

Artificial Intelligence in African Higher Education: Uses, Misuses, and Ethical Dilemmas

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Abstract

Globally, Artificial Intelligence (AI) is changing higher education, and African institutions are becoming more and more involved in this digital revolution. AI applications such as predictive analytics, automated grading, and intelligent tutoring systems offer promising opportunities to enhance research, teaching, learning, and administration—particularly in settings with limited resources. However, the incorporation of AI into African higher education also raises significant socio-technical and ethical issues. Academic dishonesty, algorithmic bias, data privacy, and unequal access to digital infrastructure are some of the issues that risk exacerbating existing educational inequalities. Furthermore, concerns regarding digital sovereignty, fairness, and cultural relevance are raised by the dependence on AI tools created in the Global North. This article highlights the dual potential for both empowerment and marginalization as it critically analyzes the advantages and hazards of implementing AI in African higher institutions. It calls for a responsible, inclusive, and culturally grounded approach to AI in African higher education through a contextual and ethical lens, using concepts like digital justice, the ethics of technology, and decolonial theory.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence, Higher education, Africa, Ethical dilemmas, Digital divide, Algorithmic bias, Decolonial theory.

1. INTRODUCTION

Higher education around the world is undergoing a significant transformation due to the rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI), and African institutions are increasingly embracing this shift. Promising prospects to improve teaching and learning, expedite administrative procedures, and foster research innovation throughout the continent are presented by AI-powered tools, which range from chatbots and intelligent tutoring systems to automated grading software and predictive analytics [1–3]. AI has the potential to address persistent challenges such as shortages of academic staff, overcrowded classrooms, and unequal access to quality education, particularly in low-resource environments [4].

AI implementation in African higher education is not without its challenges, though. Academic dishonesty, algorithmic bias, data privacy, and digital monitoring have all become major ethical concerns [5, 6]. Furthermore, concerns regarding plagiarism and the degradation of academic integrity are heightened by the increasing use of generative AI technologies, particularly at institutions with weak digital literacy frameworks [7]. Furthermore, disparities in policy preparedness and technological infrastructure could exacerbate existing educational inequalities and widen the digital divide between better-resourced and underfunded institutions [8].

Concerns regarding cultural relevance, equity, and regulatory control are becoming more pressing as AI technologies mostly developed in the Global North are deployed into African academic settings [9, 10]. Ethical, context-sensitive approaches that consider the continent's unique socio-political, economic, and educational realities are desperately needed. This article examines the ethical dilemmas surrounding AI implementation in African higher education, critically analyzing both its applications and abuses. It aims to support a more responsible and inclusive integration of AI technologies that meet the various demands of African institutions, instructors, and students.

The focus of this study is on the intricate and frequently conflicting ramifications of incorporating Artificial Intelligence (AI) into higher education in Africa. While the application of AI technologies presents enormous ethical, socio-technical, and cultural obstacles, they also provide hopeful answers to persistent issues including professor shortages, administrative inefficiencies, and limited access to high-quality education. Academic dishonesty, algorithmic unfairness, data privacy issues, and a growing digital divide made worse by unequal access to infrastructure and readiness are a few examples. Furthermore, the use of AI tools created in the Global North presents serious problems with regard to educational justice, digital sovereignty, and cultural relevance. By examining the applications, abuses, and moral conundrums of AI from the viewpoints of decolonization, digital justice, and technological ethics, the study seeks to close the gap in ethical, context-sensitive frameworks that currently govern AI deployment in African higher education.

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The general objective of this paper is to critically analyze and synthesize the opportunities, difficulties, and cultural ramifications of integrating Artificial Intelligence (AI) into African higher education. Its specific goals are:

1. To analyze how incorporating AI into African higher education presents both opportunities and problems, with an emphasis on how it could improve research, teaching, and institutional management.
2. To determine the moral, sociocultural, and physical conundrums raised by the use of AI at African institutions, such as issues with algorithmic prejudice, academic dishonesty, and the digital divide.
3. To examine how AI is used and abused in African academic institutions for teaching, research, and decision-making. Examples include chatbot services, predictive analytics, and automated grading.
4. To evaluate how imported AI tools affect digital sovereignty, cultural relevance, and educational equity in Africa.
5. To use theoretical stances such as digital justice, decolonial theory, and technology ethics to offer frameworks and policy recommendations for the ethical, inclusive, and culturally grounded integration of AI.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study explores the complicated reality of using Artificial Intelligence (AI) in higher education in Africa using a qualitative research design based on interpretive and ethical analysis. Peer-reviewed literature, institutional reports, and policy documents are among the secondary sources that are thoroughly analyzed in this study instead of empirical fieldwork. It is based on critical theoretical frameworks to guarantee an ethically sound and context-sensitive approach.

This study is a critical thematic and conceptual analysis that synthesizes and interprets current information using digital justice, decolonial theory, and technology ethics as lenses. Recurring themes, conundrums, and trends in the uptake and abuse of AI in African institutions are found in the research. In addition to being descriptive, these themes are also critically analyzed in light of institutional, cultural, and ethical issues.

3.2 Data Sources, Sampling Criteria and Search Period

The study uses books, policy briefs, case reports, and peer-reviewed journal papers that were released between 2016 and 2024. Based on their applicability to AI in African educational contexts particularly in higher education—sources were chosen. Materials were only included if they addressed policy implications, digital infrastructure, ethical issues, or the contextual relevance of AI tools.

