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AI in higher education: Balancing innovation and ethics

An international theoretical view

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Abstract: Artificial intelligence (AI) is a sensitive topic in higher education. Furthermore, there is a significant gap between the policy framework and current practices. In this context, it is crucial to understand how best practices can be applied and how different challenges related to AI can be addressed. *The aim of this chapter* is to highlight international theoretical views on the responsible implementation of AI in higher education and the skills that are required. The research method of the study is a rapid review with a hermeneutic approach. The search strategy is based on studies concerning how AI could be responsibly implemented in higher education settings, including policy, skills, and ethical reflection. *The inclusion criteria* are: 1) studies from the last three years (2023–2025); 2) peer-reviewed, open-access articles; 3) articles written in English; and 4) databases *Oria*, *ERIC*, and *EBSCO*. Based on the findings, the discussion was structured into three dimensions: Policy Framework and Institutional Support, AI Pedagogy, and Ethical Aspects.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence (AI), higher education, AI policy, institutional support, AI pedagogy, ethical aspects

Introduction

Artificial intelligence is a controversial issue in higher education settings. In addition to opening opportunities for creativity, critical thinking, and formation in the digital world, its implementation also raises pedagogical and ethical dilemmas. The fast development of AI requires critical evaluation and collaboration at both local and global levels. One of the key challenges is the significant gap between institutional policy and everyday practice. Therefore, it is important to identify and implement the most effective strategies to address the challenges posed by AI. The European Commission (2023, pp. 8–9) stated that it is crucial to strengthen both digital literacy and a critical perspective on the ethical and practical aspects of AI in educational settings. Facing the above-mentioned challenges, UNESCO's *Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence* (2022, p. 10) also highlights that the use of AI in education requires ethical consideration, critical thinking, and new pedagogical approaches, as well as knowledge and skills.

Additionally, AI might have an impact on learning experiences for each student, but it can also hinder the development of crucial human abilities such as creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving (The UN Development Programme, 2025, p. 72).

The Report of Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (Flaata Bjaaland et al., 2025) highlights that four out of five students are already using AI in their studies. AI offers significant pedagogical benefits, including language support, simplification of complex content, and the provision of diverse teaching resources (Jermstad & Holovchuk, 2025). Moreover, AI can support students' critical thinking and analytical skills and contribute to student engagement in academic discussions (Flatåset al., 2023). Nevertheless, despite the benefits mentioned, implementation also raises ethical dilemmas. Digital judgement in this context is significant. This implies critical evaluation of digital tools, as well as privacy, safety, and ethical consideration. Digital ethics includes principles and guidelines for how AI should be implemented and managed. These key elements are crucial for students' decisions related to the use of AI. Additionally, it is also connected with values such as openness and trust. It is also worth mentioning that digital formation is an important factor in students' professional development (Haugestad & Keeling, 2024, p. 20). At this point, it is necessary to invite both students and educators to engage in critical reflection (Schön, 1987) about the potential moral and

ethical issues that may occur in interaction with AI (Jermstad & Rønning, 2024, p. 249). In addition, the introduction of AI into higher education settings raises possible risks in terms of data privacy, regulatory compliance, and ethical considerations (Molina & Medina, 2025, p. 31). Therefore, the responsibility of institutions in higher education is to navigate technological evolution in a way that is ethically acceptable (Butson & Spronken-Smith, 2024, p. 575). AI should assist and encourage the ability to think independently and critically, rather than replacing humans. Individuals learn best through observation, social dialogue, collaboration with others, the sharing of ideas, and receiving valuable feedback (Bandura, 1971). Students are more engaged in the learning process when they feel heard and valued (Chatfield, 2025, p. 6). AI can be used by lecturers to support students' creativity while establishing a dynamic learning environment that combines technological innovations with traditional pedagogical approaches and teaching methods (Jermstad, 2025, p. 18). Students who already possess critical thinking skills and creative confidence have a better understanding of how to use AI more effectively (Habib et al., 2025, p. 6). In this instance, AI pedagogy, which includes the lecturer's ability to manage various issues, is essential. A core element of AI pedagogy is supervision and support, which depends on AI literacy, discussion, critical reflection, and evaluation (Bearman & Ajjawi, 2023; Atlas, 2023, p. 92). Knowledge-sharing and critical reflection, both at national and global levels, are essential for addressing the challenges related to AI. Considering this, the following research question is:

