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Artificial intelligence in MBA education: Perceptions, ethics, and readiness among Iranian graduates

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the perceptions of Iranian MBA graduates regarding the integration of AI into business education. Drawing on survey data from 379 alumni across a range of Iranian universities, the research assesses five core dimensions: perceived usefulness of AI, ethical concerns, faculty preparedness, job market implications, and interest in AI-focused coursework. The study also investigates whether demographic factors such as age, gender, income level, and marital status significantly influence these perceptions. Results indicate a generally favorable view of AI integration, with particularly strong support for incorporating AI coursework into MBA programs. Despite broad enthusiasm, respondents expressed concerns about data privacy, algorithmic bias, and the limited readiness of faculty to teach AI-related content. Inferential tests and path analysis reveal that demographic variables had little predictive power over AI perceptions or preferences, suggesting widespread acceptance across social strata. The findings underscore both the readiness of Iranian MBA graduates for AI-related curricular reform and the need for targeted institutional responses, including faculty development and ethical frameworks.

INTRODUCTION

The advent of artificial intelligence has signaled a new era in education, revolutionizing the ways in which knowledge is delivered, absorbed, and assessed. Within higher education, AI is no longer merely a speculative frontier—it has become an operational reality, actively reshaping pedagogy, administration, and student engagement across disciplines. It is also very important in business risk reduction. Business education, and particularly Master of Business Administration (MBA) programs, is uniquely positioned at the intersection of technological innovation and organizational leadership. This makes the domain especially sensitive to technological disruptions such as AI, which not only alter the content of management education but also challenge its foundational competencies, and instructional strategies. Ethical

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imperatives of using AI in different aspects of human life and work is also an important issue. Research has shown that even individuals with advanced education often lack adequate understanding of academic ethics, highlighting the urgent need for structured ethical training to support responsible conduct in increasingly complex technological and professional environments (Sabbar, Masoomifar, & Mohammadi, 2019).

AI technologies are now being deployed across business schools in various capacities, ranging from AI-driven tutoring systems and learning analytics to AI-powered simulations, chatbots, and virtual teaching assistants. These tools promise to enhance personalization, increase scalability, improve assessment fidelity, and better align curricula with labor market needs (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019). Moreover, the diffusion of AI into core business domains—such as marketing automation, financial modeling, strategic forecasting, and HR analytics—demands that business graduates not only understand AI conceptually but also apply it practically and ethically. As a result, the integration of AI into business management is increasingly viewed as both a pedagogical necessity and a strategic opportunity for educational institutions seeking to remain competitive in an evolving global market.

Despite this growing emphasis, there remains a dearth of empirical research on student and alumni perceptions of AI integration into business education—particularly in emerging economies. Much of the existing literature focuses on faculty readiness, administrative constraints, or infrastructural barriers (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Al-Emran et al., 2020), while student-centric studies tend to be limited to undergraduates or general education contexts. Graduate-level business students and alumni, who are more attuned to industry trends and job market realities, remain underexamined in the discourse on AI in education. Yet their perspectives are critical: these individuals are not only the primary beneficiaries of AI-enhanced education but also important stakeholders whose feedback can guide the design, adoption, and optimization of AI-related curricular reforms. Studies in other domains have shown how culturally embedded ideals—such as the pursuit of beauty—can shape personal decision-making and social behavior,

often reinforcing systemic pressures that influence well-being and institutional priorities (Nosraty et al., 2020).

In the context of Iran, this issue acquires additional urgency. Iranian universities, including those offering MBA programs, have encountered systemic challenges in recent years—ranging from bureaucratic inertia and resource constraints to international isolation and curricular stagnation. These limitations are compounded by critical gaps in technological infrastructure, which have significantly hindered digital transformation efforts in Iranian higher education, even at flagship institutions, revealing a lack of preparedness for scalable, equitable, and resilient implementation (Mohammadi & Kharazmi, 2021). While policymakers have increasingly recognized the importance of digital transformation in education, the implementation of AI-related innovation has often been fragmented, top-down, and lacking in stakeholder engagement. Scholars have highlighted how powerful technology firms shape the production of academic knowledge to legitimize their practices, influencing public discourse and policy development in ways that often marginalize ethical scrutiny and reduce space for critical stakeholder engagement (Sarfi et al., 2021). Given this backdrop, understanding how Iranian MBA graduates—individuals who have experienced the MBA program in its current form and have since entered the workforce—perceive the role of AI in business education is not only timely but essential. Studies have shown that digitally mediated environments—such as social media—can distort self-perception and increase anxiety, underscoring the need for critical awareness of how technology shapes users' mental well-being and social expectations (Zamani et al., 2021). Their insights can help bridge the gap between institutional ambition and pedagogical reality, ensuring that AI-driven innovation is responsive, relevant, and ethically grounded.

