2024 Middle Eastern Student Wellbeing Survey

Research carried out by YouGov

Studiosity

Contents

Cover image: Bayan Alradi, Ajman University
Above: Faryal Waqar, Senior Counselor, Academic Support Centre, RIT Dubai
With thanks to the Student Leaders and Advisory Group pictured throughout this report.

YouGov®

The education sector has the greatest potential to change the world - students become future researchers, teachers, business owners, leaders, carers, and more, contributing to the rich societal fabric that the world needs. To protect and grow the education sector, listening and responding to the feedback, concerns, and recommendations of college students is a necessary challenge.

It is evident that students are navigating a changing academic terrain. Personalised support, a heightened sense of belonging, and rapid adaptation to AI supports are paramount .

This survey captures the voices of students, to support education leaders in their ongoing efforts to offer students an educational experience that aligns with both their study expectations and aspirations for the future.

Image obove: Mina Basta, Student at University of Wollongong in Dubai

Message from CEO

To all our partners in education and life chances:

It is evident that higher education across the world is undergoing, or being forced to undergo, significant change. This annual Student Wellbeing survey is a pragmatic guide for leaders in higher education to celebrate strengths, address gaps, and ensure our critical societal institutions remain agile and responsive to the evolving needs of the student body and deliver credible and valuable credentials.

In partnership with your institution and others, the Studiosity team continues our core mission of increasing life chances for students. In this spirit we are committed to making this contribution to the sector and putting the spotlight on student wellbeing again this year.

Michael Larsen
Chief Executive Officer, Studiosity

Studiosity

Foreword

Dear colleagues in education,

It feels as though the world has been turned on its head again, after a year of transformative generative AI launches. It comes on the heels of COVID, now in the not-too-distant past, changing legislation, and changing student demographics. If leaders in the postsecondary sector are looking for a moment to breathe, it isn't coming.

Funding, competition, academic integrity, artificial intelligence, and institutional risk are top of mind for HE leadership the world over. Students can see where institutions have made a commitment – for instance, we can see around two thirds happy with sense of belonging. Let us remember the other third, whether this is the 70 million students the world over, or the additional 6000 undergraduates enrolled just with your institution. Students are telling us where there is room for improvement – accessibility, personalisation, and connection.

Whether addressing belonging, establishing more accessible mental health support and peer connection, or accelerating AI for learning - the answer can be summed up as continual investment in *quality teaching and learning*. This year's report makes necessary actions clear.

Professor Judyth Sachs
Chief Academic Officer, Studiosity

Former Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Provost Macquarie University and
Former Pro Vice-Chancellor Learning and Teaching at Sydney University

Comment from local ==leadership==

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

Since 2020, our sector has faced unprecedented challenges that have significantly impacted our students' learning experiences and our ability to deliver quality, accessible, and inclusive education. The COVID-19 lockdowns and the subsequent shift to emergency remote teaching compelled even the most reluctant among us to embrace technology in our classrooms. This transition, while difficult, opened the door to new possibilities.

Now, as we navigate the GenAI era, we are confronted with both opportunities and risks. The rapid advancements in generative AI have highlighted the need for us to stay informed and adaptable, ensuring we understand the evolving landscape of teaching and learning. By deepening our understanding of our students, we can better tailor the support we provide, empowering them to become true partners in this educational journey.

This report is both timely and critical, offering valuable insights into student awareness of academic integrity and their use of generative AI.

Kind regards

Dr Zeenath Reza Khan
Associate Professor, University of Wollongong in Dubai
Board Member, European Network for Academic Integrity
Champion for AI Ethics and Academic Integrity

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG IN DUBAI

Introduction

Background

YouGov

YouGov is a global public opinion and data company, international market research and data analytics firm headquartered in the UK with operations in Europe, North America, the Middle East, and Asia-Pacific.

Studiosity

Universities around the world partner with Studiosity to grow student success at scale, via 24/7 formative writing feedback, discussion about core skills, and peer-to-peer connection.

For eight years, Studiosity has run an annual Student Wellbeing Survey with Australia's university students. In 2023 they undertook the survey with students in the Middle East for the first time in partnership with TGM Research, and in November 2023, YouGov was commissioned by Studiosity to conduct the next wave of this global research.

Objectives

The survey investigates key areas of student wellbeing in 2024. This annual survey seeks to better understand and discuss the motivations, emotions, and demands of university students, to provide the data and findings to higher education leadership, to support initiatives and solutions.

This year, the survey focused on topics such as experiences of artificial intelligence, connection to other students, stress, importance of grades, experiences of cheating, optimism for the future, and institutional belonging.

Methodology

Sample & Target Group:

Studiosity produced the questions for this survey with advice from YouGov to ensure robust data collection. YouGov gathered the responses from students in Canada, United States, United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates via an online survey.

The survey ran from 23 November to 29 December 2023 and gained 10,189 responses, with 498 from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and 500 from Saudi Arabia (KSA).

This survey was collected on the YouGov Panels, where each member has accepted to participate in online interviews and has received an email invitation with a link to the survey.

The sample definition is created in order to provide a representative cross-section of the UAE and KSA populations, based on the target group and the purpose of the survey.

The survey was conducted by the YouGov analysis institute.

23rd November – 29th December 2023

Weighting:

The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UAE & KSA adults aged 18+. Data was weighted according to the dimensions of gender, level of university studies finished and geography on the basis of an ideal weighting from The Federal Competitiveness and Statistics Centre, so that the results are representative of the population in relation to the aforementioned target group.
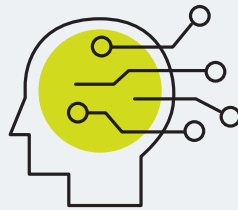
Key findings
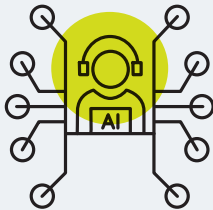
Middle Eastern students overwhelmingly expect AI support.

The large majority of students (81%, n=809) expect their university to offer AI support tools in 2024. UAE students expect it slightly more than KSA (84% compared to 78%), and students for whom English is their first language expect it more than those for whom English is not their first language (89% compared to 73%). Globally, 56% of students expect AI-powered support tools.

Students in Saudi Arabia more commonly believe their universities are moving fast enough to adapt to emerging AI technologies.

Although the overall tone of the findings is very similar for both UAE and KSA, the results differ in minor details. 69% of UAE students believe their university is adapting quickly enough to include AI support tools to help them with their study, whereas this rises to 77% for students in KSA.

The majority of students feel positively about their university experience and sense of and belonging.

Students in the UAE and KSA have a generally higher sense of belonging to their university community than students in most other regions surveyed. 44% of KSA students and 46% of UAE students said they felt that they "very much" belonged, compared to a global average of 27%.

In the KSA, most students' first language is not English.

This could present an additional challenge for this cohort (62%), as many of the large universities in Saudi Arabia teach primarily in English, and assignments and written work must be completed in English. In the UAE 40% of students say that English is not their first language, a similarly significant group with potential language support needs.

Demographics: Student profiles

To accommodate the increasingly diverse experience of students, tertiary leaders can look to equal-access to programming, resources, and support structures to ensure access and wellbeing for all.

The students (n=998) represented a mix of domestic (39%, n = 384) and international (61%, n=614) students.

Of respondents, 59% were male and 41% female, with the majority (57%) being in the 18-25 year old age group..

36% had just completed their third year of study in 2023, and 33% completed a postgraduate level, 17% second year, and 14% first year.

49% report English as their first language; of those for whom it is not, 65% record Arabic, and 13% Urdu.

Most students (40%) were employed part time, with 26% full time, 17% casual and 16% not in paid employment at all. Despite this, 73% of students had a full-time study load, with 27% studying part time. STEM is the most common study area (29%), followed by Business (24%).

Survey respondents self-report a mix of grades, though mostly higher - 37% Credit or Pass, with 59% of students reporting Distinction or High Distinction.

Over half (53%) are carers - people who provide unpaid care or other support to family members and friends at the same time as study.

Compared to the prior year, less university students in the Middle East are working while studying (5% down), with a significant drop in full-time work (10% down), but a rise (6%) in casual/temporary work during study. Younger students were more likely to be unemployed (UAE 21%, KSA 24% of 18-25 year olds) during study than their older counterparts.

Compared to average global responses (79%), Middle Eastern students reported higher rates of employment (84%) - similar to Australian university students (86%), higher than the UK (70%) and the United States (78%).

LEVEL OF STUDY FINISHED IN 2023

- 1st year
- 2nd year
- 3rd year
- Postgraduate

14%
17%
36%
33%
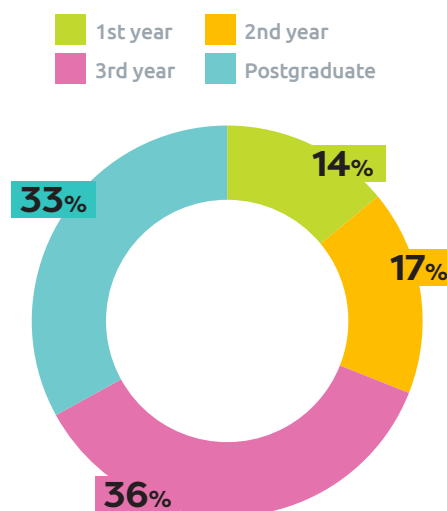
YOY MIDDLE EASTERN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS – EMPLOYMENT DURING STUDY

UAE   KSA

	2022			2023		
Yes, full-time	40%	32%	36%	27%	25%	26%
Yes, part-time	39%	44%	42%	45%	36%	40%
Yes, casual/ temporary work	11%	11%	11%	15%	19%	17%
No, not currently employed	10%	13%	11%	14%	19%	16%
NET: Yes	90%		87%	89%	86%	81%	84%

Chapter 1: Artificial intelligence

Globally, UAE students have the highest expectation of AI

The UAE has arguably one of the faster-moving higher education sectors in the world - possibly due to its relative youth compared to other countries. The UAE aspires to be a world leader in AI - its government includes AI in its vision and strategic objectives, and it's home to the world's first graduate, research AI university - The Mohamed bin Zayed University of Artificial Intelligence (MBZUAI) in Abu Dhabi, founded in 2020.
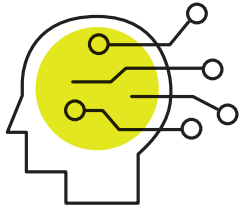
Q. Do you expect your university to offer AI (artificial intelligence) support tools to students? *AI or artificial intelligence refers to a trained, digital helper that gives personal feedback and other 24/7 study help.*

Q. Is your university adapting quickly enough to include AI (artificial intelligence) support tools to help with your study?

Students' expectations in the UAE appear to be in line with this countrywide attitude, and with the rapidly changing technology landscape. Most (84% n=418) UAE students expect their university to adopt AI-based support, with 77% agreeing that their university is moving fast enough to provide those tools. Students in the UAE have the highest expectation of AI-powered support in the world.

This overwhelming expectation that universities provide AI support is evident across all age groups, genders, and study modes. Students in all areas of study reported a majority expecting AI-based support, however the expectation is highest among Humanities and Social Sciences students (98%) and lowest among Law students (71%).

Those whose first language is English expect AI support slightly more (88% 'yes') than those for whom English is not their first language (77% 'yes').

International students believe that universities are adapting quickly enough, slightly more than their domestic counterparts, with 82% agreeing compared to 66% of domestic students. Younger students (aged 18 – 25 years) are less likely to agree that the university is moving fast enough, with only 72% of students in that age group stating 'yes'.

EXPECTATION FOR UNIVERSITY TO OFFER AI SUPPORT TOOLS TO STUDENTS

Legend: Australia | New Zealand | Singapore | UK | KSA | UAE | Canada | USA

Yes
Australia	New Zealand	Singapore	UK	KSA	UAE	Canada	USA	
56%	59%	71%	39%	79%	84%	54%	58%	**57%**

No
Australia	New Zealand	Singapore	UK	KSA	UAE	Canada	USA	
44%	41%	30%	61%	21%	16%	46%	42%	**44%**