> *How do international studies from 2023 to 2025 highlight the responsible implementation of AI in higher education?*

Methodology and ethical implications

This study is based on a rapid review methodology (Smela et al., 2023) in combination with a hermeneutic approach, emphasizing interpretation and understanding as core elements of the analysis.

Search strategy

The search strategy aimed to identify and select relevant studies concerning the integration of AI in higher education. The process involved the inclusion *criteria* to ensure relevance and quality of the selected studies. The inclusion criteria were: 1) studies published within the last two years (2023–2025); 2) peer-reviewed, open-access articles; 3) articles written in English; 4) international databases related to educational research – *Oria*, *Eric* and *EBSCO*.

Table 4.1: The inclusion criteria

Period	Types of sources	Language	Databases
2023–2025	Peer-reviewed, open-access articles	English	Oria, ERIC, EBSCO

To identify the relevant studies, the following search terms were used: *AI, Higher Education, AI Policy, Ethical Issues, AI Literacy, AI Evaluation*, and *Digital Formation*. The search strategy involved various combinations of these terms, including *AI and Higher Education*; *AI Policy and Higher Education*; *AI implementation and Higher Education*; *AI and Higher Education and Ethical Issues*; *AI Literacy and Digital and Higher Education*; and *AI evaluation and Higher Education*. In addition, Boolean operators (AND, OR) were applied to refine the search strategy, ensuring both broad coverage of perspectives and the identification of research relevant to this study.

Selection

The article selection process followed three steps: identification, screening, and inclusion of relevant articles. In total, *940* records were identified through database search (ORIA, n = 660; Eric, n = 201; EBSCO, n = 79). During the screening phase, titles and abstracts were assessed for relevance. *27* articles fulfilled the inclusion criteria and were selected for full-text analysis; *16* of these were included in the final analysis.

Data analysis

The hermeneutic framework for the literature review, suggested by Boell and Cecez-Kecmanovic (2014, p. 265), was used to analyze the data materials. Based on this, the analysis was divided into four components: *Reading* (identifying key ideas and main results); *Classification* (organizing relevant ideas for the research aim); *Critical Evaluation* (analysis of how knowledge is produced, the outcomes of the study, and the identification of limitations); and Argument *Development* (the process of building arguments based on the main findings of the articles).

This study has several *limitations*. First, the search strategy has been limited to a few databases and to publications from the past three years. Consequently, relevant studies might be excluded. Second, the researcher's personal interest may have an impact on both the study selection process and the interpretation of the results.

Ethical considerations

The study has followed the Guidelines for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities (NESH, 2021). The articles included have been analyzed with credibility and transparency.

Findings

The following session presents an overview of the included studies and summarizes information, including author(s), year of publication, primary objective, research methodology, and the main findings of the study.

Table 4.2: An overview of the included studies

Author(s)	Year of publication	Primary objective	Method	Key finding
Crompton & Burke	2023	AI in higher education	Systematic review	The study presents five core findings that are crucial for implementing AI in higher education: assessment/evaluation, predicting, AI assistant, intelligent tutoring system, and managing student learning.
Southworth et al.	2023	Identifying and implementing pathways to enhance AI literacy across the curriculum at university.	Piloting and evaluation of AI models across the curriculum	The key findings of the study emphasize the importance of developing AI pedagogy, as well as implementation and evaluation of the AI model within the curriculum.
Chan & Hu	2023	Students' reflection and attitudes related to AI: insights into benefits and challenges.	Survey	The study indicated benefits of AI for students' learning support, such as language and idea generation. Challenges related to concern about privacy, ethical issues, and human values.
Michel-Villarreal et al.	2023	Explore the challenges and opportunities related to AI in higher education.	Ethnography	The core findings point out the need for clear policies, guidelines, and frameworks to support the responsible integration of AI into higher education. In addition, exploring best practices and effective strategies.
Wanyu et al.	2024	Communication with AI-based technologies in higher education	Survey	The results show the benefits of AI, such as language development and critical thinking, as well as its limitations and ethical dilemmas.
Tzirides et al.	2024	Highlighting the integration of human insight to improve AI literacy in higher education environments	Pre- and post surveys	The findings emphasize the importance of pedagogical supervising and support in the use of AI, the significance of critical reflection and evaluation, and maintaining a balance between artificial and human intelligence.