This study aims to fill that gap by systematically **examining Iranian MBA graduates' perceptions of AI** in business education. It focuses on five key perceptual domains: (1) the perceived usefulness of AI in enhancing MBA curriculum relevance and effectiveness, (2) ethical concerns related to AI use in education, such as data privacy, algorithmic bias, and surveillance, (3) perceptions of faculty

preparedness to teach and apply AI tools, (4) expectations regarding the impact of AI on employment opportunities and labor market competitiveness, and (5) interest in formal coursework or programmatic integration of AI-related content within the MBA curriculum. These perceptual dimensions are investigated in relation to four demographic variables: age, gender, financial status, and marital status, which are known in educational research to moderate views on technological adoption, risk management (see for example Soroori Sarabi et al., 2020), and educational expectations.

The study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional survey methodology, collecting data from a national sample of 379 MBA graduates across Iranian universities. In addition to descriptive analyses, the study employs inferential techniques—including ANOVA, chi-square tests, and t-tests—to assess differences in perceptions across demographic groups. Furthermore, a path analysis framework is utilized to model direct and indirect relationships among demographic and perceptual variables, offering a conceptual structure that approximates a structural equation model.

In doing so, this research makes several important contributions. First, it provides a rare empirical window into the views of MBA alumni from a non-Western context, enriching the global discourse on AI in education. Second, it highlights the extent to which demographic variables shape or fail to shape perceptions of technological integration, challenging assumptions of technological determinism or demographic homogeneity. Third, it offers practical insights for curriculum designers, educational policymakers, and university administrators in Iran and similar contexts, emphasizing the need for responsive, inclusive, and evidence-based AI integration strategies. Ultimately, the study calls for a more grounded understanding of AI as not merely a technological tool, but a socio-educational transformation that requires the participation and trust of all stakeholders—especially those who have experienced the system firsthand. Achieving such trust depends not only on stakeholder inclusion but also on institutional structures that protect civil liberties and reinforce public oversight—conditions shown to cultivate credibility and reinforce the legitimacy of professional systems (Kodabakhshi, Salehi, & Dehshiri, 2021).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The lecture notes authored by John Sum (2020) provide an introductory overview of intelligent technology (iTech) tailored for a Fall semester MBA course in Intelligent Technology Management at National Chung Hsing University. The material systematically defines intelligent technology as either (I) technology inspired by human cognition and problem-solving methods, such as fuzzy logic and neural networks, or (II) systems that replicate tasks traditionally performed by humans, such as autonomous driving or machine translation. The course explores foundational and applied aspects of intelligent technology, including machine learning algorithms, cost functions, and real-world applications in speech recognition, language processing, and object detection. A distinction is made between "smart" systems, such as smart homes or cities, and truly intelligent technologies, clarifying conceptual overlaps and differences. Emphasis is placed on the technological infrastructure underpinning intelligent systems, particularly the critical role of graphical processing units (GPUs) in enabling the computational demands of deep learning. Cloud-based AI services from leading tech firms (e.g., IBM, Amazon, Microsoft, Google) are presented as key components of the broader intelligence infrastructure. The course also includes content on AI-related legal, ethical, and workforce implications, and it integrates practical assessment through written assignments, reading reflections, and group projects analyzing intelligent products or services. The lecture series reflects a strong emphasis on understanding not only the technical mechanics of iTech but also its management and implementation in real-world business contexts.