With a focus on changes from 2020 to 2023—a time of increased acceptance and ethical examination of AI tools in African educational settings—the analysis focused on materials published between 2016 and early 2024.

3.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Publications published between 2016 and 2024 that particularly look at the application of AI in African higher education settings are included in this study. Works that address digital justice, policy formation, ethical frameworks, and the socio-technical ramifications of AI adoption are given precedence. Studies that provide insights into the institutional, cultural, or infrastructure aspects of AI in higher education are taken into consideration, whether they are theoretical or applied.

On the other hand, publications with an engineering or technical focus that don't discuss the ethical or educational aspects of AI are not included in the study. Additionally, works of literature that only discuss non-African contexts are not included unless they are used to compare and contrast and shed light on the African context. Furthermore, materials that discuss AI applications in business, secondary, or elementary education contexts are outside the purview of this study.

3.4 Databases and Source Types

Academic journals, institutional records, and theoretical literature referenced in the article itself were all used in the study.

- Peer-reviewed journals like the International Journal of Education and Development using ICT and African Studies Review were among these sources.
- Reports and policy materials from institutions such as the Brookings Institution, UNESCO, and AUDA-NEPAD.
- Seminal theoretical works by writers including Walter Mignolo, Achille Mbembe, and Luciano Floridi.
- Reports and case studies from African universities, such as the University of Cape Town, the University of Johannesburg, and the University of Nairobi.

3.5 Limitations

This study is a conceptual review and synthesis of existing literature on AI in African higher education, rather than an empirical investigation. As such, its findings are constrained by the scope and gaps inherent in the reviewed sources. The reliance on secondary data means that the analysis is limited to published works, which may overlook emerging trends or undocumented practices in AI adoption across the continent. Additionally, the qualitative nature of the review prioritizes thematic exploration over statistical generalizability, and the conclusions drawn are interpretive rather than empirically validated. While the study provides a critical synthesis of opportunities, challenges, and ethical dilemmas, it does not generate new primary data or assess the longitudinal impacts of AI implementation. Future research could address these limitations by incorporating empirical fieldwork, case studies, or regional comparative analyses to deepen the evidence base.

4. REVIEW OF EXISTING LITERATURE ON ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

Scholarly interest in the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in African higher education is growing quickly, illustrating the continent's technological innovation's potential as well as its risks. The literature currently in publication examines a variety of applications, ranging from administrative automation and personalized learning to AI ethics, politics, and governance, while also emphasizing significant issues with infrastructure, digital inequality, and cultural misalignment. This review highlights important research gaps that need to be filled and assesses the advantages and disadvantages of previous studies.

4.1 Strengths and Contributions of Existing Studies

4.1.1 Broad scope of applications

The literature's thorough mapping of AI application cases in African higher education is one of its main advantages. Research by Bello & Akinwande (2021) [3], Gudyanga (2023) [11], and Luckin et al. (2016) [1], details the various uses of AI, such as predictive analytics, adaptive learning platforms, intelligent tutoring, and institutional management. These studies highlight how AI has the revolutionary potential to improve learning outcomes, alleviate resource restrictions, and boost operational efficiency.

4.1.2 Ethical awareness and contextual sensitivity

Scholars who critically examine the ethical implications of implementing AI make a significant contribution. Zeleza (2023) [12], Ezenwoke & Eze (2021) [13], and Crawford & Calo (2016) [5], highlight dangers include algorithmic prejudice, data privacy violations, and academic dishonesty. Their study highlights the necessity for ethical frameworks tailored to Africa that take decolonial criticisms, local governance, and digital sovereignty into account.

4.1.3 Empirical and regional specificity

From algorithmic exclusion in scholarship distribution to AI-supported plagiarism, empirical research [14–16], offers important case-based evidence on AI's practical implications. These studies with a wealth of data provide the granularity that is required to support the field's more conceptual or policy-focused research.

4.1.4 Interdisciplinary and policy-oriented approaches

AI is approached from a governance perspective by regional institutions like UNESCO (2021) [2], AUDA-NEPAD (2023) [17], and the Policy Center for the New South [18], which evaluate institutional alignment and state preparedness. By emphasizing the necessity of unified policy

frameworks and regional policies, these studies aid in the development of moral and sustainable AI ecosystems.

4.2 Opportunities Identified in the Literature

4.2.1 Personalized and inclusive learning

The ability of AI to be customized is highlighted in particular. Students with different requirements can benefit from personalized learning routes provided by intelligent tutoring platforms and adaptive learning systems, particularly in big, under-resourced classes [19]. Additionally, inclusive education is promoted via tools that assist students with disabilities or translate content into local languages [20, 21].

4.2.2 Enhanced administrative efficiency

According to a number of studies [22, 23], AI technologies increase institutional efficiency and decrease staff workload by automating tasks like scheduling, grading, and admissions. Support vector machine algorithms have occasionally sorted admissions with 95% accuracy, highlighting AI's potential for accuracy in institutional operations.

4.2.3 Strengthened research and educator support

AI solutions help teachers with research workflow management, assessment administration, and content creation. These features improve research productivity and the quality of instruction [24, 25]. Additionally, AI is mentioned as being crucial in assisting African institutions with grant applications and policy creation.

4.3 Limitations and Challenges in the Existing Literature

4.3.1 Infrastructure and digital divide

One enduring obstacle is the digital divide. Particularly in remote areas, many institutions lack access to necessary technologies, dependable internet, and steady electricity [11, 26]. The adoption and sustainability of AI-driven educational breakthroughs are constrained by this infrastructure shortfall.