Author(s)	Year of publication	Primary objective	Method	Key finding
Chiu	2024	Describe suggestions for advancing higher education with AI	Thematic analysis	The results underline the importance of critical reflection, developing new learning skills and students' preparation for a society driven by AI.
Lee et al.	2024	Explore how AI affects teaching and learning in higher education learning	Online survey and interviews	The key findings include a focus on AI skills, the impact of AI on curriculum development, the crucial role of institutional support, and the promotion of activity-based learning.
Aler Tubella et al.	2024	Describe a responsible approach to teaching with AI in higher education, based on an understanding of challenges and possibilities	Systematic review and qualitative interviews	The findings identified the significant gap between institutional policy, a lack of practical experience, and clear expectations.
Cherner et al.	2024	Explore the adaptation of AI in higher education	Documentary method	The core findings focus on critical decision-making and the ethical implications related to AI adaptation.
Malik et al.	2025	Explore the benefits and limitations of using conversational AI in higher education settings	Semi-structured interviews	The findings discuss the responsible use of AI, institutional policy framework, the role of such policies, and ethical implications.
Krause et al.	2025	Investigating the impact of AI on the transformation of higher education	Survey and scenario analysis	The core findings of the project are related to the positive effect of AI on the students' learning. Throughout this process, critical reflection and AI competencies are essential.
Jensen et al.	2025	Analysis of the theoretical perspectives developed during the first months after AI became publicly available	A scoping review	The key findings show how AI can support the development of innovative approaches to students' active learning.

Author(s)	Year of publication	Primary objective	Method	Key finding
Jin et al.	2025	Describe how AI has been integrated into institutions in different countries	Case study	The results show the key priorities for implementation of AI in higher education, such as AI literacy, improvements in teaching and learning, and establishment of ethical guidelines.
Bayaga	2025	Explore the impact of AI on pedagogical approaches in higher education	Survey	The findings show that AI literacy, critical reflections and institutional support are crucial components of the responsible implementation of AI in higher education.
Qiang	2025	Present cases related to using AI in higher education	Case study	The findings highlight the importance of new pedagogical approaches and understanding, addressing ethical issues in practice, and critical evaluation of AI.

Discussion

Based on the key findings of the review studies, the discussion is structured around three core dimensions, presented below: Policy Framework and Institutional Support, AI Pedagogy, and Ethical Aspects.

Policy framework and institutional support

The results indicate that the responsible implementation of AI in Higher Education depends on well-established policy frameworks and institutional support, as highlighted by several studies (Michel-Villarreal et al., 2023; Malik et al., 2025; Lee et al., 2024; Aler Tubella et al., 2024; Bayaga, 2025). Furthermore, the results also show a disconnect between policies and their implementation in daily practice.

Several institutions acknowledge the potential challenges of AI, while educators emphasize the lack of clear expectations or guidelines for teaching, learning, and assessment. Supporting this view, Michel-Villarreal et al. (2023, p. 7) underline that clear policies and guidelines for AI use in higher education settings are crucial. Institutions should define what is considered responsible use of AI, address issues such as academic integrity, data privacy, and bias, and ensure that these policies are disseminated to all participants in the educational process.

In the higher education context, it is important to recognize expectation-related issues connected with AI. Developing an effective policy framework is the first step in overcoming barriers (Michel-Villarreal et al., 2023, p. 12). Expanding on this, Lee et al. (2024, p. 9) argue that policy alone does not give the best results; this requires reflection, critical analysis, and professional awareness of AI. Based on this suggestion, institutional policies should integrate AI use with capacity-building initiatives and sustainable evaluation.