Chen, Chen, and Lin (2020) conducted a qualitative literature review to examine the transformative role of artificial intelligence (AI) in educational contexts, focusing on its applications in administration, instruction, and learning. Anchored in a conceptual framework derived from preliminary analysis, the study explored how AI technologies—ranging from early computer-based tools to contemporary web-based systems and humanoid robots—have evolved to support educational practices. The authors highlighted AI's capacity to replicate human-like cognitive functions such as learning, adaptability, and decision-making, which have facilitated its integration into various educational domains. Specifically, the review

identified how AI tools have enabled more efficient administrative tasks, such as automated grading and performance tracking, thereby allowing educators to concentrate on pedagogical quality. In instructional contexts, AI-driven systems have been utilized to personalize learning experiences, adapting curricula and content to meet individual student needs, which in turn enhanced student engagement and learning outcomes. The study emphasized the dual benefits of AI in improving operational efficiency and enriching the educational experience through personalization. Ultimately, the authors concluded that AI has significantly influenced educational practices and continues to reshape the teaching and learning landscape through intelligent systems capable of autonomous or semi-autonomous instructional functions.

Makda et al. (2021) investigated the perceptions and implications of AI in the healthcare industry, with a specific focus on the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The study aimed to assess whether AI could assist or potentially replace medical professionals, examining both its benefits and limitations. Drawing on both secondary literature and a primary survey of 50 practicing doctors across various specialties—including radiology, dentistry, and general practice—the authors analyzed the current state of AI implementation in clinical settings.

The survey revealed that while AI use was relatively limited (only 36% of respondents used AI in their workplace), attitudes toward AI were largely positive. Notably, 86% of the respondents believed **AI could help reduce doctors' workload, and 78%** indicated willingness to use AI-based tools in their practice. Radiologists showed the highest engagement with AI, reflecting its maturity in image-based diagnostics. However, concerns persisted: 84% of doctors felt AI lacked the flexibility needed to address individual patient variability, and a majority (86%) did not believe AI could replace physicians, citing the irreplaceable psychological and interpersonal dimensions of patient care. The study concluded that AI is best positioned as a supportive tool rather than a replacement for healthcare professionals. It emphasized the importance of training, ethical considerations, and the need for context-specific AI solutions tailored to different medical specializations. Limitations included the relatively small sample size and potential selection bias. Overall, the findings offer nuanced insights into how AI is shaping, and is expected to shape, the future of healthcare delivery in the UAE.

Raisch and Krakowski (2021) investigated the interplay between automation and augmentation in the context of artificial intelligence within organizational management, using insights from three contemporary business books as a conceptual springboard. They distinguished automation as the replacement of human labor by machines, and augmentation as collaborative human-machine interaction aimed at enhancing performance. While the books examined largely advocated for augmentation due to its perceived benefits, the authors adopted a paradox theory framework to challenge the notion that these two pathways are mutually exclusive. They argued that automation and augmentation are intrinsically interdependent and can co-occur across various organizational contexts and timeframes, producing a paradoxical tension. This tension, if unresolved, may lead to reinforcing cycles that yield adverse outcomes for both organizations and society, such as technological overreliance or worker displacement. However, Raisch and Krakowski proposed that embracing this paradox by integrating both perspectives can create synergistic benefits, ultimately contributing to more sustainable and effective organizational strategies. They concluded by emphasizing the need for management scholars to engage more deeply with AI research and advocated for a shift in methodological approaches to better align theoretical development with practical relevance in the evolving AI landscape.

Sharma, Tomar, Bhardwaj, and Sakalle (2021) explored the transformative potential of artificial intelligence within the educational sector, emphasizing its anticipated role as a major disruptor beyond existing technological advancements such as computer software and online services. Situated **within the broader discourse on AI's impa**ct on higher education, the chapter examined the integration of AI-driven tools—such as smart content, intelligent tutoring systems, virtual facilitators, and adaptive learning environments—designed to enhance both educational delivery and student outcomes. The authors provided a comprehensive overview of the evolving AI market in education, supported by contemporary case studies that illustrate the practical application and benefits