EXPECTATION FOR UNIVERSITY TO OFFER AI SUPPORT TOOLS TO STUDENTS

Yes **No**

Category	Yes	No
STEM	80%	20%
Medicine	75%	25%
Nursing	96%	4%
Psychology	78%	22%
Business	86%	14%
Law	71%	29%
Languages	81%	19%
Humanities / social sciences	98%	2%
Journalism / communications	78%	22%
Creative Arts	91%	9%
Other	76%	24%
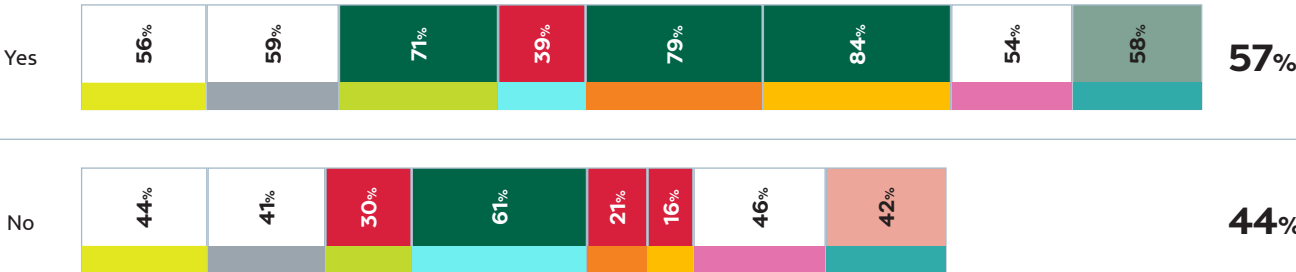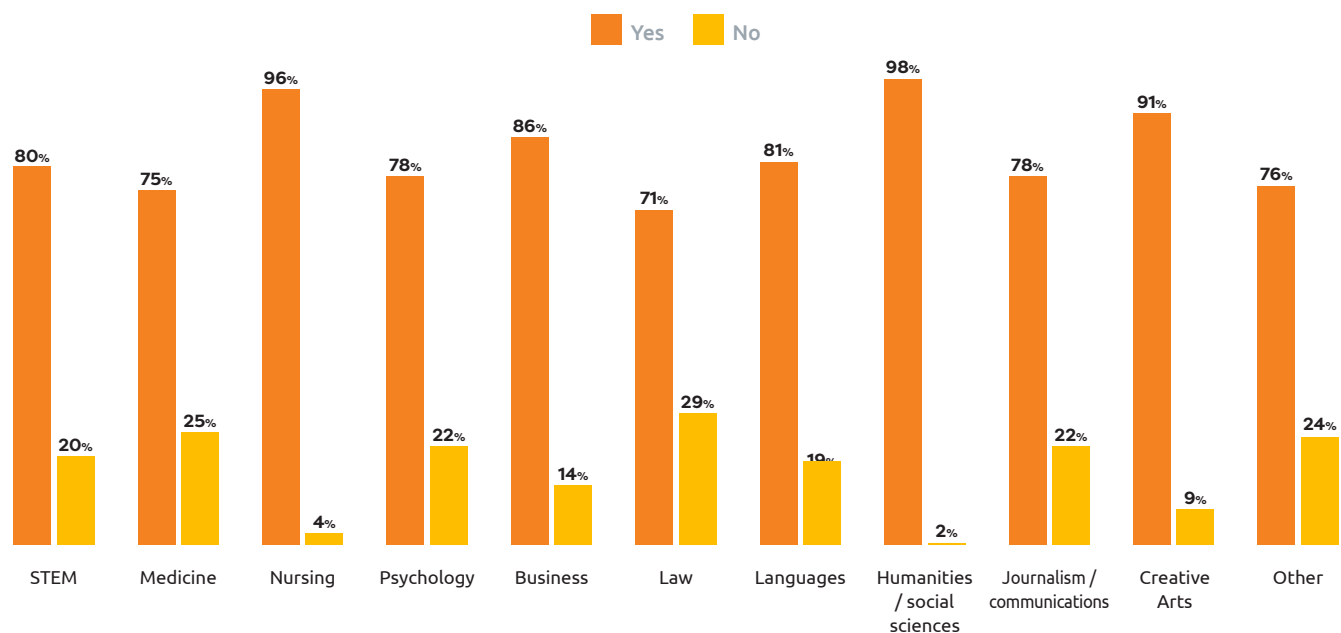
Q. What is the main reason you would use the university's AI (artificial intelligence) support or feedback?

Students' top reasons for using their university's AI support tools are to bolster 'confidence that they're on the right track throughout their assignment' and to 'learn how to use AI tools' (both 21%).

This reasoning is in contrast with the rest of the world, where 'Speed - only waiting minutes, not a day or several days for feedback' was the main reason students would look to AI-based support. The UAE respondents showed a greater interest in 'Skills' and also 'Safety' around AI, compared to the rest of the world. Between the genders, males are more likely to select 'Avoid embarrassment' as a reason to use AI (12%) compared to females (7%), and females are slightly more likely to use AI to 'improve my grades' (14% compared to 12% of males).

"The artificial intelligence has helped me a lot, especially in my grades."

"Artificial intelligence is future everyone must have knowledge about it."

"As of now there arent any AI tools available by the uni"

MAIN REASON FOR USING UNIVERSITY'S AI SUPPORT OR FEEDBACK

Reason	%
Confidence to check I'm on the right track throughout my assignment	21%
Skills learn to use AI tools	21%
Speed only waiting minutes, not a day or several days for feedback	14%
Grades to improve my own work before I submit	13%
Safety because I can trust AI resources that my university provides	13%
Avoid embarrassment from a real person e.g. the AI won't judge my writing	10%
Do not want to burden others e.g. I won't feel bad asking my teacher's or friends	8%
Other	2%

KSA universities moving fast to adapt to AI technologies

Similarly to the UAE, the attitudes in Saudi Arabia towards AI are positive and generous. In 2016, Saudi Arabia unveiled its 'Vision 2030' - an ambitious plan aiming to enhance the Kingdom's image globally, and develop an economy that has multiple sources of income by supporting non-oil sectors such as tech and AI development. In 2024 Saudi Arabia created a $100 billion fund to invest in AI and other technology. So it is against this economic backdrop that university students in the region are contemplating and engaging with AI technologies.
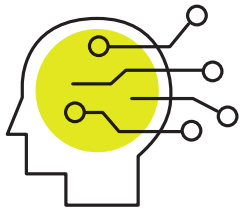
Q. Do you expect your university to offer AI (artificial intelligence) support tools to students? *AI or artificial intelligence refers to a trained, digital helper that gives personal feedback and other 24/7 study help.*

Q. Is your university adapting quickly enough to include AI (artificial intelligence) support tools to help with your study?
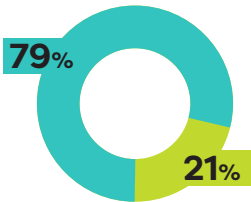
Students in Saudi Arabia, perhaps unsurprisingly, have very high expectations that their university will provide AI support tools (79%), however fewer students believe that their institution is adapting fast enough to provide AI, (69%). Those who reported 'Distinction' grades were significantly more likely to agree that their uni is moving fast enough (75%) compared to all the other grade brackets. In Saudi Arabia, students cited confidence (19%), developing AI skills (18%), speed of feedback and potential for higher grades (both 16%) as comparatively similar reasons for wanting AI-powered support.

For students with English as their first language, the biggest reason was 'to learn AI skills' (21%), whereas for those whose first language is not English, the more common reason was 'Confidence' at 21%.

This could indicate that there is an opportunity to further support English as additional language learners with fast, ethical AI-powered support and build their confidence in their academic journey.

EXPECTATION FOR UNIVERSITY TO OFFER AI SUPPORT TOOLS TO STUDENTS

Yes   No

79%

21%

MAIN REASON FOR USING UNIVERSITY'S AI SUPPORT OR FEEDBACK

Confidence
to check I'm on the right track throughout my assignment

19%

Speed
only waiting minutes, not a day or several days for feedback

16%

Grades
to improve my own work before I submit

16%

IS UNIVERSITY ADAPTING FAST ENOUGH TO INCLUDE AI SUPPORT TOOLS FOR STUDY?

Yes   No

70%

30%

IS UNIVERSITY ADAPTING FAST ENOUGH TO INCLUDE AI SUPPORT TOOLS FOR STUDY?

Yes   **No**

Category	Yes	No
Non-pass (below 50%)	79%	21%
Pass (50-64%)	73%	28%
Credit (65-74%)	70%	30%
Distinction (75-84%)	75%	25%
High distinction (85-100%)	65%	35%
Prefer not to say	30%	71%
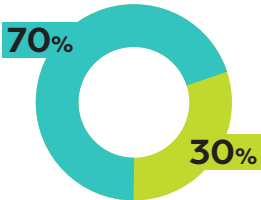
Q. What is the main reason you would use the university's AI support or feedback?

In Saudi Arabia, students cited confidence (19%), developing AI skills (18%), speed of feedback and potential for higher grades (both 16%) as comparatively similar reasons for wanting AI-powered support. For students with English as their first language, the biggest reason was 'to learn AI skills' (20%), whereas for those whose first language is not English, the 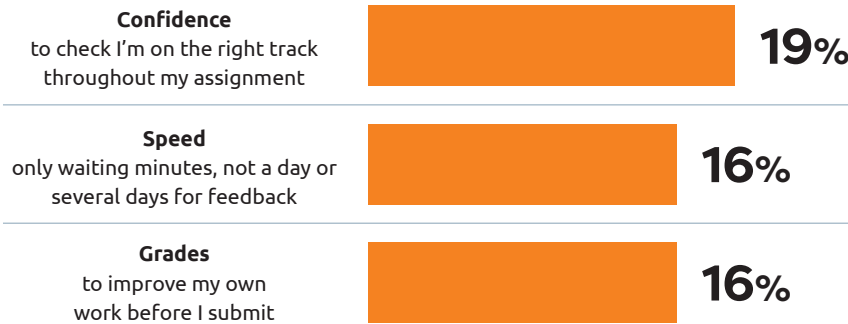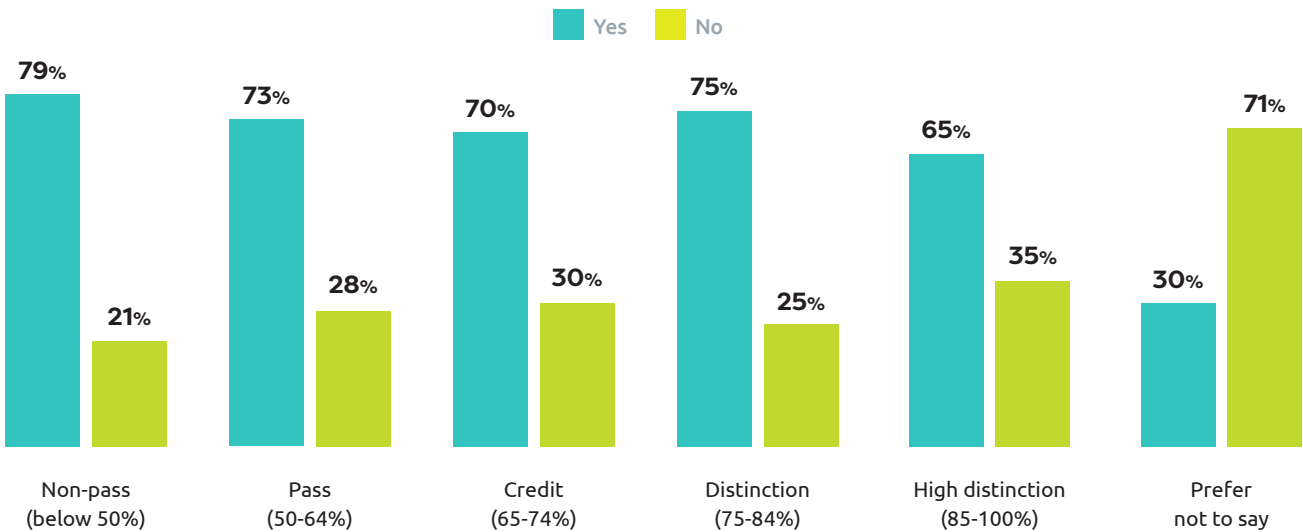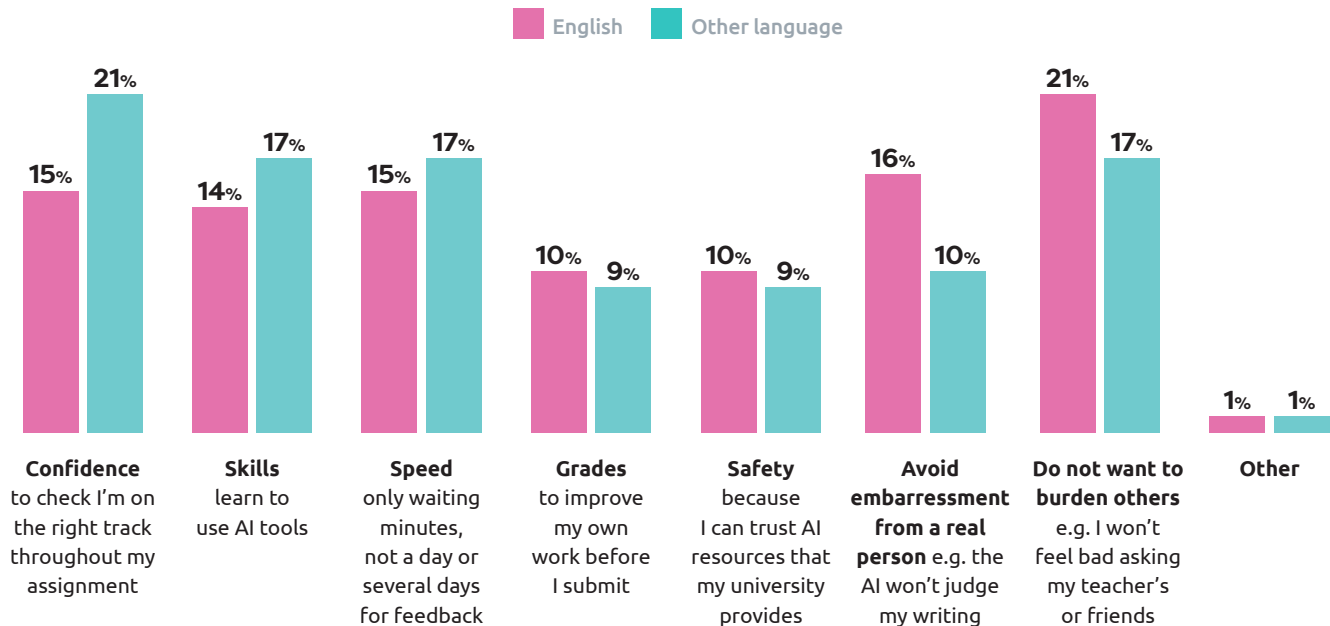more common reason was 'Confidence' at 21%. This could indicate that there is an opportunity to further support English as additional language learners with fast, ethical AI-powered support and build their confidence in their academic journey.

> "My university always keeps pace with developments in the technological field and always works to provide everything new in the medical field."

