Katzenbach, 2022, for a discussion of this in relation to national AI strategies). This matter is also discussed in the book by Weber and Heidelmann (Chapter 18), who provide a Foucauldian analysis of discursive formations identifiable through national AI strategies across the United States, the European Union, and China. What emerges from this analysis is an interplay of market- and state-driven forces that shape HE governance and policies regarding AI. In another contribution in this part of the book, Ismail highlights an issue that has been discussed in scholarly circles – namely, the bias that can underpin AI algorithms. He discusses how this bias can be further perpetuated in higher education settings by AI, thereby reinforcing asymmetrical power relations and inequalities in a sector that is already rife with such issues.

Accordingly, Part 2 of the book especially emphasised for me the value of sociological analyses of the subject matter, although I was also left feeling that critique in the collection could potentially have been deepened. For instance, one theme that could have been explored more concerns the possibilities for exercising resistance against the technology in HE settings and the implications of this. Waring, in his contribution, touches on this in relation to the 'AI Avoidance' scenario, wherein some universities may attempt to distinguish themselves from others through

the principled refusal to adopt or support the technology. As highlighted previously, his overall thesis centres on the likelihood of institutions embracing the technology instead, in part due to competitive pressures in the sector. Beyond this book, some high-profile management researchers have taken a stance against AI and encouraged others to do the same, for instance, due to its failings, its capacity to transform our relationship with knowledge in detrimental ways, and the threat it poses to academic jobs (Lindebaum, 2023; Lindebaum & Fleming, 2024). In relation to education more broadly, some have highlighted the need to 'push back' against the technology or rethink how it can be used in more equitable ways, especially given critiques of AI posed by traditionally disadvantaged groups of individuals (Selwyn, 2024). Such perspectives – along with all that we already know concerning the issues with AI – raise questions concerning potentialities for how resistance against the technology may be enacted on a day-to-day basis by individuals and at an institutional level. These kinds of issues may have been touched on a little more within the book.

However, this foregoing observation should in no way detract from what is an accomplished collection of articles. The editors and contributors of The Handbook of Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education have done stellar work in compiling a book that addresses a myriad of themes in a considered manner. This book will no doubt be relevant to a wide range of HE stakeholders – from leaders and administrators to researchers and faculty, to graduate students and future academics, and to those working in Edtech. I anticipate it will warrant continued engagement and careful reading, and serve as an important reference for HE stakeholders as discussions on the impact of AI on HE settings continue to develop and evolve.

Additional references

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