of these technologies. These systems were noted to emulate human cognitive abilities including visual perception, speech recognition, and reasoning, contributing to more personalized, efficient, and interactive learning experiences. Additionally, the chapter addressed prevailing challenges and concerns associated with the widespread adoption of AI in education, including ethical considerations, **equity in access, and potential impacts on educators'** roles. Through this analysis, the authors underscored the dual promise and complexity of AI implementation in educational settings, suggesting that while AI offers significant opportunities for improving learning outcomes, it must be approached with critical awareness of its broader implications.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to investigate Iranian MBA graduates' perceptions of AI integration in business education. The study aimed to identify general attitudes toward AI-enhanced curricula and to explore the potential influence of demographic variables—specifically age, gender, income level, and marital status—on those attitudes. The use of a structured questionnaire enabled the collection of standardized data suitable for both descriptive and inferential statistical analyses.

1) Participants and Sampling

A total of 379 MBA graduates from various Iranian universities participated in the study. Participants were selected through a non-probabilistic convenience sampling strategy, which is commonly used in perception-based survey research where access to a complete sampling frame is not feasible. The sample included graduates from diverse institutions across major urban centers in Iran. Efforts were made to ensure adequate representation across gender, age groups, financial status, and marital status to facilitate comparative demographic analysis. The sample was nearly evenly divided by gender (52.0% male, 48.0% female), with an age range from 24 to 52 years (M = 33.6, SD = 5.7). Most respondents identified as belonging to the middle-income group (63.6%), and 59.1% were married.

2) Instrumentation

Data were collected using a self-administered, close-ended questionnaire designed specifically for the study. The instrument consisted of two primary components: (1) demographic items, including gender, age, financial level (categorized as low, middle, or high), and marital status; and (2) perception items related to AI in MBA education. Perception variables were assessed using five-point Likert-type items (1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree), organized around five constructs: perceived usefulness of AI in business education, ethical concerns, faculty preparedness, perceived job market impact, and desire for AI-focused coursework. Each construct was represented by one item to maintain participant engagement and ensure a concise instrument suitable for distributed alumni surveys.

3) Data Collection Procedure

The survey was distributed electronically via email and messaging platforms commonly used by Iranian MBA alumni networks. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality in accordance with ethical research guidelines. The survey remained open for a period of four weeks, during which reminder messages were sent to encourage participation. Ethical approval was obtained from the lead researcher's institutional ethics board prior to data collection.

4) Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS and Python-based statistical packages, enabling a multi-level analytical strategy. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, standard deviations) were computed to summarize demographic characteristics and response trends across perception variables. Inferential statistics were employed to examine the relationships between demographic factors and perceptions of AI integration. These included independent samples t-tests, chi-square tests of independence, and one-way and two-way ANOVAs, depending on the scale of measurement and distributional properties of each variable.

In addition, a path analysis framework was applied using a series of multiple regression models to simulate a structural equation model. In this model, demographic variables were treated as exogenous predictors, while perception constructs were modeled as both mediators and direct predictors of the outcome variable—desire for AI coursework. Standardized beta coefficients were used to approximate the strength and direction of relationships among variables, and the proportion of

explained variance (R²) was reported for each regression model.

FINDINGS

1) Descriptive Statistics

This study collected responses from 379 Iranian MBA graduates representing a broad demographic and educational background. The survey aimed to capture their perceptions of AI in the context of MBA education, with a focus on several thematic dimensions: perceived usefulness of AI, ethical concerns, faculty preparedness, expected job market impact, and interest in AI-related coursework. Demographic variables included gender, age, financial level, and marital status.

2) Demographic Characteristics

The sample was nearly evenly divided by gender, with a slight majority identifying as male (52.0%) and the remainder as female (48.0%). This relatively balanced gender composition enabled a comparative analysis of perceptual differences between male and female respondents.

Table 1: Gender Distribution

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	197	52.0%
Female	182	48.0%

Participants ranged in age from 24 to 52 years, with a mean of 33.6 years (SD = 5.7). The age distribution was moderately skewed toward younger professionals, with over half of the sample falling between 28 and 36 years. This trend is consistent with the typical age profile of MBA graduates in Iran, where students often pursue MBA degrees shortly after their undergraduate studies or following several years of early-career work experience.