> "They are not actually doing it 'quickly' but yea at least they are trying to adapt [to] that"

MAIN REASON FOR USING UNIVERSITY'S AI SUPPORT OR FEEDBACK – FIRST LANGUAGE

English   **Other language**

Reason	English	Other language
Confidence to check I'm on the right track throughout my assignment	15%	21%
Skills learn to use AI tools	14%	17%
Speed only waiting minutes, not a day or several days for feedback	15%	17%
Grades to improve my own work before I submit	10%	9%
Safety because I can trust AI resources that my university provides	10%	9%
Avoid embarrassment from a real person e.g. the AI won't judge my writing	16%	10%
Do not want to burden others e.g. I won't feel bad asking my teacher's or friends	21%	17%
Other	1%	1%

Half of UAE students unaware of academic integrity

There is room to improve visibility and awareness of information and support services around academic integrity and how to avoid plagiarism, with around half of students not aware of what academic integrity is and two fifths unsure how to avoid plagiarism. Students' awareness of academic integrity support is mostly through 'referencing workshops' (61%).

Q. In 2023, did you hear about the following from your university? *Please select all that apply*

Students who study primarily on campus are slightly less aware of the supports and services compared to 'distance' or mixed-mode students. A small proportion of students (8%) report that they don't know about any of the information and services or don't remember hearing about them.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AWARENESS

Workshops to improve referencing skills	**61%**
An explanation of what 'academic integrity' is	**50%**
Where to get referencing help	**48%**
How to avoid plagiarism	**44%**
I don't remember hearing about any of these things	**8%**

Q. When you are unsure about plagiarism or your referencing, how would you prefer to get help? *Please rank the following in order of preference.*

Students generally ranked 'asking their lecturer/teacher' as their top preference (70% ranked in top 3), followed by 'search engine' (64%), then 'asking a friend or another student' (57%) for help with referencing or avoiding plagiarism. Interestingly, 50% of students also specified 'use an AI tool' in their top 3 preferences for getting help with plagiarism or referencing - in keeping with the AI preference results from earlier in this report. This is a starkly different result to students in Australia or the UK, where only 32% and 26% respectively selected 'use an AI tool' as one of their top 3 preferences.
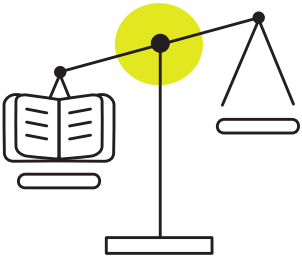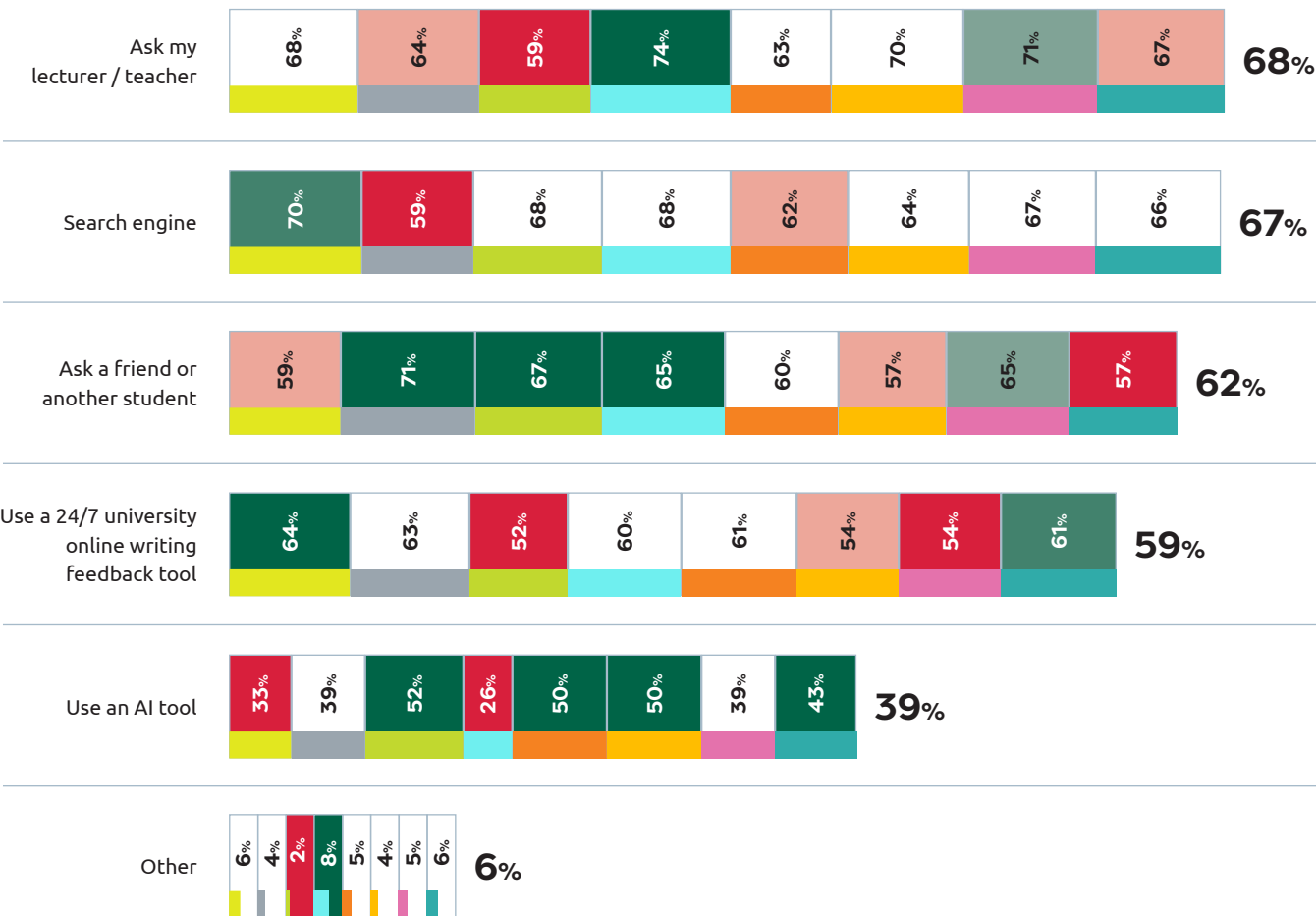
"No, I don't remember anything about this."

"These workshops improve our skills or experience."

"Commit to doing your own work."

TOP 3 RANKED PREFERENCES FOR HELP WITH REFERENCING OR AVOIDING PLAGIARISM

Legend: Australia | New Zealand | Singapore | UK | KSA | UAE | Canada | USA

Ask my lecturer / teacher — 68%
- Australia: 68%
- New Zealand: 64%
- Singapore: 59%
- UK: 74%
- KSA: 63%
- UAE: 70%
- Canada: 71%
- USA: 67%

Search engine — 67%
- Australia: 70%
- New Zealand: 59%
- Singapore: 68%
- UK: 68%
- KSA: 62%
- UAE: 64%
- Canada: 67%
- USA: 66%

Ask a friend or another student — 62%
- Australia: 59%
- New Zealand: 71%
- Singapore: 67%
- UK: 65%
- KSA: 60%
- UAE: 57%
- Canada: 65%
- USA: 57%

Use a 24/7 university online writing feedback tool — 59%
- Australia: 64%
- New Zealand: 63%
- Singapore: 52%
- UK: 60%
- KSA: 61%
- UAE: 54%
- Canada: 54%
- USA: 61%

Use an AI tool — 39%
- Australia: 33%
- New Zealand: 39%
- Singapore: 52%
- UK: 26%
- KSA: 50%
- UAE: 50%
- Canada: 39%
- USA: 43%

Other — 6%
- Australia: 6%
- New Zealand: 4%
- Singapore: 2%
- UK: 8%
- KSA: 5%
- UAE: 4%
- Canada: 5%
- USA: 6%

60% of KSA students unaware how to avoid plagiarism

Similarly to the UAE students, there is plenty of room in Saudi Arabian universities to improve students' awareness and understanding of academic integrity issues. In particular, avoiding plagiarism appears to be a low-awareness issue, with only 40% of students reporting that they had heard about support to do this.

Q. In 2023, did you hear about the following from your university? Please select all that apply

Workshops to improve referencing skills stood out as the highest-awareness support service, with 59% relying on them. Notably, female students exhibited greater awareness of 'where to get referencing help' compared to their male counterparts (49% vs. 40%).

> "i cant really remember any other things aside from plagiarism."

> "I can actually understand most things on my own."

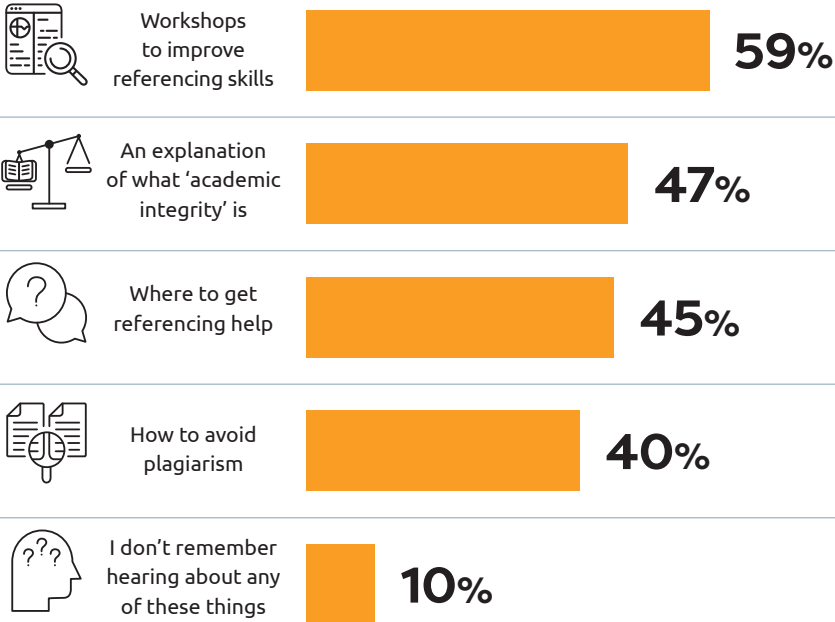> "I think more information being provided by my university would have been helpful"

Q. When you are unsure about plagiarism or your referencing, how would you prefer to get help? *Please rank the following in order of preference.*
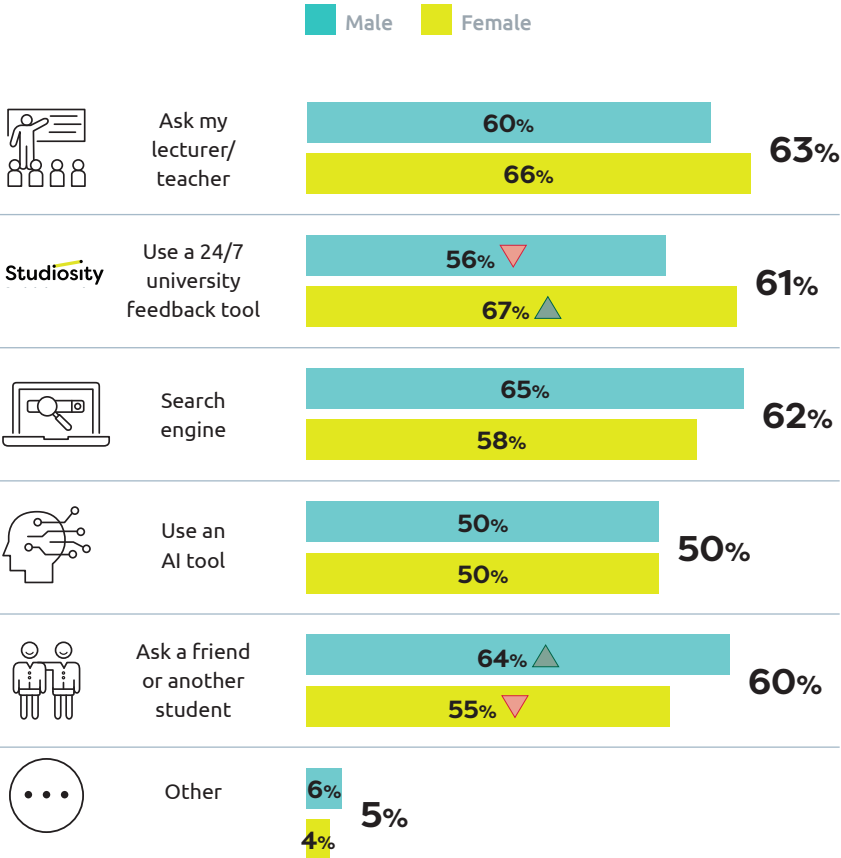
In terms of plagiarism or referencing assistance, students most commonly ranked 'Ask my lecturer/ teacher' as their first preference (27% ranked first). This was followed by 'using a 24/7 university online writing feedback tool' at 22%, and then 'asking a friend or another student' (18%).

A significant number (67%) of female students ranked using a '24/7 university online writing feedback tool,' in their top 3, whilst 64% of male students preferred seeking help from a friend or peer.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AWARENESS FROM THE UNIVERSITY

Workshops to improve referencing skills	59%
An explanation of what 'academic integrity' is	47%
Where to get referencing help	45%
How to avoid plagiarism	40%
I don't remember hearing about any of these things	10%

TOP 3 RANKED PREFERENCE FOR HELP WITH REFERENCING OR AVOIDING PLAGIARISM – GENDER

■ Male   ■ Female

	Male	Female	Total
Ask my lecturer/ teacher	60%	66%	63%
Use a 24/7 university feedback tool	56% ▽	67% △	61%
Search engine	65%	58%	62%
Use an AI tool	50%	50%	50%
Ask a friend or another student	64% △	55% ▽	60%
Other	6%	4%	5%

Studiosity

Q. Please rate how confident you feel about the following statements on a scale of 1 to 5 where 5 is very confident and 1 is not confident at all.

Nearly two thirds of students are confident in future employment prospects.