4.3.2 Ethical concerns and algorithmic bias

AI systems rely on enormous datasets, frequently without the necessary security measures. Several researchers have brought out important difficulties, including algorithmic prejudice, data privacy

breaches, and opaque algorithms, particularly with regard to marginalized pupils [16, 19]. Tools created outside of the continent run the risk of promoting systemic injustices and Western-centric epistemologies [27, 28].

4.3.3 Academic integrity and misuse

Growing worries about academic dishonesty, such as plagiarism and content automation, are linked to generative AI technologies like ChatGPT. These tools have the potential to increase productivity, but they may also weaken academic rigor and critical thinking [29, 30].

4.3.4 Pedagogical and theoretical gaps

Few studies thoroughly address instructional theory, despite the fact that many emphasize AI's technical capabilities. AI's effects on learning processes, student-teacher relationships, and cognitive development are not well understood [12, 22]. In empirical research, ethical and decolonial frameworks are frequently mentioned but not fully operationalized.

4.3.5 Limited african-led innovation

The literature lacks in-depth examinations of African-led AI initiatives or attempts to incorporate indigenous knowledge systems, despite the fact that a number of writers criticize the over-reliance on AI solutions created in the Global North [10]. This absence is a reflection of larger worries about technological dependency and digital colonization.

4.3.6 Scarcity of longitudinal and field-based research

The majority of research uses short-term pilots, policy assessments, or conceptual analysis. Longitudinal, evidence-based studies that monitor the long-term impacts of AI deployment on labor dynamics, academic quality, and access are scarce, especially in rural or under-resourced environments [31].

4.4 Summary of Gaps

A survey of previous research indicates a number of enduring gaps in the body of knowledge about the integration of AI in African higher education. Cultural and linguistic inclusion is still lacking, with little integration of African languages and knowledge systems into AI design, despite growing awareness of epistemic injustice issues. Additionally, there is a dearth of longitudinal research on the long-term implications of AI adoption, which limits our comprehension of its long-term effects on equality, access, and learning outcomes. Additionally, not enough attention is paid to the pedagogical implications of AI, specifically how it affects teaching strategies, classroom dynamics, and student engagement. Furthermore, there is a dearth of study on African-led innovation in

AI development, with the majority of studies concentrating on imported technologies rather than indigenous solutions. Lastly, a large portion of the extant research is limited in its generalizability and contextual relevance due to the substantial underrepresentation of rural and under-resourced institutions in empirical investigations.

The topic and organization of the following parts are directly informed by and justified by this literature review. These consist of the empirical sections on the applications, abuses, and moral conundrums of AI in African institutions; the conceptual and theoretical framework, which tackles the ethical and decolonial viewpoints required to understand the findings of the literature; and, lastly, the policy-oriented suggestions for responsible AI integration. As a result, the critical analysis and contextual suggestions that follow are both anchored and launched by the literature review.

5. CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Establishing a framework that integrates theoretical lenses critically engaging with the ethical, cultural, and socioeconomic dimensions of artificial intelligence (AI), along with a conceptual understanding of its applications, is essential for analyzing the role of AI in African higher education. This section situates the implications of AI within the context of African higher education by defining key terms, outlining ethical concerns related to AI, and applying relevant theoretical perspectives. In doing so, the framework provides a lens through which to assess the applications, misuses, and ethical dilemmas of AI in African higher education.

5.1 Definition of Artificial Intelligence in the Educational Context

In general, artificial intelligence (AI) refers to computer programs created to carry out operations like learning, language comprehension, problem-solving, and decision-making that normally call for human intelligence [32]. AI is used in education to improve teaching, learning, research, and administration using a variety of tools and technologies. These include adaptive learning platforms that customize instructional materials to meet the needs of each individual student, automated grading tools, predictive analytics to identify students at risk, and Intelligent Tutoring Systems (ITS) [33]. In Africa, AI has the ability to completely transform higher education by addressing issues like scarce resources, underqualified faculty, and access hurdles caused by geography or infrastructure.

The digital divide, algorithmic bias, and ethical issues with data protection and academic integrity are just a few of the difficulties that African higher education faces when integrating AI. It is crucial to evaluate the positive and negative effects of AI tools on education as they continue to gain popularity.

5.2 Explanation of Key Concepts

To comprehend the ramifications of AI in African higher education, a few fundamental ideas are necessary. These include AI ethics, algorithmic bias, the digital divide, and academic integrity.

- **AI Ethics:** The moral principles and frameworks that direct the development, application, and usage of AI systems are referred to as AI ethics. Fairness, accountability, openness, privacy, and security are among the topics it covers. In the context of education, AI ethics presents important concerns regarding the equity of AI tools, making sure that they don't violate data privacy rights or prejudice particular student groups [9]. The many social, cultural, and economic settings in which these technologies are used must be carefully considered when implementing AI ethically in African colleges and universities [33].
- **Algorithmic Bias:** This occurs when AI systems produce discriminatory outcomes due to biased or insufficient training data. This frequently mirrors historical injustices, including those pertaining to socioeconomic class, gender, or race [34]. Inequitable results for African students can result from the importation of AI tools from the Global North, which are frequently created and trained on datasets that mirror Western norms. This is especially true when the tools neglect to take into consideration local languages, cultural contexts, and socioeconomic realities [12].
- **Digital Divide:** Disparities in internet connectivity and access to digital technology that disproportionately impact vulnerable communities are referred to as the “digital divide” [35]. The digital divide in Africa shows up not only in terms of physical infrastructure but also in terms of digital literacy, skills, and the capacity to use AI tools efficiently. This gap makes already-existing disparities worse, especially in the field of education, where students in underdeveloped or rural areas do not have access to the technology needed to take advantage of AI-powered learning resources [36].
- **Academic Integrity:** Maintaining ethical norms in education, such as truthfulness, equity, and accountability in academic work, is a component of academic integrity [37]. The emergence of AI-powered programs like ChatGPT that can produce text that seems human poses a threat to conventional ideas of authorship and uniqueness. Concerns regarding plagiarism, contract cheating, and the possible deterioration of academic standards are raised by the extensive availability of such technologies [38].