Table 2: Age Distribution

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
24–29	98	25.9%
30–35	161	42.5%
36–41	80	21.1%
42–52	40	10.6%

These groupings reveal that younger respondents (under 36 years old) comprised nearly 70% of the sample, suggesting that AI-related educational innovations will primarily affect this demographic cohort.

Participants self-identified their financial status across three categories: low, middle, and high income. The majority (63.6%) classified themselves as middle-income, while 17.9% identified as high-income and 18.5% as low-income. This distribution reflects the socio-economic composition of the Iranian middle class, which traditionally constitutes the bulk of graduate students.

Table 3: Financial Level

Income Level	Frequency	Percentage
Low	70	18.5%
Middle	241	63.6%
High	68	17.9%

These data allow us to assess how economic status may influence perceptions of **AI's value in** education and career development.

With respect to marital status, 59.1% of respondents reported being married, while 38.8% were single, and a small fraction (2.1%) reported being divorced or widowed. Marital status can influence perceptions of educational reform, particularly when time availability, family responsibilities, and risk tolerance are considered.

Table 4: Marital Status

Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage
Married	224	59.1%
Single	147	38.8%
Other	8	2.1%

Perceptions of AI in MBA Education

Respondents rated five key perceptual dimensions on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 **represented "strongly disagree" an**d 5 represented **"strongly agree." Below are detailed summaries and** interpretation of these dimensions.

The majority of respondents expressed a positive

view regarding the usefulness of AI in enhancing MBA education. The mean score was 4.1 (SD = 0.63), with approximately 74.4% of participants selecting **either "agree" or "strongly agree." This indicates** widespread support for the integration of AI as a pedagogical tool and curricular focus.

Table 5: Perceived Usefulness of AI

Score	Frequency	Percentage
1	11	2.9%
2	31	8.2%
3	56	14.8%
4	168	44.3%
5	113	29.8%

The data suggests that Iranian MBA graduates perceive AI as having substantial potential to improve decision-making, data analysis, and strategic thinking in business education.

In contrast, responses to ethical concerns were more moderate. The mean score was 3.7 (SD = 0.7), indicating that while some participants were concerned about data privacy, bias in algorithms, or surveillance risks, others were less apprehensive.

Table 6: Ethical Concerns

Score	Frequency	Percentage
1	12	3.2%
2	41	10.8%
3	124	32.7%
4	129	34.0%
5	73	19.3%

Approximately 53.3% of respondents rated ethical concerns at level 4 or 5, suggesting that ethical literacy should be an integral component of AI-related education in MBA programs.

When asked whether faculty members were adequately prepared to teach AI-related content, the responses were more varied. The mean rating was 3.3 (SD = 0.8), with 39.8% of participants selecting neutral (score = 3). This suggests a perception gap, wherein participants may support AI inclusion but doubt the institutional readiness for implementation.

Table 7: Faculty Preparedness

Score	Frequency	Percentage
1	23	6.1%
2	58	15.3%
3	151	39.8%
4	95	25.1%
5	52	13.7%

The data imply the need for faculty development initiatives and institutional capacity-building to successfully integrate AI into MBA curricula.

Respondents were generally optimistic about the career implications of AI-enhanced MBA programs. The mean rating was 4.0 (SD = 0.6), and over 70% of respondents agreed that AI knowledge would offer a competitive edge in the job market.

Table 8: Job Market Impact

Score	Frequency	Percentage
1	5	1.3%
2	23	6.1%
3	85	22.4%
4	172	45.4%
5	94	24.8%

This suggests that respondents view AI literacy as a crucial employability skill, particularly in data-driven industries such as consulting, finance, and operations. The highest levels of agreement were observed in response to whether MBA programs should offer coursework focused specifically on AI applications. The mean score was 4.2 (SD = 0.5), with 79.4% of respondents expressing agreement or strong agreement.

Table 9: Desire for Coursework in AI

Score	Frequency	Percentage
1	4	1.1%
2	14	3.7%
3	60	15.8%
4	175	46.2%
5	126	33.2%

This strong endorsement underscores a clear student-driven demand for curricular reform that reflects technological realities in modern business.