Whilst confidence was generally high when it comes to degrees developing skills to succeed in their future jobs, with a net confidence of 69%, this is not quite as high when it comes to confidence in future employment, with 60% of students feeling 'confident' or 'very confident' that they will be able to get a job related to their degree within 6 months of graduation.

Students who studied STEM and Business courses felt significantly more confident about having strong English writing and communication skills than the rest of the students studying other courses, with 78% and 75% respectively.

"Competition is tough, that's why I need to be prepared to deal in the real world."

"I am very confident I can secure an internship within 6 months of graduating."

EMPLOYABILITY CONFIDENCE

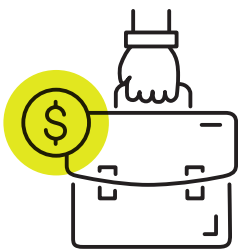■ 1. Not confident at all   ■ 2   ■ 3   ■ 4   ■ 5. Very confident

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
My degree is developing the skills I need to succeed in my future job	2%	7%	22%	33%	36%
I have strong English writing and communication skills needed to apply for and get a job	3%	7%	21%	30%	39%
I will be able to get a job related to my degree, within 6 months of graduation	5%	10%	25%	27%	33%

Females more confident in English skills and job prospects

Female students had an overall higher net confidence rating than males for each of the employability questions. 67% of males felt confident that they are developing the skills they need to succeed, compared to 72% of females. Female students felt significantly more confident about having strong English writing and communication skills than male students (77% vs 68%). And when asked if they were confident they could secure a job in their field within 6 months of employment, females responded 'confident' or 'very confident' at a rate of 66%, compared to males at 60%.

Q. Please rate how confident you feel about the following statements on a scale of 1 to 5 where 5 is very confident and 1 is not confident at all.

While most students felt confident with their employability, those with grades classed under credit felt mostly neutral about their 'prospects related to their degree within 6 months after graduation' (36%), highlighting an opportunity to provide more assistance and support for this cohort.
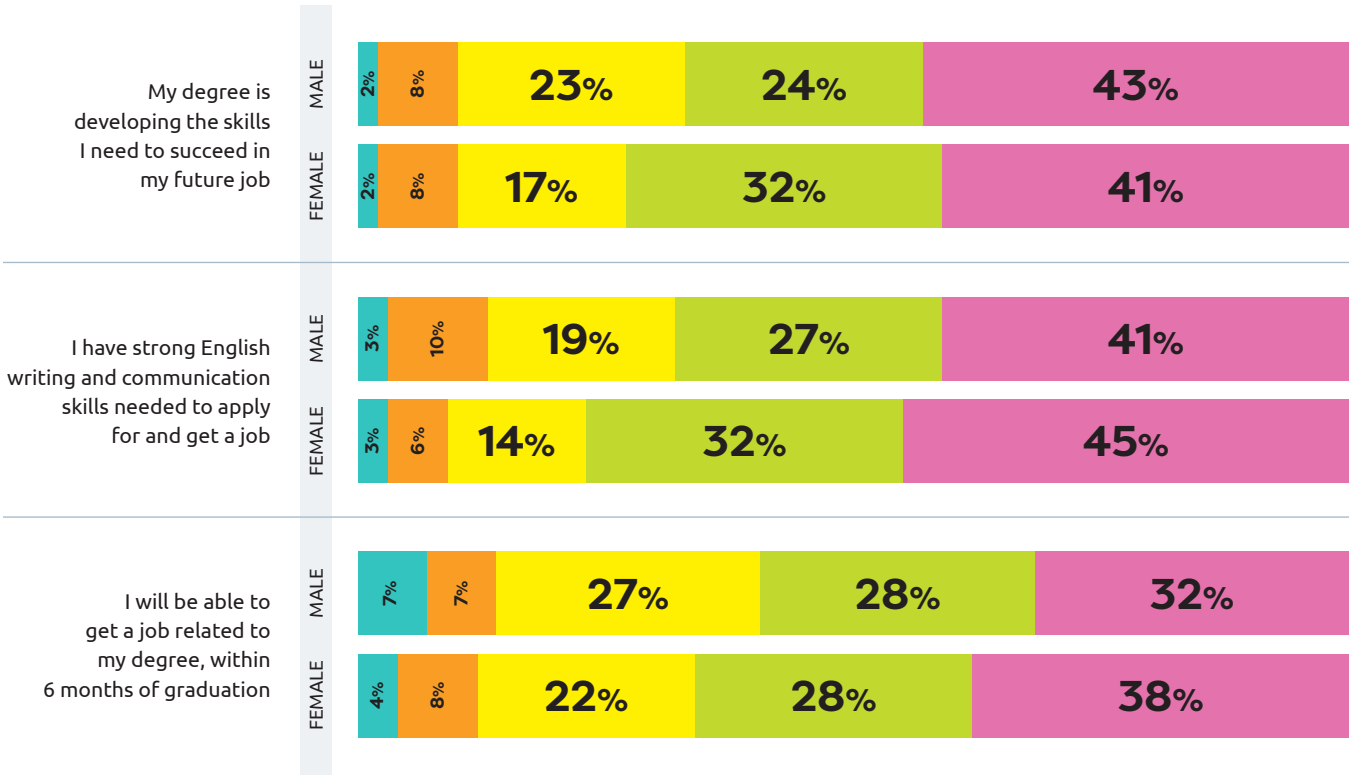
"Stressing about artificial intelligence taking over my future jobs."

"The degree is good but practicing makes the confidence more strong."

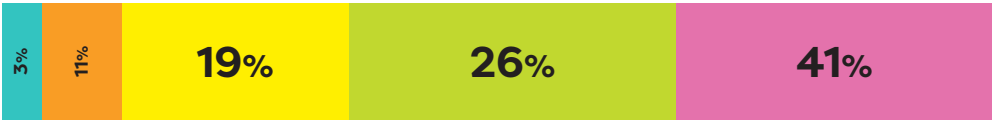"Confidence is essential to be successful."

EMPLOYABILITY CONFIDENCE

- 1. Not confident at all
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5. Very confident

My degree is developing the skills I need to succeed in my future job

MALE: 2% | 8% | 23% | 24% | 43%
FEMALE: 2% | 8% | 17% | 32% | 41%

I have strong English writing and communication skills needed to apply for and get a job

MALE: 3% | 10% | 19% | 27% | 41%
FEMALE: 3% | 6% | 14% | 32% | 45%

I will be able to get a job related to my degree, within 6 months of graduation

MALE: 7% | 7% | 27% | 28% | 32%
FEMALE: 4% | 8% | 22% | 28% | 38%

Chapter 3: Employability

EMPLOYABILITY CONFIDENCE - STUDENTS WITH AVERAGE GRADE OF 'CREDIT' (N=116)

Legend: 1. Not confident at all | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5. Very confident

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
My degree is developing the skills I need to succeed in my future job	3%	11%	19%	26%	41%
I have strong English writing and communication skills needed to apply for and get a job		5%	23%	28%	43%
I will be able to get a job related to my degree, within 6 months of graduation	7%	6%	36%	23%	28%
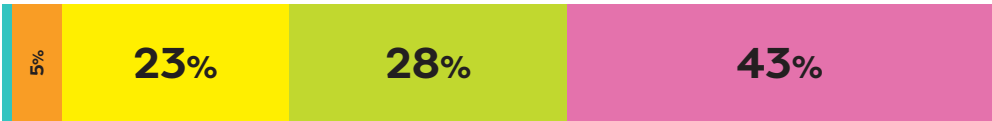
Students with average grade of 'Credit' (n=116).

Image obove: Students in Dubai attending a presentation with Studiosity

## Students feel that they belong, and use support services.

Q. Thinking about the factors you considered when selecting your degree / university, please rank the following in order of importance.

In the UAE, 'offering the right course' and 'university advertising' were both strong influential factors for students in choosing their degree or university (42% and 43% respectively).

Domestic students were much more likely to select 'Cost' as an influential factor than international students (30% vs 21%).
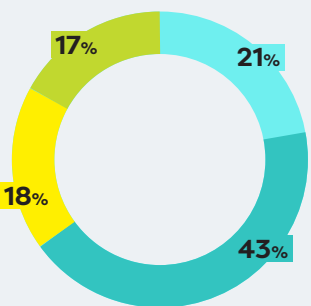
FACTORS CONSIDERED WHEN SELECTING A DEGREE/UNIVERSITY

- Close to home
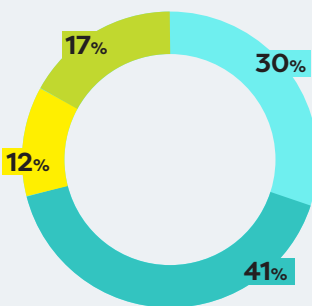- Far from home
- If offered the right course for me
- Cost

17%
24%
16%
42%

FACTORS CONSIDERED WHEN SELECTING A DEGREE/UNIVERSITY

- Close to home
- Far from home
- If offered the right course for me
- Cost

17%
21%
18%
43%

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT

17%
30%
12%
41%
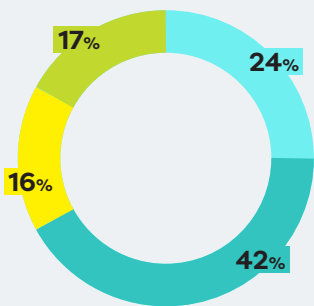
DOMESTIC STUDENT

Q. Which of the following is most important to you?

Those who had an average grade of high distinction had a significantly higher preference of 'global rankings' (61%), whilst those who averaged a pass grade preferred 'a good student experience' over 'global rankings' (68%).

IMPORTANCE OF UNIVERSITY GLOBAL RANKING VS ACTIVITIES

- Global ranking of the university's reputation
- Lots of activities, ways to make friends and support (a good student experience)
- Other

Non-pass (below 50%)

| 38% | 62% |

Pass (50–64%)

| 32% ▽ | 68% ▲ |

Credit (65–74%)

| 53% | 44% |

Distinction (75–84%)

| 46% | 53% |

High distinction (85–100%)

| 61% ▲ | 38% ▽ |

Q. Do you feel like you 'belong' in your university community?
(for example, do you feel supported and included?)

Q. In which of the following ways, if any, has your university made you feel like you belong? *Please rank your Top 3.*

UAE students experienced a significantly strong sense of belonging (83%, in keeping with last year which was also 83%), much higher compared to other countries. The survey explored what contributes to a sense of belonging for students, and key factors included 'feeling confident in reaching out to their teachers' (64% ranked in their top 3, and especially among high-achieving students, 74% ranked in top 3), 'having a flexible schedule allowing for a balance between work and study' (53%), and 'the ability to easily connect with a student mentor' (50%).
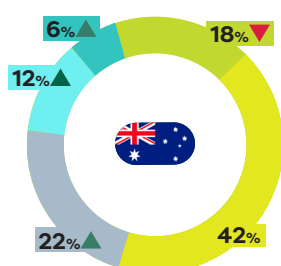
"Encouraging and supporting a variety of student organizations and clubs allows students to connect with like-minded peers and build a sense of community."

"The university is good, it has a good atmosphere."
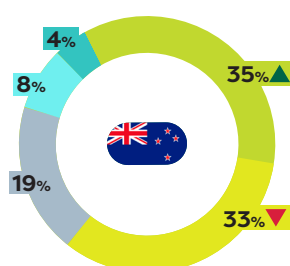
"Missing home makes it harder to belong"

FEELING OF 'BELONGING' IN UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY - COUNTRY

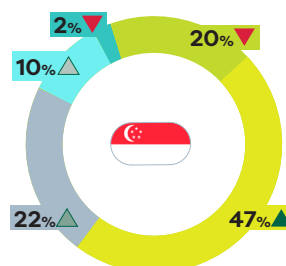- Not much at all
- Not much
- Neutral
- Somewhat
- Very much

AUSTRALIA

60%▼ likely to feel like they belong, with only **18%**▲ unlikely.

NEW ZEALAND

69% likely to feel like they belong, with only **12%** unlikely.

SINGAPORE

67% likely to feel like they belong, with only **12%** unlikely.
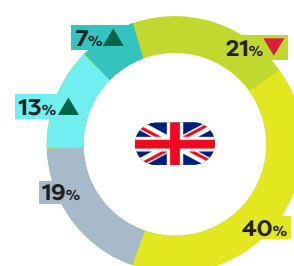
UNITED KINGDOM

61%▼ likely to feel like they belong, with only **20%**▲ unlikely.
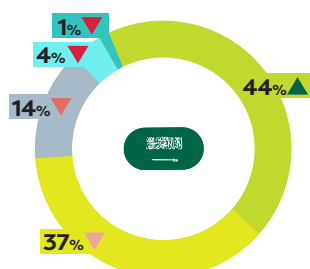
SAUDI ARABIA (KSA)

81%▲ likely to feel like they belong, with only **5%**▼ unlikely.
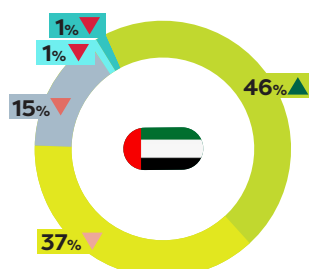
UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

83%▲ likely to feel like they belong, with only **2%**▼ unlikely.

CANADA

68% likely to feel like they belong, with only **12%** unlikely.