5.3 Theoretical Lenses

The following theoretical frameworks are used in this article to critically examine the implications of AI in African higher education:

- **Ethics of Technology:** This viewpoint looks at how AI and other technologies are not neutral; rather, they reflect particular ideologies, values, and power structures [9, 38]. In the context of higher education, the ethics of technology lens challenges us to think about both what AI can and should achieve. This perspective calls into question how AI will affect educational methods in Africa, the possibility of exploitation and the necessity of inclusive, culturally aware design procedures [39].
- **Digital Justice:** By promoting the fair treatment of all people regardless of their socio-economic status or geographic location, digital justice aims to guarantee equitable access, participation, and outcomes in the digital sphere [40, 41]. In order to ensure that underserved areas are not left behind in the digital age, this lens, when applied to AI in African higher

education, advocates for AI solutions that are affordable, accessible, and tailored to local needs [42].

- **Decolonial Theory:** The persistence of Western epistemologies and the ways that global knowledge systems and technology frequently limit African knowledge and experiences are both criticized by decolonial theory [43, 44]. This perspective promotes the creation of AI-related technologies that honor African cultural values, languages, and pedagogies. It opposes the importation of contextually irrelevant AI tools and advocates for a broader regional strategy for AI development that gives African sovereignty and knowledge systems top priority [45].

5.4 Relevance to African Realities

The theoretical and conceptual frameworks mentioned above are especially pertinent to comprehending the intricacies of artificial intelligence in African higher education. Frameworks that particularly address concerns of fairness, power, and cultural sensitivity are required due to Africa's varied socioeconomic landscapes, infrastructure challenges, and historical background. With notable differences in access to digital technology throughout the continent, the digital divide is still a major concern. Additionally, the colonial legacy continues to influence how schools operate and how technology is embraced and used.

This analysis highlights the significance of developing AI solutions that are not only technically sound but also socially and culturally appropriate, by drawing on frameworks such as digital justice and decolonial theory. Rather than reproducing existing disparities or perpetuating colonial legacies, these frameworks encourage African higher education institutions and governments to critically engage with AI technologies in ways that promote equity, inclusivity, and local empowerment.

In conclusion, there are advantages and disadvantages to implementing AI in African higher education. We can better understand the complex effects of AI in African education by grounding our analysis in key concepts such as algorithmic bias, AI ethics, the digital divide, and academic integrity, and by applying theoretical frameworks like decolonial theory, digital justice, and the ethics of technology. In order to ensure that the potential advantages of these technologies are realized in a way that is equitable, culturally appropriate, and in line with Africa's larger educational and developmental goals, this framework promotes a critical and contextually grounded approach to AI adoption.

6. USES OF AI IN AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

Teaching, research, and institutional management are all changing as a result of artificial intelligence (AI) being incorporated into African higher education. Higher education institutions throughout the continent are implementing AI-powered technology to improve learning results, streamline administrative duties, and facilitate research as the use of AI grows. The main uses of AI at African higher institutions are highlighted in the subsequent subsections, along with successful implementation examples and their effects.

6.1 Teaching and Learning

AI is being used more and more to enhance instruction, customize learning, and make learning more accessible to a wider range of students. These apps are especially helpful in an area with a variety of educational needs and difficulties.

6.1.1 Adaptive learning systems and intelligent tutoring

AI-powered adaptive learning platforms personalize instruction by adjusting the pace and content to match each student's individual progress and learning style. By addressing each student's unique learning needs, this tailored approach enhances student engagement and facilitates deeper understanding, particularly when confronting complex material. For instance, students can work through difficulties at their own pace with the help of Intelligent Tutoring Systems (ITS), which offer individualized education and real-time feedback [1]. AI is used by platforms like Siyavula in South Africa to provide individualized math and science instruction, assisting students in underserved settings [46, 47].

6.1.2 Language tools and accessibility for students with disabilities

AI-powered solutions for language translation, speech recognition, and text-to-speech technologies have opened new avenues for accessibility. These technologies ensure that students with disabilities or those who speak different languages have equal access to educational resources. For example, Natural Language Processing (NLP) is used to translate between African languages such as Yoruba and Swahili, and it can provide real-time transcription or speech-to-text services for children with visual impairments [48, 49].

6.1.3 AI for remote and inclusive education

For children in impoverished and rural areas, where access to high-quality education is often limited, artificial intelligence can be a game-changer. By offering personalized learning paths and connecting students to a wide range of courses, Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) supported by AI-based recommendation systems help bridge the educational gap. Organizations such as the African Virtual University (AVU) use AI chatbots to support students in their studies, enabling learners in remote areas to access education more effectively [50, 51].

6.2 Research and Innovation

In higher education in Africa, AI has transformed research in a number of fields. AI is being used by researchers in new areas like healthcare, agriculture, and climate science, as well as for data analysis and the automation of literature reviews.