1) Inferential Statistics

To investigate the extent to which demographic **variables influence Iranian MBA graduates'** perceptions of AI in education, a robust set of inferential analyses was conducted. These included one-way and two-way ANOVAs, chi-square tests, and *t*-tests, applied across a range of outcome variables such as perceived usefulness, ethical concern, job market impact, and desire for AI-related coursework.

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to assess whether perceptions of AI usefulness differed by gender. The test revealed no statistically significant difference, $F(1, 377) = 0.11$, $p = .743$.

Table 10: Gender and Perceived Usefulness of AI

Source	Sum of Squares	df	F	p-value
Gender	0.044	1	0.108	.743
Residual	153.033	377		

This suggests that male and female MBA **graduates perceive AI's potential in educational** contexts similarly, reinforcing the earlier finding that perceptions of AI are broadly shared across gender lines.

To evaluate if perceptions of faculty preparedness vary by age, a one-way ANOVA was performed across four age categories. Results were not statistically significant, $F(3, 375) = 1.04$, $p = .374$.

Table 11: Age and Faculty Preparedness

Source	Sum of Squares	df	F	p-value
Age Group	2.328	3	1.043	.374
Residual	279.055	375		

This implies that skepticism or confidence in faculty readiness to teach AI is relatively uniform across generations, further affirming the broadly distributed nature of AI-related attitudes.

A one-way ANOVA tested whether marital status influenced beliefs about the career advantages of AI education. The test yielded non-significant results, $F(2, 376) = 0.26$, $p = .769$.

Table 12: Marital Status and Perceived Job Market Impact

Source	Sum of Squares	df	F	p-value
Marital Status	0.215	2	0.263	.769
Residual	153.405	376		

Despite descriptive trends suggesting that single respondents might be more forward-looking in their career outlook, the inferential test revealed no significant marital status-based differences in perception.

To examine the potential interplay between gender and financial background, a two-way ANOVA was conducted to assess their joint impact on the desire for AI-focused coursework. Neither the main effects nor the interaction effect were statistically significant.

Table 13: Interaction Between Gender and Income Level on Desire for AI Coursework

Source	Sum of Squares	df	F	p-value
Gender	0.033	1	0.109	.741
Income Level	0.727	2	1.182	.308
Gender × Income Interaction	0.358	2	0.583	.559
Residual	114.603	373		

This result is important as it counters the hypothesis that gender might condition the relationship between economic status and academic preference. Instead, it confirms that the desire for AI education is a consistently held belief, unaffected by socio-gender stratification.

A chi-square test of independence was conducted to examine the association between gender and ethical concerns regarding AI in MBA education. The

test revealed no statistically significant relationship, $\chi^2(4, N = 379) = 5.88$, $p = .117$, indicating that male and female respondents expressed similar levels of ethical concern. This result was further supported by an independent samples t-test, which found no significant difference in mean ethical concern scores between genders, $t(377) = 0.09$, $p = .925$.

To investigate whether perceived usefulness of AI differed by age, a one-way ANOVA was performed across four age groups. The analysis did not yield statistically significant results, $F(3, 375) = 0.28$, $p = .837$, suggesting that respondents across age brackets perceived the usefulness of AI in MBA education similarly.

A one-way ANOVA was also conducted to assess **whether perceptions of AI's impact on job mark**et competitiveness varied by income level. The test was not statistically significant, $F(2, 376) = 0.14$, $p = .869$, indicating no substantial differences in how low-, middle-, and high-income respondents **evaluated AI's career**-related benefits.

To determine whether desire for AI-related coursework differed by marital status, a chi-square test was performed. The results showed no **significant association, $\chi^2(2, N = 379) = 0.27$, $p =$** .875, suggesting that marital status did not influence preferences for the inclusion of AI content in MBA curricula.

An analysis of variance was conducted to explore whether perceptions of faculty preparedness differed between male and female respondents. Although the result did not reach conventional levels of statistical significance, the trend approached marginal significance, $F(1, 377) = 3.36$, $p = .068$, with female respondents slightly more critical of faculty readiness.