USA

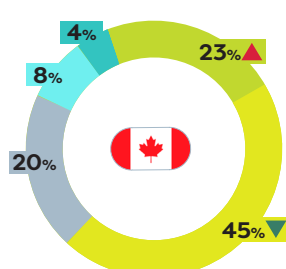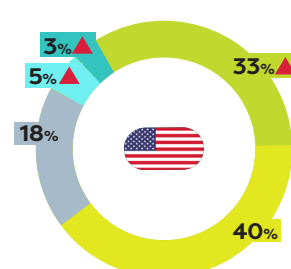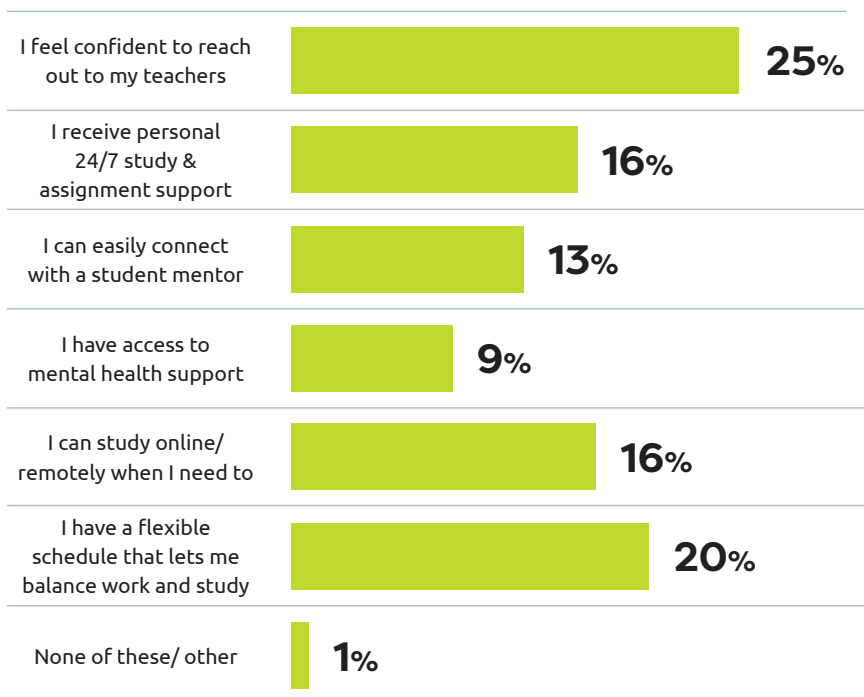**74%**▲ likely to feel like they belong, with only **8%**▼ unlikely.

Feeling confident to reach out to teachers was ranked as the top reason for a sense of belonging by a quarter of students, showing that they are supported to communicate directly with their educators. It may also indicate an abundance of around-the-clock enquiries being fielded by academic staff, so further investigation as to whether this is a sustainable and encouraged practice by institutions is necessary.

BELONGING REASONS - RANKED FIRST

Reason	Percentage
I feel confident to reach out to my teachers	25%
I receive personal 24/7 study & assignment support	16%
I can easily connect with a student mentor	13%
I have access to mental health support	9%
I can study online/ remotely when I need to	16%
I have a flexible schedule that lets me balance work and study	20%
None of these/ other	1%

FREQUENCY OF USE OF UNIVERSITY'S ACADEMIC SUPPORT SERVICES

■ Once a week ■ Once a month ■ Once a semester/trimester ■ Never

Service	Once a week	Once a month	Once a semester/trimester	Never
Asked my teachers directly	61%	24%	15%	
University's 24/7 feedback service	45%	31%	24%	
Asked a Learning Support officer	41%	40%	20%	
Asked a student mentor	42%	40%	19%	
Joined a peer support program	39%	47%	13%	
Attended a study workshop	26%	52%	22%	
Mental health support	39%	39%	21%	
Online/remote study option	47%	35%	18%	

USED UNIVERSITY'S ACADEMIC SUPPORT SERVICES

■ Yes ■ No

79%

21%

Nearly eighty percent of students accessed their university's academic support services, with 'asking teachers directly' (52%) being the most mentioned and frequently used (61% accessing once a week), followed by online/remote study options (45%) and attending study workshops (43%).

Recognising the diversity of student experiences in 2024, universities can look to serving all students regardless of location or academic literacy, with a focus on scaled, online study supports for the most frequent use, in addition to peer mentoring access, and scaling teacher capacity to respond to student enquiries.

UNIVERSITY'S ACADEMIC SUPPORT SERVICES USED

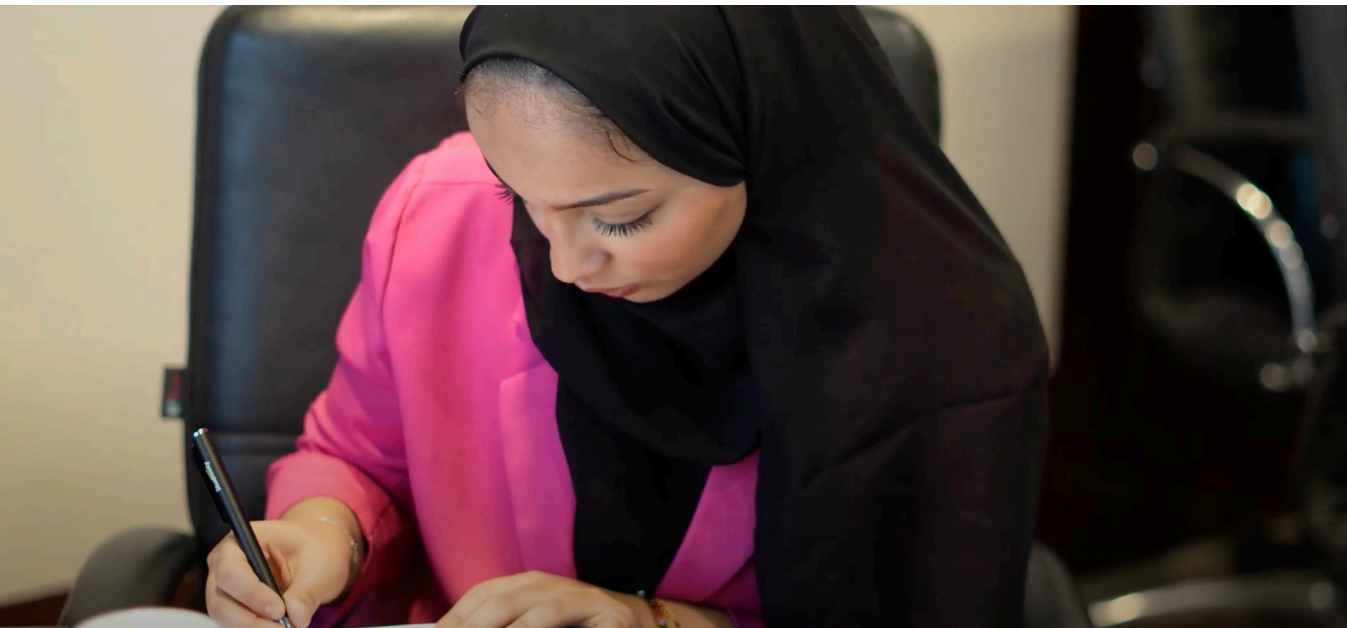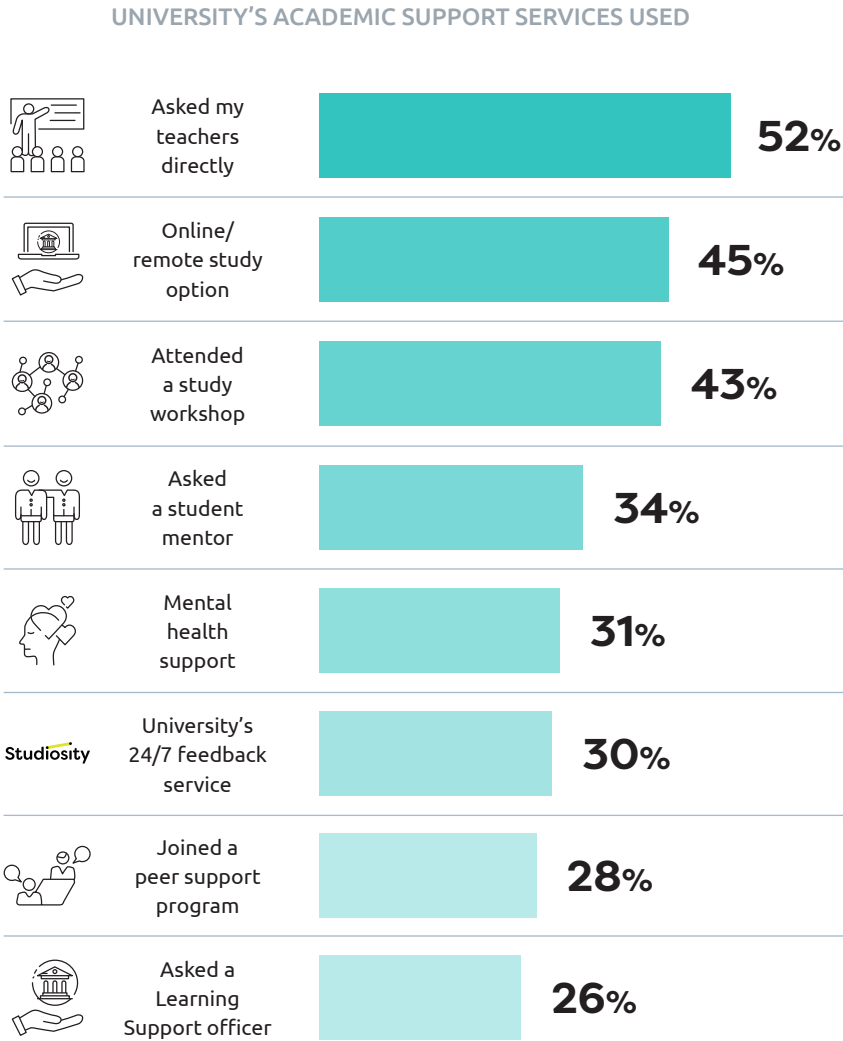| Service	%
Asked my teachers directly	**52%**
Online/remote study option	**45%**
Attended a study workshop	**43%**
Asked a student mentor	**34%**
Mental health support	**31%**
Studiosity University's 24/7 feedback service	**30%**
Joined a peer support program	**28%**
Asked a Learning Support officer	**26%**

Image obove: Lana Isam, Ajman University

English-speakers feel that they belong, and use support services

When choosing their degree or university, KSA students were most influenced by the university's course offerings (43%) and 'university advertising' (45%).

Q. Which of the following is most important to you?

Proximity to home and cost were evenly-weighted first ranked options.

"I just see a good community I can get involved with and activities that are suitable for me."

"Their online library system was helpful."

MOST IMPORTANT WHEN SELECTING DEGREE / UNIVERSITY

It offered the right course for me	**43%**
Far from home	**19%**
Cost	**19%**
Close to home	**19%**
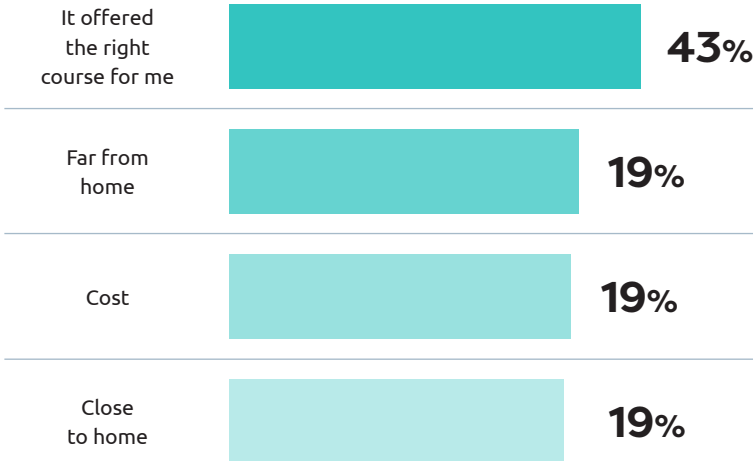
INFLUENCERS WHEN SELECTING DEGREE / UNIVERSITY

University advertising	**45%**
Family went there	**30%**
Friends went there	**25%**

Image obove: Farah Zakut, Ajman University

Q. Do you feel like you 'belong' in your university community?

(for example, do you feel supported and included?)

Q. In which of the following ways, if any, has your university made you feel like you belong?
Please rank your Top 3.

Having a strong 'sense of belonging' to the university community is widely correlated with student success metrics, though it is challengi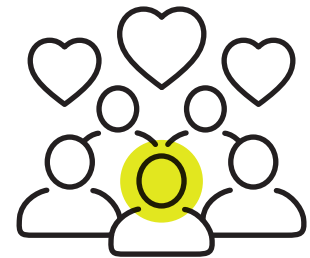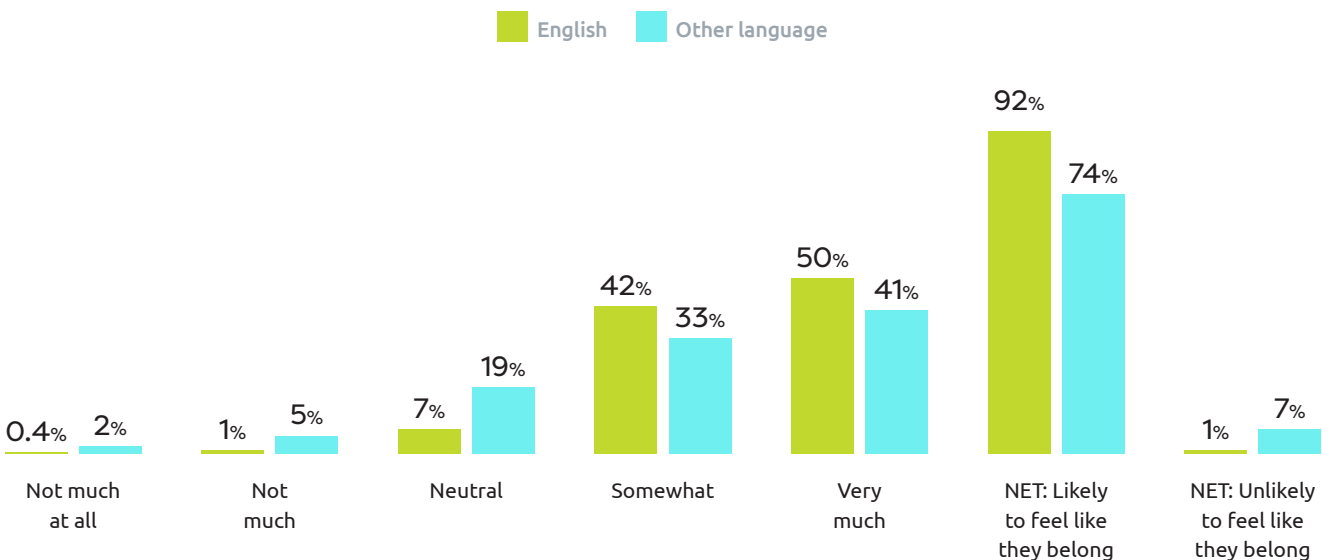ng to measure outside of students' own self-reported rating. In Saudi Arabia, belonging was notably high (net likely to feel like they belong 81%, in line with last year's 80%) compared to other countries, with primary reasons: feeling 'confident to reach out to teachers' (60%), having the option to 'study online/remotely' (55%), and receiving 'personal 24/7 study and assignment support' (48%).

