SAICA UNDERTOOK A STUDY to determine the extent to which artificial intelligence (AI) is used by the preparers of financial statements. The purpose for this research was two-fold:

- To get insights regarding the understanding of preparers of financial statements of AI and extent to which AI is incorporated on financial systems of companies, and

- To assist the Independent Regulatory Board for Auditors (IRBA) with their request to reach out to preparers of financial statements of Public Interest Entities (PIEs) for their staff alert project for registered auditors.

A survey was sent out to preparer of financial statements across different sectors, comprising both members as well as non-members. The survey consisted of questions to gain insights on current usage, understanding what AI entails, limiting factors on the use of AI, and investing in training of staff by organisations.

For the purposes of the survey, preparers of financial statements were defined as people who are involved in direct preparation or the review of financial statements.

USE OF AI BY
PREPARERS OF FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

Artificial intelligence (AI) has opened a wide range of opportunities for business, which need to be considered by those charged with governance to remain at a competitive advantage when it comes to strategic decision-making. AI is transforming how companies operate and ultimately the future market share. The use of AI within financial systems can result in benefits to organisations but also raises challenges and risks.

METHOD

Objective –The objective of this research is to collect data and share insights on the use of AI in the preparation of financial statements in South Africa.

Target market – SAICA members and non-members

Distribution channels – 46% of respondents assessed the link via social media and 54% assessed it through email.

**Data gathering period** – 5 May – 11 July 2025

INSIGHTS AND FINDINGS

We noted that 81% of the participants represented individuals who were involved in the preparations of financial statements. The graph below shows the split of the population used between preparers of financial statements and non-preparers. We also requested the participants to indicate if they work for a Public Interest Entity (PIE). 12% of the respondent are preparers of PIE financial statements.

Please confirm if you are involved in the preparation and/or review of financial statements?

19%
81%
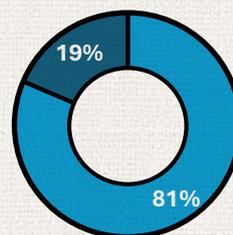
Do you work for a listed Public Interest Entity (PIE)?

12%
88%
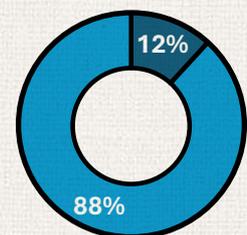
■ Yes   ■ No

With the increase in buzz words related to AI, it was our objectives to determine if AI is being incorporated as part of preparation of the financial statements. We also wanted to know the reasons why there is a high or low usage of AI.

According to the World Economic Forum, the Fourth Industrial Revolution is about more than just technology-driven change; it is an opportunity to help everyone, including leaders, policymakers and people from all income groups and nations, to harness converging technologies to create an inclusive, human-centred future. Opportunities are created when you look beyond technology and find ways to give the greatest number of people the ability to positively impact their families, organisations and communities. How does this really translate to effective use of AI within organisations?

We also asked participants if they use any AI-powered tools, techniques or software in the preparation of financial statements, and iff yes, to mention the tools, techniques, platform, software, etc.

59% of participants indicated that they are currently not utilising any AI-powered tools or software in the preparations of financial statements.
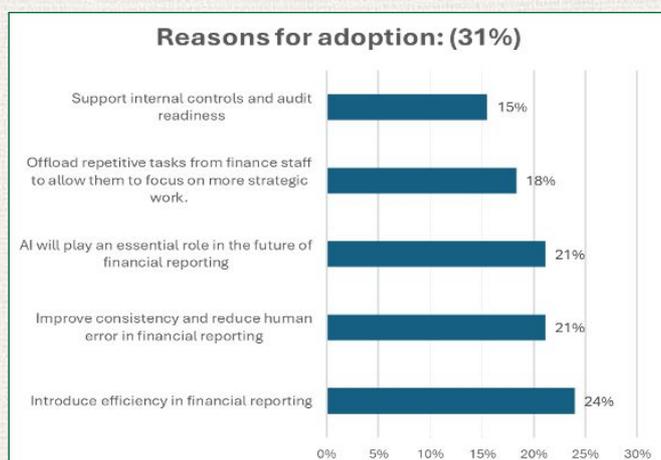
Do you currently use any AI-powered tools, techniques or software in the preparation of financial statements? If yes, please mention the tools, techniques, platform, software, etc.
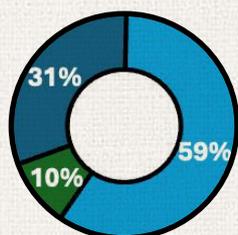
- Yes
- No
- Not sure

'Not sure' responses suggest AI use is either not applicable, not needed, or unsupported.

Current use of AI in financial statement preparation

Reasons for adoption: (31%)

- Support internal controls and audit readiness — 15%
- Offload repetitive tasks from finance staff to allow them to focus on more strategic work. — 18%
- AI will play an essential role in the future of financial reporting — 21%
- Improve consistency and reduce human error in financial reporting — 21%
- Introduce efficiency in financial reporting — 24%

31% of participants indicated that they have incorporated AI as part of financial reporting systems.

31% of participants indicated that they have incorporated AI as part of financial reporting systems. The top three reasons for using AI are the following:

- **24%** – Introduce efficiency in financial reporting
- **21%** – Improve consistency and reduced human error in financial reporting
- **21%** – AI will play an essential role in the future of financial reporting

From the above it is clear that some organisations are slowly realising that AI has the potential to unlock certain advantages for the organisation and exploring the benefits it can bring is better than deciding to completely ignore it.

Successful adoption of AI to financial process requires human judgement for critical tasks and allocating routine repetitive tasks to AI with human supervision.

With emerging technology finance will need to focus on improving controls and specifying the desired information outcomes from machine use. It is also important for the finance team to ensure that the use of AI systems in finance aligns with professional and regulatory standards.

There are several areas were incorporating of AI, could result in efficiency and competitive advantage for the finance team, including but not limited to routine processing, expansion in strategic and advisory decision-making, evolution of mid-level roles to incorporate more judgement and client interaction, and new responsibilities at the intersection of accounting, technology and strategy.

There is a view that implementing AI is about attitude and less about the technology.

Most organisations will use applications that can be rolled out in a controlled, low-stakes environment. This allows organisations to learn specifics such as which AI technologies create the most impact, decide on whether to build capabilities in-house or to outsource, how to upskill employees, and which teams need to collaborate to ensure a winning organisation.

Look out for the full result of the survey on the SAICA website.

AUTHOR
Angel Sithole, Lead Audit and Assurance