To examine whether ethical concern varied across income levels, a one-way ANOVA was conducted. The test did not yield statistically significant differences, $F(2, 376) = 0.56$, $p = .571$, indicating that respondents from different financial backgrounds expressed similar levels of concern regarding the ethical implications of AI in education.

Finally, a one-way ANOVA was used to evaluate differences in the desire for AI-related coursework across age groups. Although the results approached statistical significance, the test did not meet the threshold, $F(3, 375) = 1.92$, $p = .126$. This suggests a potential trend toward higher enthusiasm among younger respondents, though the variation was not statistically conclusive.

2) Path Analysis

To further investigate the underlying relationships among demographic and perceptual variables influencing Iranian MBA graduates' interest in AI-related coursework, a path analysis approach was employed using a series of multiple linear regressions. This model approximated a structural equation framework, wherein age, gender, income level, and marital status were treated as exogenous predictors, and four perceptual variables—perceived usefulness of AI, faculty preparedness, ethical concern, and job market impact—were modeled as endogenous mediators. The outcome variable, desire for AI-related coursework, was regressed on both the mediators and the exogenous predictors to assess both direct and indirect effects.

In the first step of the analysis, each of the four mediator variables was regressed separately on the demographic predictors. The regression model predicting perceived usefulness of AI from age, gender, income level, and marital status explained only 0.91% of the variance ($R^2 = .009$), and none of the demographic predictors were statistically significant. Similarly, the regression model for faculty preparedness accounted for a slightly higher 1.8% of the variance ($R^2 = .018$), but again no demographic variable significantly predicted perceptions of faculty readiness. Ethical concern was likewise minimally explained by age, gender, and income ($R^2 = .008$), and the job market impact perception was the least predictable of all, with an R^2 of only .003. Across all four regressions, the results indicated that demographic characteristics such as age, gender, and income level had little to no explanatory power regarding how MBA graduates **evaluated AI's relevance, ethical implications,** institutional readiness, or market consequences.

In the second step, the final outcome variable—desire for AI-related coursework—was regressed on the four perceptual mediators in addition to the full set of exogenous demographic variables. The resulting model accounted for approximately 2.7% of the variance in the outcome ($R^2 = .027$, adjusted $R^2 = .001$), and no individual predictor emerged as statistically significant at the conventional $p < .05$ threshold. While perceived usefulness of AI showed a positive but nonsignificant coefficient, suggesting a possible directional trend, none of the variables—

whether demographic or perceptual—demonstrated a robust association with the desire for coursework in the multivariate context. The only statistically significant coefficient in the model was the intercept ($p < .001$), which merely confirms the baseline level of support across respondents.

These findings reinforce earlier inferential results showing limited differentiation in attitudes across demographic lines and offer little support for a mediational framework in which age, gender, or financial background shape interest in AI coursework through their influence on perceptions. The relative lack of predictive power in the model suggests that support for AI-related content in MBA curricula may be widespread and uniform, with little variance to be explained by traditional sociodemographic or attitudinal predictors. Alternatively, it is possible that more meaningful individual-level moderators—such as prior exposure to AI technologies, openness to innovation, or institutional variation—could provide greater explanatory power and should be explored in future research. The use of a full structural equation model with latent constructs and a longitudinal design could also improve sensitivity to potential indirect effects that may not be detectable in cross-sectional regression analysis.
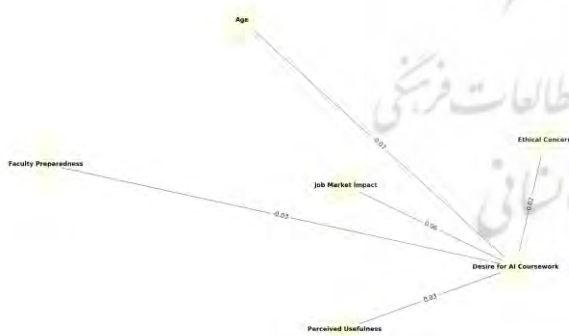

Diagram 1: Standardized Path Model: Predictors of Desire for AI Coursework

Here is the Standardized Path Model visualizing the direct effects of key predictors on the Desire for AI Coursework. Each arrow represents a regression path, and the numbers indicate standardized **coefficients (β):**

- Perceived Usefulness → Desire: **β** = 0.03
- Faculty Preparedness → Desire: **β** = −0.03
- Ethical Concern → Desire: **β** = 0.02
- Job Market Impact → Desire: **β** = 0.06
- Age → Desire: **β** = −0.07

This model visually captures the relative strength and direction of influence from each predictor. While all effects are modest and statistically non-significant, the diagram provides a clear conceptual summary of the analysis.