6.2.1 AI for data analytics, literature review automation, and scientific discovery

The research process can be significantly enhanced by AI-powered technologies that enable researchers to process large datasets quickly and accurately. Tools such as Semantic Scholar and Elicit support scholars in conducting literature reviews, identifying key trends, and extracting relevant information [3]. Furthermore, automated literature review tools streamline the research workflow by reducing the time and effort required for systematic reviews, thereby increasing overall efficiency [52].

6.2.2 Emerging fields: Healthcare, agriculture, and climate change

Artificial intelligence is significantly contributing to addressing Africa's urgent challenges, particularly in healthcare, agriculture, and climate change. For example, AI-driven diagnostics—such as AI for tuberculosis detection in South Africa—are advancing medical research and improving health outcomes [11]. As demonstrated by Nigerian AI agritech companies, AI applications in precision farming and pest management promote food security and sustainable agricultural practices [48]. Additionally, AI-powered climate models are supporting research at institutions such as the Climate AI Lab at the University of Nairobi [53].

6.3 Administration and Institutional Management

AI is simplifying administrative tasks in African universities, resulting in more data-driven and effective procedures. AI is improving institutional management and decreasing human error in everything from admissions to student tracking.

6.3.1 AI-driven admissions, grading, and student tracking

By analyzing student data to predict academic success, AI applications in admissions help automate the selection process, making enrollment more efficient and objective. For example, the University of Cape Town has adopted AI screening to enhance its admissions procedure [54]. AI grading tools, such as Turnitin's AI feedback system, support instructors in managing large volumes of assignments and provide timely, consistent feedback, allowing more time for personalized student engagement [55].

6.3.2 Chatbots for student inquiries and support services

Universities are increasingly using AI-powered chatbots to respond to students' inquiries about timetables, fees, and campus services in real time. These chatbots ensure that students receive support when needed while reducing administrative burdens. For instance, the University of Johannesburg employs AI chatbots to provide 24/7 assistance, easing staff workload and enhancing student engagement [56].

6.3.3 Predictive analytics for enrollment trends and dropout prevention

AI-powered predictive analytics are used to identify enrollment trends and estimate the likelihood of student dropouts. By analyzing student data, institutions can improve retention rates and offer proactive support to at-risk students. Stellenbosch University, for example, has implemented a predictive model to help identify students who may need additional academic support [35].

6.4 Case Examples of AI Adoption

A number of African colleges are setting the standard for AI technology adoption, demonstrating the various and creative ways AI is being incorporated into higher education (TABLE 1).

Table 1: Case examples of AI adoption Matrix

Institution	AI Application	Impact
University of Johannesburg	AI chatbots for student support	Reduced response time by 70%, improved student engagement [56]
African Institute for Mathematical Sciences (AIMS)	AI for climate modeling	Enhanced African-led research in climate change [57]
Covenant University (Nigeria)	AI-driven admissions and student tracking	Improved enrollment efficiency, optimized student support [58]
University of Nairobi	AI for healthcare diagnostics	Supported medical research and improved healthcare outcomes [14]

7. MISUSES AND ABUSES OF AI IN AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

Although artificial intelligence (AI) holds the potential to transform higher education in Africa, its rapid adoption has also led to significant abuses and ethical dilemmas. Issues such as algorithmic bias, data privacy violations, and academic dishonesty threaten the integrity and equity of educational systems across the continent. This section examines key instances of AI misuse in African universities, supported by case studies and empirical evidence.

7.1 Academic Dishonesty

New types of academic dishonesty, including as AI-generated writings, plagiarism and compromised assessment integrity, have been made easier by AI technologies. Although these resources can improve learning, their improper usage raises questions regarding academic integrity.

- **AI-Generated Essays and Plagiarism:** The widespread use of AI text generators (such as ChatGPT and GPT-4) has made it easier for students to submit machine-generated essays

as their own, raising concerns about academic integrity. Concerns over plagiarism and the validity of student work are growing, as evidenced by a 2023 study conducted at the University of Lagos that revealed more than 30% of turned in assignments contained AI-generated content [15, 59]. AI-assisted plagiarism has increased as a result of the availability of writing tools, which students use to avoid doing original work and critical thinking [55].

- **Lack of AI Detection Tools:** Faculty often struggle to verify originality because many African institutions lack access to AI-powered plagiarism detection tools, such as Turnitin's AI writing indicator [60]. Although universities like Stellenbosch have piloted AI detection technologies, their adoption remains uneven across the continent [34]. Without adequate detection systems, academic dishonesty becomes difficult to prevent, as students may exploit these gaps.

7.2 Algorithmic Bias and Exclusion

There are serious worries about prejudice and exclusion when AI is used in decision-making processes like admissions and grading. African students' particular circumstances and difficulties are frequently overlooked by imported AI models.

- **Imported AI Models Failing to Reflect African Contexts:** Cultural and linguistic biases arise because many AI systems used in African higher education institutions are trained on Western-centric datasets. For example, automated grading systems may penalize students for using local idioms or African English dialects, resulting in unfair assessments [6]. This misalignment between AI models and local realities not only undermines academic equity but also risks further marginalizing African students.
- **Discrimination in Automated Decision-Making:** AI-driven admissions systems and automated scholarship distribution processes have been found to favor applicants from well-resourced universities, thereby reinforcing existing inequalities. A 2022 study conducted at the University of Cape Town [14], found that algorithmic bias in scholarship distribution disproportionately disadvantaged rural students and those from low-income backgrounds. Such bias in automated decision-making processes undermines efforts to create a more inclusive educational system and perpetuates the exclusion of already marginalized groups.