Male respondents are slightly more likely to feel that they belong (83%) compared to females (78%). Students with English as their first language are significantly more likely to feel that they belong, at 92% - where only 74% of those with English as an additional language felt the same sense of 'belonging' to their university community.

Among students using their university's academic support services (73%), half 'asked teachers directly' (50%), and just over half of these students connected with teachers once a week (55%).

FEELING OF 'BELONGING' TO UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY - FIRST LANGUAGE

English **Other language**

	English	Other language
Not much at all	0.4%	2%
Not much	1%	5%
Neutral	7%	19%
Somewhat	42%	33%
Very much	50%	41%
NET: Likely to feel like they belong	92%	74%
NET: Unlikely to feel like they belong	1%	7%

Students in full time employment were more likely to have used their university's support services (77% compared to 70% of students in casual employment, and 64% of those unemployed). This could be a symptom of a reliance on support services when you are juggling more time commitments.

UNIVERSITY'S ACADEMIC SUPPORT SERVICES USED

Service	Percentage
Asked my teachers directly	53%
Online/remote study option	45%
Attended a study workshop	44%
Asked a student mentor	34%
Mental health support	31%
University's 24/7 feedback service	30%
Joined a peer support program	28%
Asked a Learning Support officer	26%

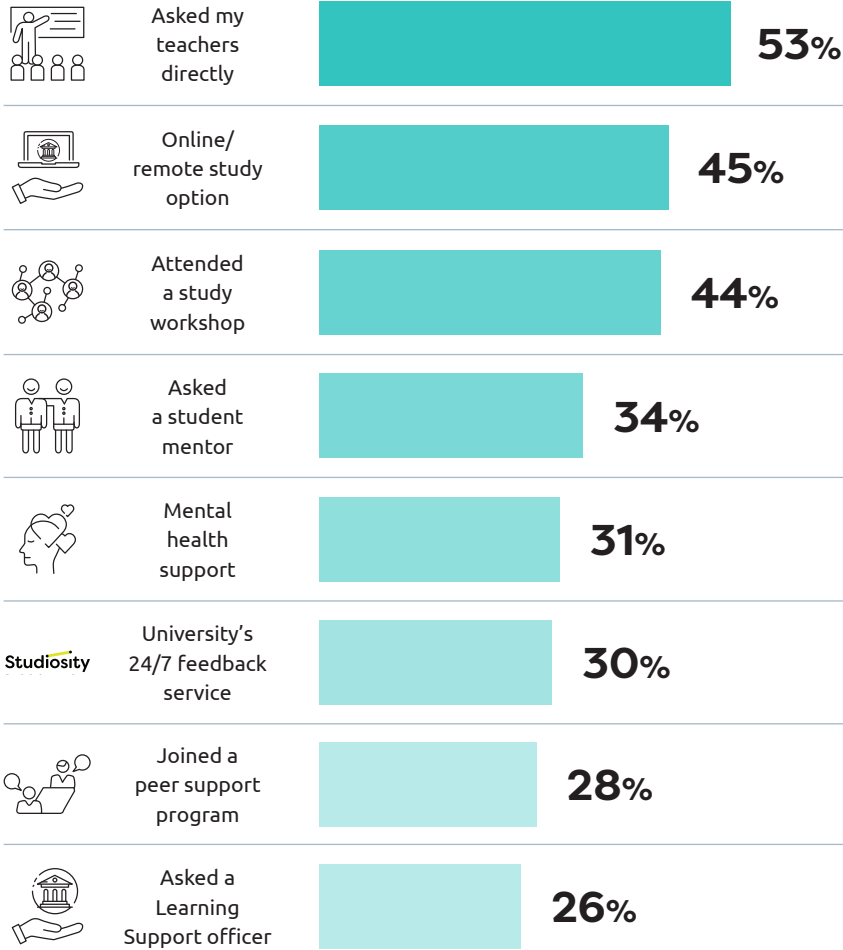### USED UNIVERSITY'S ACADEMIC SUPPORT SERVICES

Yes No

73%
27%
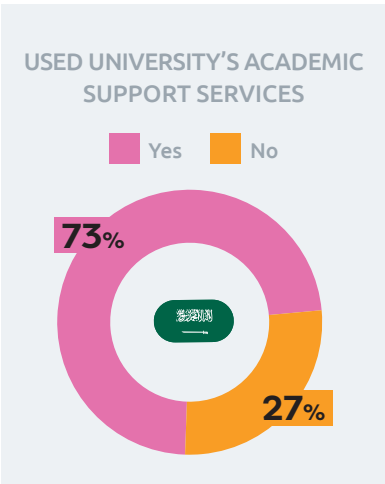
Image obove: Obaya Ahmed, Ajman University

Most UAE students have a peer mentor

Being able to connect with peers and be part of the academic community is a critical part of university life, and a known contributor to student success and wellbeing.

Q. Did you have a student mentor? *(for example - a student in a senior year who could provide study advice anytime you needed it)*

Q. Would you have liked to have a senior student mentor?

Three quarters of UAE students said they had access to a student mentor, showing that universities in this region have a good coverage of students using peer support - however the remaining quarter must be considered. Of those, 60% said they would have liked one. Younger students, aged 18-25, were less likely to have a peer mentor (71%) than those in the 26-33 age group (80%).

International students were also more likely to have a mentor (78%) compared to domestic (70%), and English speakers much more (84%) compared to English as additional language speakers (61%). Interestingly, of those who did not have a mentor, English speakers were evenly split on whether they would have liked to have one, whereas EAL speakers mostly did want one (66%).

WANTED A SENIOR STUDENT MENTOR - FIRST LANGUAGE

■ Yes ■ No

50% **50%**

ENGLISH

66% **34%**
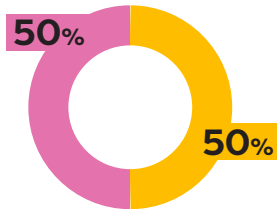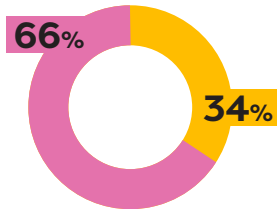
OTHER LANGUAGE

Q. When you started your degree, how easy was it to ask other students questions? *on a scale of 1 to 5 where 5 is very easy and 1 is very hard.*

Connecting with other students was deemed easy by most (61%), although domestic students found it harder to connect than international students (15% versus 9% respectively). University leaders can look to creating more opportunities to connect between students, regardless of their study modes or academic statuses.

"Social stress, including getting along with classmates, professors, and others, and adjusting to new social situations."

"Constantly interacting with your peers can somehow improve your intellectual skills and helps you understand your degree easily."

EASE OF ASKING QUESTIONS TO OTHER STUDENTS

■ 1. Very hard　■ 2. Hard　■ 3.　■ 4. Easy　■ 5. Very easy

3% 8% 29% 28% 32%

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

2%▽ 7% 30% 29% 32%

DOMESTIC STUDENTS

5%△ 10% 27% 27% 32%
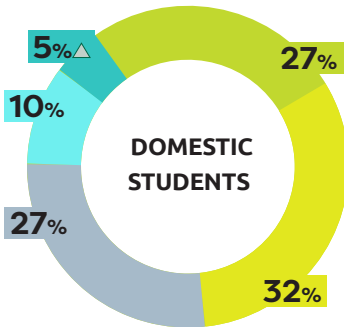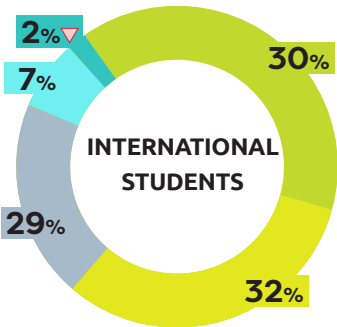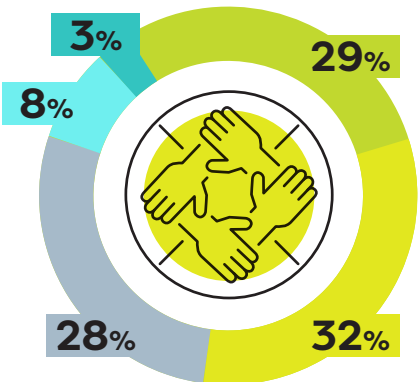
One third of KSA students struggle to connect with others

Q. Did you have a student mentor? *(for example - a student in a senior year who could provide study advice anytime you needed it)*

Q. Would you have liked to have a senior student mentor?

72% of students had a peer mentor available, similar to the UAE result. By contrast, more domestic students in Saudi Arabia had a peer mentor (74%) than international students (70%). Part-time students were also significantly more likely to have a mentor (78% vs 69% full time students), and males were more likely to as well (75% vs 67% of females).

Out of those who did not have a mentor available, just over half said they would have liked one, though this rose to 63% for STEM students, and 72% for English as a first language students.

Q. When you started your degree, how easy was it to ask other students questions? *on a scale of 1 to 5 where 5 is very easy and 1 is very hard.*

Two out of three students (67%) found it easy to connect with other students, with female students finding it easier than male students (73% vs 62% respectively). Those for whom English is their first language found it much easier (77%) than those for whom English is an additional language (60%).

University leaders can consider the impact of facilitating more and simpler connections between students who are learning English, and those who speak proficiently as well as students across all study modes.

> **"I made a lot of friends that share the same thoughts and ideas."**

EASE OF ASKING QUESTIONS TO OTHER STUDENTS

Legend: 1. Very hard | 2. Hard | 3. | 4. Easy | 5. Very easy

Overall:
- 3% (1. Very hard)
- 8% (2. Hard)
- 23% (3.)
- 25% (4. Easy)
- 41% (5. Very easy)

MALE
- 4% (1. Very hard)
- 10% ▲ (2. Hard)
- 24% (3.)
- 18% ▼ (4. Easy)
- 44% (5. Very easy)

FEMALE
- 2% (1. Very hard)
- 4% ▼ (2. Hard)
- 21% (3.)
- 34% ▲ (4. Easy)
- 38% (5. Very easy)
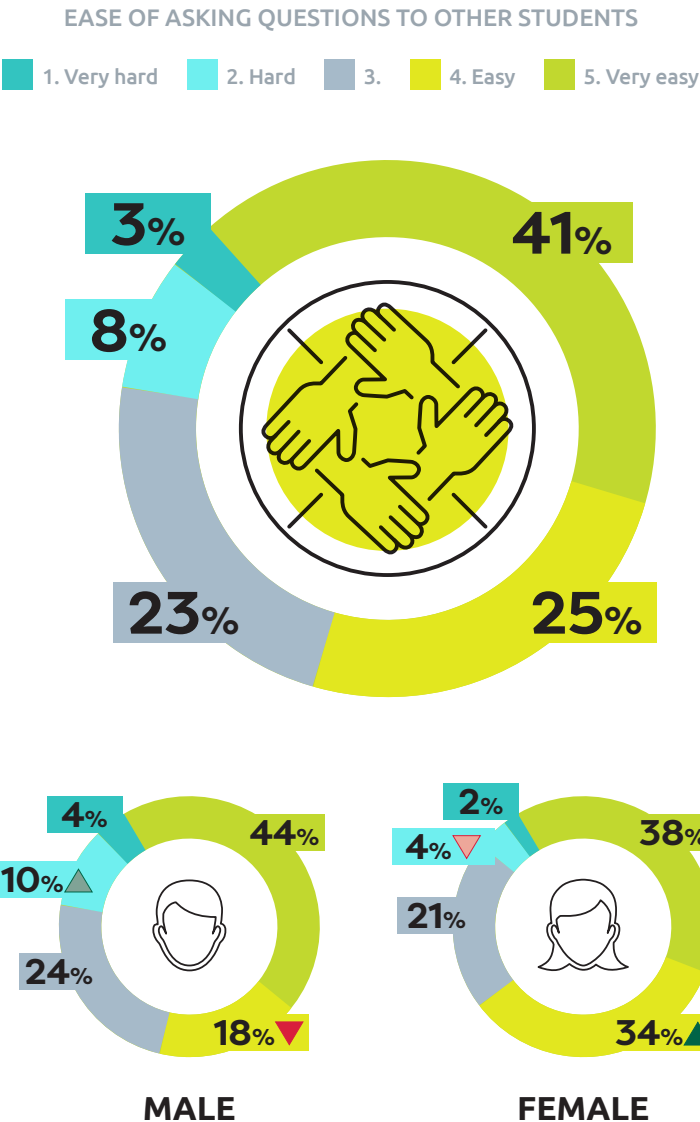
Stress levels remain steady, students struggling more with managing responsibilities independently