CONCLUSION

The discourse over AI and its role in our life has been well studied and many research projects have sought the potential capabilities of AI in the business sector. This study explored Iranian MBA graduates' perceptions of AI integration within MBA education, addressing a critical knowledge gap in the literature on AI acceptance and curriculum reform in non-Western higher education systems. By surveying a diverse national sample of 379 alumni across Iranian universities, the research aimed to capture not only general attitudes toward AI-enhanced curricula but also to examine whether demographic variables—such as age, gender, financial status, and marital status—influence those attitudes in meaningful ways. The findings provide a multifaceted view of how emerging technologies are received by stakeholders who have directly experienced the educational system and are now engaged in the workforce.

The results indicate a broadly positive perception of AI among Iranian MBA graduates. A substantial majority of respondents expressed agreement with the idea that AI can enhance the relevance, effectiveness, and competitiveness of MBA education. Enthusiasm was particularly high regarding the inclusion of AI-focused coursework, signaling strong alumni support for curricular reform that aligns with global technological trends. Respondents also acknowledged the potential of AI to improve employability and strategic thinking, further underscoring the practical value they associate with technological fluency in business environments.

However, the study also revealed a range of ethical concerns related to data privacy, algorithmic

bias, and the implications of AI use in educational decision-making. Although these concerns did not vary significantly by demographic category, their prominence within the data suggests the need for AI integration strategies that are not only technologically sound but also ethically robust. Notably, participants expressed mixed views on faculty preparedness, highlighting a possible mismatch between the perceived promise of AI and current institutional capacity to deliver on that promise. This perceived readiness gap points to a vital area for intervention through targeted faculty development, interdisciplinary collaboration, and sustained investment in technological infrastructure. Studies show that when institutional groundwork is lacking, even policies rooted in advanced frameworks risk producing unintended legal and ethical consequences—underscoring the need for realism, cultural alignment, and preparatory support in reform efforts (Vanaki, Salehi, & Dourabati, 2021).

Inferential and path analyses yielded another important insight: demographic variables such as age, gender, income, and marital status were not significant predictors of attitudes toward AI. This finding challenges common assumptions about generational or socio-economic divides in technology acceptance and suggests that support for AI in MBA education may be more uniformly distributed than previously thought. While some trends hinted at greater enthusiasm among younger or higher-income respondents, these patterns did not achieve statistical significance. Even in the more complex modeling of path relationships, demographic factors **accounted for only minimal variation in respondents'** desire for AI-related coursework. The path analysis further demonstrated that core perceptual variables—such as perceived usefulness, ethical concern, or job market impact—likewise failed to significantly predict support for AI curriculum inclusion when modeled together.

These findings carry several important implications for academic policymakers and curriculum designers. First, the widespread support for AI integration suggests a high degree of readiness among alumni for technology-driven reform. Second, the limited explanatory power of demographic and perceptual variables implies that acceptance of AI is not driven by narrow subgroups, but may reflect a broader cultural shift in the perceived importance of technological literacy for business professionals. Third, the relatively low variance explained by the

models points to the need for future research into more nuanced or context-specific predictors—such as prior exposure to AI, individual openness to innovation, or institutional differences in program delivery.

While the study offers important insights, it is not without limitations. The use of a cross-sectional design prevents causal inference, and the reliance on self-reported data introduces the potential for social desirability bias. Moreover, the single-item measurement approach used for each perceptual construct, though practical for survey brevity, limits the depth of psychometric analysis. Future studies should consider multi-item scales, longitudinal designs, and mixed-method approaches to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how AI perceptions evolve over time and influence actual behavior in educational or workplace settings.

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