7.3 Data Privacy and Surveillance

Serious questions concerning data privacy, surveillance, and the moral use of student information are brought up by the extensive usage of AI at African higher institutions. Numerous academic institutions have implemented artificial intelligence (AI) tools to collect and analyze student data without enough security or transparency.

- **Weak Data Protection Laws:** Although some countries such as South Africa, Kenya, and Nigeria have enacted data protection legislation, many African nations still lack comprehensive legal frameworks [2]. This gap exposes students' personal information to potential misuse, especially when AI systems collect sensitive data or monitor behavior. Privacy concerns

are further heightened by the use of AI-powered proctoring tools, such as facial recognition during examinations, which risk infringing on students' rights without proper oversight [61].

- **Lack of Informed Consent:** For AI analytics, several academic institutions gather student data without getting explicit agreement or telling students how the data would be used. According to a 2023 report, 60% of surveyed African institutions did not disclose how their AI systems processed student data [62]. Since students might not be aware of the hazards involved in the collecting and use of their data, the absence of informed consent and ethical data rules presents significant ethical issues [48].

7.4 Deepening the Digital Divide

Existing disparities between African institutions with adequate and inadequate resources could be made worse by the introduction of AI into higher education. A two-tiered educational system is produced by the uneven adoption of AI tools, despite the fact that they present exciting educational potential.

- **Inequity Between Elite and Under-Resourced Institutions:** Well-funded universities, such as the American University of Nigeria and the University of Johannesburg, have adopted advanced AI technologies, while many public and rural institutions continue to lag due to limited resources, inadequate infrastructure, and insufficient technical expertise [27]. This disparity widens the gap in educational opportunities between affluent and disadvantaged students and limits access to AI-enhanced learning [12].
- **Infrastructure Challenges:** Many African institutions face significant infrastructure barriers, including high tuition costs, unreliable electricity, and limited internet access. Fewer than 20% of universities in rural areas have reliable, AI-ready infrastructure, limiting their ability to effectively adopt AI technologies [63]. These challenges hinder the widespread use of AI, deepen the digital divide, and further disadvantage underprivileged students [14].

8. ETHICAL DILEMMAS IN AI ADOPTION IN AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

Both significant opportunities and serious ethical challenges are presented by the introduction of artificial intelligence (AI) into African higher education. These problems include issues with accountability and transparency, cultural and epistemic inequities, the displacement of human labor, and the absence of ethical frameworks. In order to guarantee that AI is applied responsibly, inclusively, and fairly in African colleges, it is imperative that these issues be addressed.

8.1 Lack of Ethical Frameworks

The lack of thorough and strong ethical frameworks is one of the main obstacles to the use of AI in African higher education. Universities might find it difficult to guarantee that AI is applied fairly and responsibly in the absence of explicit ethical standards.

- **Inadequate Institutional and National Policies:** Coherent AI policies that address the ethical implications of AI in education have not yet been developed in many African nations. Only a small number of institutions have established internal policies, and while some countries, such as South Africa and Kenya, have begun developing AI governance frameworks, these efforts remain fragmented [2, 17]. In the absence of institutional or national policies to regulate AI use, universities face a significant risk of inconsistent practices and potential harm to faculty, staff, and students [64].
- **Limited Guidelines for Fair and Responsible AI Use:** The risk of misuse and biased outcomes is heightened by the absence of established ethical standards for the application of AI. For example, AI systems used in student evaluation, admissions, or grading may not follow fair or transparent procedures, potentially favoring certain groups over others [64]. If ethical frameworks remain vague, the adoption of AI could unintentionally reinforce existing biases and contribute to inequality within the educational system [55].

8.2 Cultural and Epistemic Injustice

The rich cultural and epistemic diversity of African nations is often overlooked by AI technology. AI systems that fail to incorporate African languages, knowledge systems, and values risk erasing cultural identities and deepening existing inequalities.

- **Neglect of African Languages, Values, and Indigenous Knowledge:** African languages like Swahili, Yoruba, and Amharic are frequently neglected by AI systems that were primarily created in Western contexts and give preference to languages like English and French [48]. Additionally, a Western-centric viewpoint is reinforced in academic contexts by the fact that many AI technologies disregard indigenous African knowledge systems [65]. In addition to undermining African languages and cultures, this exclusion contributes to the marginalization of African research and values within the international academic community [66].
- **Risk of Digital Colonialism and Dependence on Foreign AI Tools:** A type of digital colonialism is being perpetuated by the fact that foreign businesses generate more than 80% of the AI tools utilized in African institutions [14]. Because African organizations and governments frequently lack the means and capacity to develop their own AI solutions, this reliance on external technologies stifles local innovation. The use of foreign AI systems that fail to consider local contexts may undermine the autonomy of African institutions and increase their dependence on external technologies [61, 67].

8.3 Employment and Human Displacement

Concerns about the future of labor in academic institutions have also been raised by the rise of AI in African higher education. The issue of human displacement is becoming increasingly urgent as AI systems automate more academic and administrative tasks.

- **Automation of Academic and Administrative Roles:** Numerous administrative and academic tasks, including resource management, student enrollment, content creation, and grad-

ing, could be automated by AI technologies. While these technologies have the potential to boost productivity, they also pose a risk of job displacement, particularly for support and administrative roles [63]. A 2023 study conducted at the University of Ghana estimates that up to 30% of routine academic duties could be automated within the next five years [15].