Students reported lower stress levels than their counterparts in other countries, with the majority experiencing stress a few times per term/semester (24%). This is in keeping with last year's results, though the trend seems to show that students are more frequently stressed (with 11% stressed constantly compared to 9% last year), overall the level of students feeling study-related stress weekly or more remained consistent year on year.
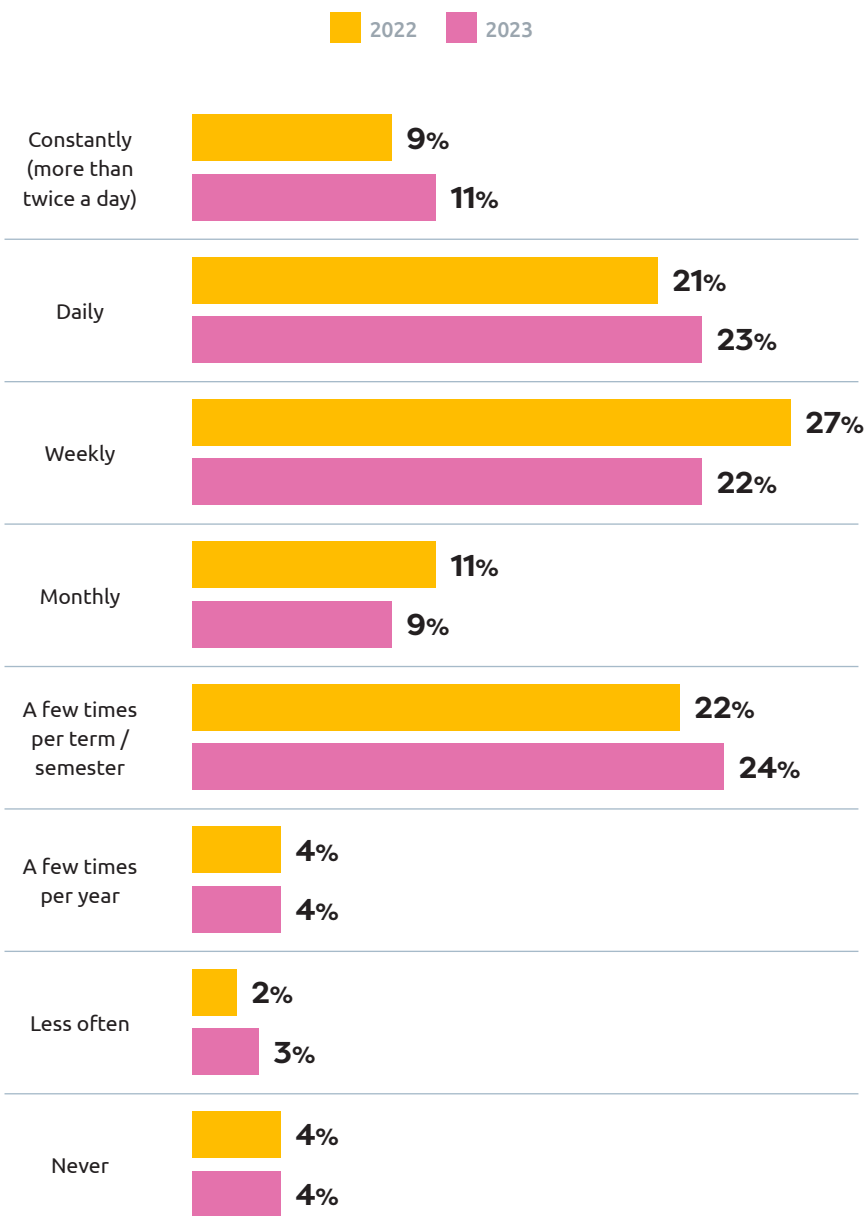
In the UAE, the primary cause of stress was 'managing more responsibility on my own' (47%, above the global average), which has risen since last year's 30%. The next most common cause of stress is 'not having enough time to balance life commitments' (43%, particularly notable among part-time workers, 48%), which last year was the primary cause of stress for most students (54%).

Males are more likely to struggle with 'difficult course content' (44%) compared to females (33%). English as a first language speakers are more likely to struggle with 'meeting new friends' (31%) compared to EAL students (18%). This could indicate that those English speakers may need additional peer support.

"There isn't much stress when entering university life as the faculties and superiors are very passionate and lenient. There are times I've been stressed but that's only because of my fees being a hurdle in my upcoming exams. Other than that I've never felt stressed or threatened as such. Maybe for other courses they have more pressure since they need to give out models and reports every week but not the case for me."

"Finishing assignments by deadline can be quite stressful."

YOY UAE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS, STRESS FREQUENCY DURING STUDY

2022   2023

Category	2022	2023
Constantly (more than twice a day)	9%	11%
Daily	21%	23%
Weekly	27%	22%
Monthly	11%	9%
A few times per term / semester	22%	24%
A few times per year	4%	4%
Less often	2%	3%
Never	4%	4%

57% stressed weekly or more

56% stressed weekly or more

TOP 3 RANKED CAUSES OF STUDY STRESS – EMPLOYMENT STATUS

Legend: Casual | Part-time | Full-time | Not in paid employment

Cause	Casual	Part-time	Full-time	Not in paid employment	Total
Managing more responsibility on my own	45%	48%	49%	45%	48%
Not enough time to balance other commitments	43%	48% ▲	31% ▼	52%	43%
Paying for degree / study	30% ▽	41%	48%	51%	42%
Difficult course content	47%	36% ▽	44%	39%	40%
Not enough time to prepare for exams & assessments	38%	35%	27% ▽	55% ▲	36%
Sticking to academic writing rules (i.e referencing and AI use)	38%	30%	38%	27%	33%
Finding study help	27%	29%	33%	17%	28%
Meeting new friends	31%	29%	26%	10% ▼	26%
Other	1%	5%	5%	5%	4%

Students are more stressed, struggle with course content

Compared to students in neighboring geographies, a higher proportion of students in the surveyed group reported experiencing stress regularly, with 30% facing it weekly and 22% on a daily basis. Daily and weekly stress levels are in line with last year's results, however 'constant' stress has increased by 4 percentage points. This could signify to university leaders to ensure mental wellbeing services are available and accessible to as many students as possible.

The primary cause of stress, cited by 47% of students who experienced weekly and daily stress (n=256), was identified as 'difficult course content.' Notably, male students reported a higher prevalence of this type of stress at 56%, and within the subgroup studying medicine, 66% experienced stress around course content, though it's important to acknowledge the small sample size (n=30).
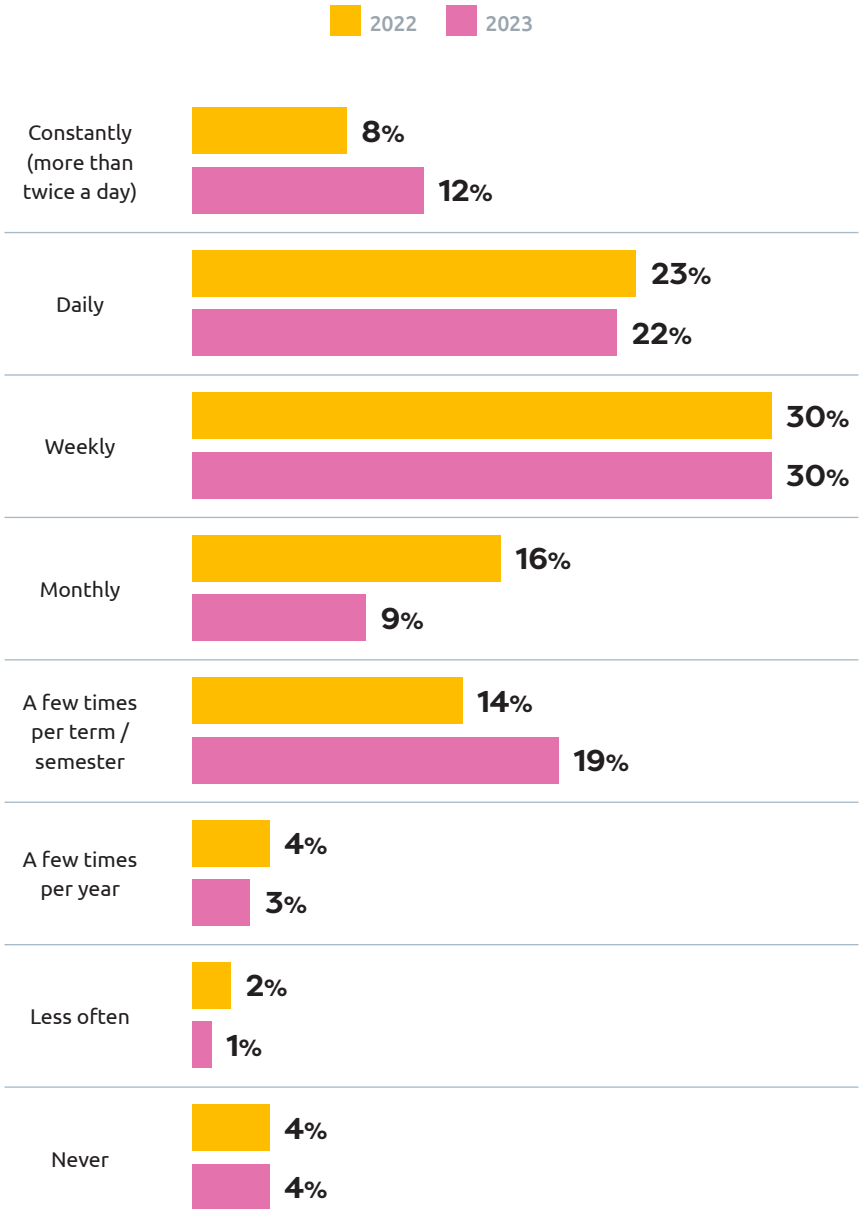
Last year, only 36% of KSA students were stressed by course difficulty, and the primary cause of stress was 'Balancing work or social commitments with study' at 40%. It is interesting to note how attitudes shift year on year, however a few more years' data is required to draw any significant longitudinal conclusions.

"Not being able to manage studies and work respectively."

"Passing the exams specially that you will pay the course again in case you failed."

"Yes, there are a lot of pressures, for example you want to achieve a record in the exam and not fail. Disappointment from friends and loved ones causes a lot of stress."

YOY KSA UNIVERSITY STUDENTS, STRESS FREQUENCY DURING STUDY

■ 2022   ■ 2023

	2022	2023
Constantly (more than twice a day)	8%	12%
Daily	23%	22%
Weekly	30%	30%
Monthly	16%	9%
A few times per term / semester	14%	19%
A few times per year	4%	3%
Less often	2%	1%
Never	4%	4%