- **Impact on Job Security and Institutional Identity:** The identity and mission of educational institutions are at risk as AI increasingly replaces traditional roles. The holistic and personalized quality of education—crucial to many African institutions—may be undermined by reduced human interaction in teaching and administrative functions. Furthermore, staff and university leadership may experience anxiety due to fears of job displacement [12]. To prevent the erosion of institutional culture, it is vital to balance technological innovation with preserving the human element in education.

8.4 Accountability and Transparency

Concerns about transparency and accountability are critical as AI systems become increasingly integrated into decision-making processes within African institutions. The ethical use of AI tools in education may be hindered by unclear accountability mechanisms.

- **Who is Liable When AI Systems Make Errors?**: Determining responsibility for errors or biased outcomes produced by AI systems is one of the most pressing ethical challenges in AI adoption. Accountability becomes particularly complex when, for example, an algorithm produces biased admissions decisions or an AI-based grading system inaccurately assesses a student's performance [55]. In many African institutions, the absence of clear legal and regulatory frameworks for AI exacerbates the problem, leaving faculty, staff, and students uncertain about who is responsible for addressing complaints or correcting such errors [17].
- **The Need for Explainable and Auditable AI in Academic Contexts:** Many AI systems function as “black boxes,” making decisions without offering transparent reasoning or explanations [68]. In academic settings—where AI may influence critical processes such as grading, admissions, and research evaluation—explainable AI (XAI) is essential. It provides insight into how decisions are made, thereby enhancing trust and allowing stakeholders to understand and contest outcomes when necessary. Equally important is the auditability of AI systems, which allows for independent evaluation, correction of errors, and assurance of fairness [1]. Without explainability and auditability, AI-driven decisions risk becoming opaque and unchallengeable, raising serious concerns about justice, accountability, and institutional integrity.

9. TOWARD RESPONSIBLE AI INTEGRATION IN AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has the potential to transform higher education in Africa, but its implementation demands inclusivity and accountability. A thoughtful approach that incorporates robust governance frameworks, capacity building, and infrastructure development is essential to prevent exacerbating existing inequities and ethical challenges. This section outlines strategies for the

responsible integration of AI in African universities, focusing on inclusive design, capacity building, and policy and governance.

9.1 Policy and Governance

Clear and context-specific regulations and governance structures are essential for the effective integration of AI into African higher education. Besides addressing regional challenges, these regulations must ensure ethical AI practices that promote transparency, accountability, and equity.

9.1.1 Recommendations for AI ethics policies tailored to african contexts

African countries should develop AI ethical guidelines that reflect the continent's political, cultural, and socioeconomic contexts. These frameworks should address key issues such as accountability, algorithmic bias, and data privacy. National policies must prioritize human rights and equity while fostering innovation, drawing on international frameworks like the African Union's AI Strategy [17], and UNESCO's ethical principles for AI [2]. Special attention should be given to ensuring that AI technologies promote cultural relevance, inclusion, and educational equity across African higher education systems.

9.1.2 Development of regulatory frameworks inspired by GDPR and UNESCO

African nations must implement comprehensive data protection legislation, guided by international standards such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). For instance, Kenya's Data Protection Act and Nigeria's NDPA provide frameworks that safeguard individual privacy and ensure data security. As part of a broader commitment to algorithmic transparency, AI providers should also be required to disclose information about their algorithms, training data, and the rationale behind automated decisions [12]. By promoting trust and accountability, such regulatory frameworks can support the ethical use of AI technologies in educational settings

9.2 Capacity Building

Capacity building must be a top priority if African higher education is to fully harness the potential of AI. This requires comprehensive education and training programs aimed at equipping key stakeholders including educators, administrators, and students with the skills to effectively utilize AI technologies and understand their ethical implications.

9.2.1 Training educators, administrators, and students in AI literacy

For all parties involved in higher education, AI literacy is essential. In-depth instruction on AI technologies and their ethical ramifications is required for educators and administrators. This training should enable decision-makers to evaluate AI systems for bias, privacy concerns, and cultural

relevance. Programs for student AI literacy should emphasize the moral application of AI and give students tools such as algorithmic bias detection and prompt engineering [52]. One example of the significance of incorporating AI ethics into teacher training programs is South Africa's AI for Educators initiative [69].

9.2.2 Promoting african-led AI research and curriculum development

To ensure that AI systems are relevant to African contexts, universities must prioritize African-led research and the development of AI curricula that address regional needs. This includes establishing regional AI research centers such as Lelapa AI in South Africa, which focuses on Natural Language Processing (NLP) for African languages [70]. Institutions can also design decolonial AI programs, like the University of Johannesburg's "AI and Society" courses [71], and revise their curricula to incorporate local knowledge systems into AI training datasets [27].

9.3 Infrastructure and Inclusive Design

Ensuring equitable access to AI technologies in African higher education requires the development of robust and inclusive digital infrastructure. Infrastructure must be designed with accessibility in mind so that no student regardless of socioeconomic background or geographic location is left behind.

9.3.1 Expanding digital infrastructure and equitable access

African governments must invest in AI-compatible infrastructure for under-resourced institutions and prioritize improving internet connectivity, particularly in rural areas, to help close the digital divide. A notable example is Rwanda's partnership with SpaceX's Starlink to expand internet access in remote regions [63]. Moreover, investments in AI tools and resources should be made accessible to all students, regardless of their location or their institution's financial capacity [17].

9.3.2 Collaborating with local stakeholders for culturally relevant AI solutions

To ensure that AI solutions are culturally appropriate and address specific social challenges, they must be developed in collaboration with local communities and stakeholders. An example is Mozilla's "African AI Localization" project, which seeks to adapt AI tools for African languages [72]. Through partnerships with regional businesses, governments, and academic institutions, AI technologies can be tailored to local needs and reflect African values.

9.3.3 Public-private partnerships to support sustainable implementation

The successful integration of artificial intelligence in African higher education relies significantly on the establishment of robust public-private partnerships (PPPs). Collaborations between univer-

sities and private sector organizations can provide much-needed financial support, technological infrastructure, and specialized expertise to effectively scale AI initiatives. For example, IBM's *Digital Nation Africa* program demonstrates how such partnerships can enhance student access to AI tools and training [73]. Beyond resource mobilization, PPPs can also contribute to the development of sustainable business models that support the long-term implementation and maintenance of AI technologies within academic institutions.

In conclusion, context-specific policies, capacity building, and infrastructure development are essential for achieving responsible and equitable AI integration in African higher education. By establishing robust governance frameworks, promoting AI literacy, and ensuring that AI tools are accessible and culturally relevant, African institutions can cultivate a thriving AI ecosystem. This approach will address ethical challenges and promote inclusivity while enabling institutions to fully harness AI's potential to enhance administration, research, and teaching.

10. CONCLUSION

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in African higher education holds a transformative potential, offering opportunities to enhance teaching, learning, research, and administrative efficiency. AI-powered tools like adaptive learning systems, language translation technologies, and predictive analytics can help address longstanding challenges, including resource constraints and limited access to quality education. However, the adoption of AI is not without significant risks, including academic dishonesty, algorithmic bias, data privacy violations, and the exacerbation of the digital divide. These challenges underscore the urgent need for robust ethical frameworks, inclusive policies, and culturally grounded approaches to ensure that AI becomes a tool for empowerment rather than a source of further marginalization.

To harness AI's benefits responsibly, African higher education institutions must adopt context-specific strategies. This includes establishing robust ethical frameworks, investing in digital infrastructure, and promoting AI literacy among educators and students. Collaboration among governments, universities, and local stakeholders is crucial to create AI solutions that reflect African languages, values, and knowledge systems. Additionally, addressing issues of accountability, transparency, and equity will be critical to mitigating the risks of digital colonialism and ensuring that AI adoption aligns with the continent's educational and developmental priorities.

Ultimately, the future of AI in African higher education depends on a balanced approach that integrates innovation with ethical responsibility. By prioritizing inclusivity, cultural relevance, and social justice, African institutions can harness AI to bridge educational disparities, empower communities, and shape a globally competitive yet locally grounded academic environment. Achieving ethical AI integration will require sustained collective effort, but with thoughtful and context-sensitive implementation, it offers the potential to create a more equitable and transformative future for education across the continent.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

To ensure the ethical, equitable, and effective integration of artificial intelligence in African higher education, the following recommendations outline key strategic actions for policymakers, academic institutions, and development partners.

- **Develop Context-Specific Ethical Frameworks:** African governments and academic institutions must prioritize the creation of ethical guidelines for AI deployment in higher education. These frameworks should address algorithmic transparency, data privacy, academic integrity, and fairness. Drawing inspiration from international models like the GDPR and UNESCO AI Ethics Guidelines, policies must be adapted to Africa's cultural, legal, and institutional realities to ensure equitable and responsible use of AI.
- **Strengthen Infrastructure and Bridge the Digital Divide:** Equitable AI adoption requires significant investment in digital infrastructure. Governments and development partners should prioritize internet connectivity, reliable power supply, and access to AI-compatible tools particularly in rural and underfunded institutions. Without addressing these disparities, AI risks deepening educational inequalities rather than resolving them.
- **Promote AI Literacy and Capacity Building:** Higher education institutions must incorporate AI literacy into their curricula and faculty development programs. Educators, administrators, and students should be trained to critically engage with AI tools, understanding both their potential and limitations. Special attention should be given to promoting ethical AI use, responsible data handling, and decolonial digital practices.
- **Support African-Led AI Research and Innovation:** To reduce dependency on Global North technologies and avoid digital colonialism, African governments and universities should invest in local AI research centers and promote the development of tools that reflect African languages, cultures, and knowledge systems. Funding mechanisms and partnerships should be established to encourage innovation and ensure the sustainability of African-led AI initiatives.
- **Establish Robust Data Governance and Accountability Mechanisms:** Institutions must implement clear protocols for data protection and AI accountability. This includes informed consent for data collection, explainable AI systems, and mechanisms for redress when AI tools produce harmful or biased outcomes. Regulatory agencies should oversee AI use in education to protect student rights and promote institutional transparency.
- **Encourage Inclusive and Participatory AI Design:** AI systems should be co-designed with input from local stakeholders, including students, faculty, technologists, and community members, to ensure cultural relevance and inclusiveness. Participatory design processes help align AI tools with local educational goals, linguistic diversity, and social values, reinforcing trust and usability.
- **Promote Regional Collaboration and Policy Alignment:** Continental and regional bodies like the African Union and AUDA-NEPAD should facilitate policy coordination among African countries to promote ethical, inclusive, and harmonized AI integration in higher education. Collaborative initiatives can pool resources, share best practices, and develop common standards for AI development and implementation.

12. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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This research was conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines and standards. All procedures performed were in compliance with relevant ethical regulations and institutional requirements.

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