61% stressed weekly or more

64%▲ stressed weekly or more

TOP 3 RANKED CAUSES OF STUDY STRESS – GENDER

■ Male ■ Female

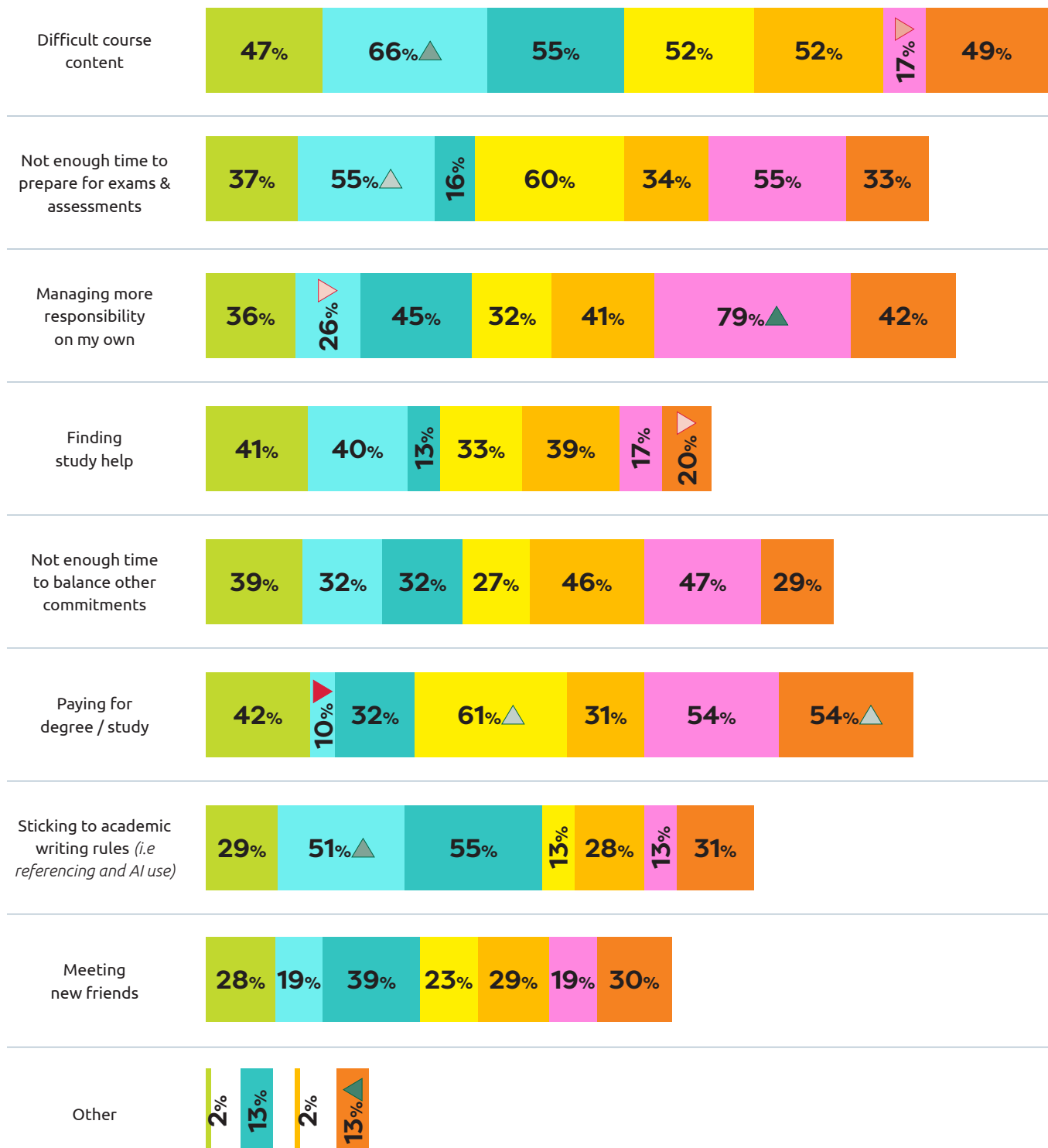| Cause	Male	Female	Total
Difficult course content	56% ▲	36% ▼	47%
Not enough time to prepare for exams & assessments	45% ▲	34% ▼	40%
Managing more responsibility on my own	40%	39%	40%
Finding study help	36%	40%	38%
Not enough time to balance other commitments	35%	40%	37%
Paying for degree / study	31% ▼	42% ▲	36%
Sticking to academic writing rules (i.e referencing and AI use)	32%	33%	32%
Meeting new friends	23%	32%	27%
Other	2%	4%	3%
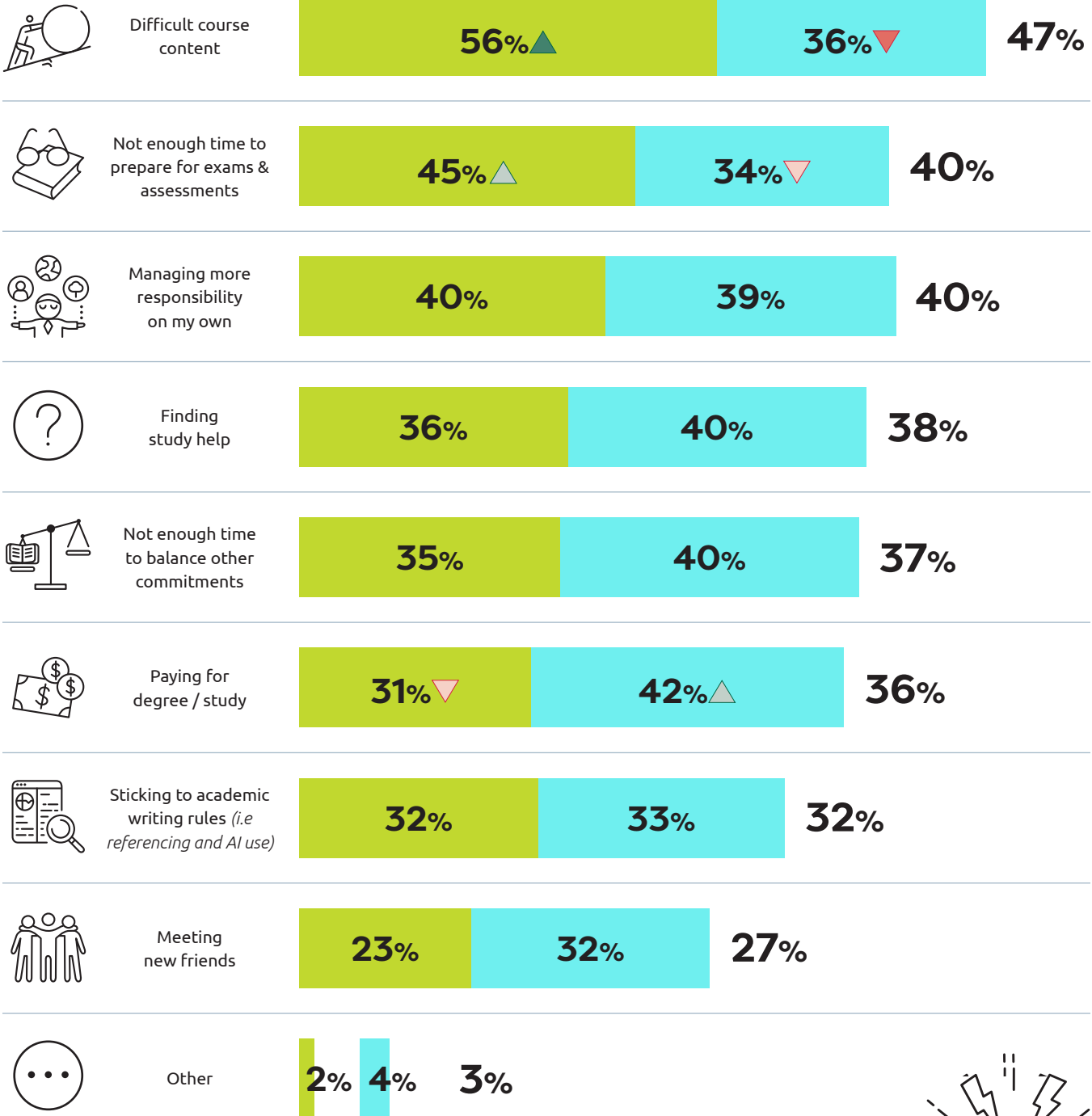
Students who reported daily or weekly stress (n=256)
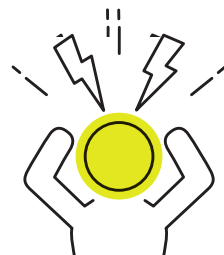
TOP 3 RANKED CAUSES OF STUDY STRESS – AREAS OF STUDY

Legend: STEM · Medicine · Nursing · Psychology · Business · Law · Languages

Cause	STEM	Medicine	Nursing	Psychology	Business	Law	Languages
Difficult course content	47%	66%	55%	52%	52%	17%	49%
Not enough time to prepare for exams & assessments	37%	55%	16%	60%	34%	55%	33%
Managing more responsibility on my own	36%	26%	45%	32%	41%	79%	42%
Finding study help	41%	40%	13%	33%	39%	17%	20%
Not enough time to balance other commitments	39%	32%	32%	27%	46%	47%	29%
Paying for degree / study	42%	10%	32%	61%	31%	54%	54%
Sticking to academic writing rules (i.e referencing and AI use)	29%	51%	55%	13%	28%	13%	31%
Meeting new friends	28%	19%	39%	23%	29%	19%	30%
Other	2%	13%			2%		13%

Students who reported daily or weekly stress (n=256)

Students' recommendations to their education providers:

This year, students were asked to offer their qualitative comment on how to improve students' wellbeing, success, overall experience, and could offer an 'other' topic area of interest. Themes are grouped by frequency, and a real student comment is included.

Overall, students ask their institutions to consider providing more one-to-one connection, to prioritise mental health supports, improve communication and transparency and awareness of resources, reduce financial pressure, and offer more feedback mechanisms.

UAE students' recommendations for: **Wellbeing**

UAE

Provide more support groups
"Offer mental health resources and establish peer support groups."
"A weekly support group or mentor that could orient us about taking good care of our overall wellness."
"Building Learning Communities"

Increase flexibility of delivery and engagement
"Develop a better Study-Life balance system"
"Firstly, they could focus on creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for students. Additionally, implementing programs or initiatives that promote work-life balance and stress management could greatly benefit students' well-being. It's also important to encourage open communication and create channels for students to express their concerns or seek help when needed. Overall, prioritizing the well-being of students can greatly enhance their overall college experience."
"Make hours flexible"
"Maybe reduce the amount of assignments assigned"
"More time for family"

Offer more feedback
"Giving opportunities to contribute. Providing specific feedback. Providing high levels of support. Setting the right tasks difficulty level."

"Giving support 24/7"
"Better understanding and bonding with the lecturers / teachers"
"Conduct regular check-ins to understand students' progress and challenges."

Host and promote on-campus events
"Cultural events so that everyone feels belonged"
"More activities on campus supporting/ encouraging fitness and wellbeing"

Increase access to mental health resources
"Counseling sessions"
"Having monthly mental checkup"
"Implement programs that raise awareness about mental health, reduce stigma, and provide resources for stress management and self-care."
"Introducing mindfulness lessons which focus on breathing and worrying less"

Financial assistance/scholarships
"Make the university cheaper with more activities"
"Making studies and tuition fees more inclusive, especially for international students"
"Help the students who can't afford the cost of education"

KSA students' recommendations for: **Wellbeing**

Support students with time management
"Ensure all students have enough time for their study"
"Enough time for exam preparations"
"Have flexible programs to fit with people. Especially for people with lots of responsibilities"
"less stressful deadlines"
"Flexible time for the assignments"

Facilitate more extra-curricular activities
"Fun and entertaining activities to keep you from getting bored"
"Having more sports option and actually giving preference to it rather than classes all day"
"More activities, less courses"
"Musical activities and exhibitions"

Increase access to mental health services
"Increase access to mental health counselors. Universities can aim for a ratio of one counselor per 250 students, and ensure counselors are culturally competent and diverse to meet the needs of their student body"
"More mental health resources, partnerships, and inclusive environment."

"Offering regular mental health check-ins and access to counseling services, promoting a balanced workload, and providing resources for stress management and self-care"

Deliver more health education
"Offer more mental health courses"
"Offer a lecture per month about health and / or offering more activities to alumnis."
"Having (or installing) a positivity board"

UAE students' recommendations for: **Success**

Personalize support for students
"Establish peer mentorship programs for academic and personal support."
"Providing resources and support tailored to different learning styles and needs can empower students to achieve academic success."
"Provide support and encourage students to do more and push themselves more"
"Ensure to give proper feedback"
"Offer dedicated tutoring services for students who need additional assistance."

Incorporate more technology
"They should increase on the use AI because they are good for personal assessments and confidence boost"

"Support AI tools whom make student study"
"AI tools should be integrated to assist us solve and go thru difficult task where we are alone"
"Get better labs for AI"

Ensure materials and tools are inclusive and accessible
"Ensure that all learning materials are accessible to students with disabilities."
"Course content and language must be inclusive and culturally sensitive."
"Providing the availability of free or low-cost tools so students can access"

Provide more career resources and hands-on experience
"Help in job and other possible opportunities"
"Govt. Should encourage universities for paid internships"
"Improve connections between my university with real world businesses"
"Give students practical experience and push them to different workshops"
"More career workshops like CV writing/ feedback and opportunities for current students to get paid internships or part time jobs to gain experience."

Improve assignment timetabling
"More flexible schedule"

KSA students' recommendations for: **Success**

Include the latest technology
"adapting the latest and the most desireable skills and tools to get students ready for the workforce and being ready to adapt new ways to navigate modern problems using modern technology instead of relying on the old and tested outdated methods of the past"
"AI writing tools"

More career support
"Have courses for finding your path in your future career, and how to choose it with confidence."

Celebrate students' success
"Giving certificates of appreciation to those who are distinguished"
"Rewards students who achieve a lot"
"Care about high achieving"

Make it personal
"Differentiation is that each student has his own independent personality"
"Adopt a personalized education approach to understand students' learning styles and needs, and provide them with support and resources closer to their individual learning needs to stimulate their learning interest and potential."

UAE students' recommendations for: **Overall experience**

Provide more feedback
"Establish effective feedback mechanisms to help students understand their progress, highlight strengths and point out directions for improvement."
"Clearly communicate learning objectives for each course or module."

Increase opportunities for connection
"To encourage students to not be shy to ask."
"They should make a separate time where everyone can gather and have a deep conversation about anything and everything."
"Peer group study."

Help students with time management
"Balancing all studies with day to day lives of students."
"Give us more time for us work"
"Improve communication channels and ensure transparency in sharing important information with students.

This could include timely updates on course schedules, assignments, and any changes to curriculum or policies."

Increase ties with industry
"Universities should hire actual industrialist to give us the actual knowledge."
"Offering internships or practical experiences, and continuously adapting programs to align with emerging industry needs."

KSA students' recommendations for: **Overall experience**

Close the feedback loop
"Ask for students' opinions on a regular basis."
"Understand students' progress and needs through feedback and data analysis, and adjust teaching and support strategies based on assessment results."
"Encourage students to participate in the school's decision-making process and establish a student representation system"
"Listening to students' problems"
"Thinking about students would help"

Remain modern and relevant
"Adapting students and facultaies to the modern technology like AI"
"Conduct activities to motivate students to use artificial intelligence"
" Improved communication, tech investment, student-centered focus, and strong partnerships."

Ensure a balanced approach
"Overall, a balanced approach to life, encompassing personal, professional, and social aspects, contributes to a fulfilling existence."
"Ensure that they provide advice on work-study and life balance"
"Good balance of courses & activities"
"just balance everything and give students access to attending remote online exams cuz not everyone stays in university these days"
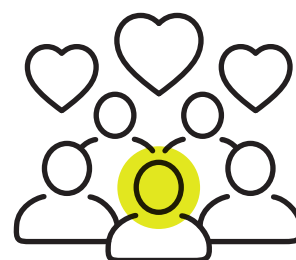
Recommendations for Improvement: **Other**

Lastly, students were also given the opportunity to make suggestions on any other facet of university life.

Students used this opportunity to request financial assistance, more wellbeing and mental health support, a greater diversity of support options for students with a greater diversity of needs and preferences, more opportunities to make connections with peers, and better technology both in terms of infrastructure and support tools.

Additionally, students asked for enhanced career opportunities and increased transparency in university operations. Some students used this space to emphasise the importance of diverse and inclusive environments.

Despite the diversity of opinions in this last qualitative section of the survey, a recurring theme is the importance of creating a supportive and engaging learning environment for all students.

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