Bayaga (2025, p. 1049) emphasises that the responsible use of AI in higher education requires the development of an institutional culture that actively supports its integration. According to the author's interpretation, such a culture should focus on incorporating AI into the educational process and include the provision of tools, tutorials, and support systems that enable successful and responsible AI adoption in the learning environment. This implies that educational institutions should ensure that both lecturers and students are equipped to use AI rationally and effectively. Professional development and technical assistance are essential components of institutional culture. Additionally, educational institutions should create guidelines that clearly outline the implementation of AI (Malik et al., 2025, p. 2402). This policy can provide an explicit foundation for ethical and pedagogical AI practices, as well as a clear standard for AI practices. By integrating institutional culture with well-defined policy standards, the institution can establish a supportive environment that enhances opportunities and minimizes potential risk.

AI Pedagogy

As previously discussed, effective AI implementation requires not only technical support but also the adaptation of innovative pedagogical approaches and teaching methods (Jin, 2025, p. 11). AI can produce information and

provide quick responses, but it cannot replace the human ability to critically analyze, reflect, and comprehend context—all of which are significant to the learning process (Tzirides et al., 2024, p. 11). These viewpoints underline the significance of the students' opinions concerning AI in higher education, since their attitudes and experiences can affect how AI might be incorporated in such settings (Chiu, 2024, p. 4). By engaging students to reflect on their professional development and learning strategies in the AI era, lecturers can foster a more meaningful approach to education (Lee et al., 2024, p. 9). Additionally, students' feedback and insights regarding AI may assist educational institutions in cultivating an innovative environment that promotes critical thinking and creativity.

Jensen et al. (2025, p. 1156) highlight three possible risks associated with AI in higher education. First, AI may pose a risk to the development of students' critical thinking and writing skills. When AI generates text and solves various tasks, students' ability to analyse and reflect independently, and to develop academic skills, may be reduced. Second, curriculum content should be revised in relation to new knowledge and skills. AI has both benefits and limitations; therefore, it is significant to know what kinds of tasks and forms of exams could ensure high-quality education. Third, there is a need for innovative pedagogical approaches to address the challenges that AI presents in higher education. Furthermore, it is significant to develop teaching methods that promote reflection, critical evaluation, and creativity. For instance, students could use AI as a supportive aid during project-based learning.

It is also crucial to note that both students and educators may have different attitudes, experiences, expectations, and skill levels, which might make it difficult to implement AI in the educational process (Chan & Hu, 2023, p. 12). These differences may result in gaps in knowledge, accessibility, and effectiveness. In this situation, it makes sense to address pedagogical and ethical dilemmas in addition to technical training, thereby making both lecturers and students confident and competent in their use of AI.

In higher education, it is significant to provide a collaborative setting where students can explore the benefits and threats of AI in their education. As noted by Bandura (1971), such an environment encourages active learning, reflection, and idea generation. By combining human input with AI-generated insights, students can identify gaps in their knowledge and improve their own problem-solving abilities. This approach fosters collaborative learning

that equips students to use AI as a supportive tool rather than a replacement. Additionally, improving AI knowledge and competence within the community is essential to ensuring responsible AI integration, as enhancing skills can significantly reduce challenges and potential risks, as Bayaga (2025, p. 1069) underlined in the study. Supporting this perspective, Michel-Villarreal et al. (2023, p. 11) emphasized that advancing knowledge and awareness of AI is crucial for ensuring high-quality learning outcomes, as well as for cultivating both professional development and personal growth. Facilitating such understanding supports responsible AI use, assisting both lecturers and students in avoiding potential risks and misinterpretation. Furthermore, the development of such knowledge can foster a culture of responsible AI use, which involves technical understanding as well as social and practical effects.

Ethical aspects

Ethical considerations are essential to ensuring responsible AI implementation in higher education settings. According to Tzirides et al. (2024, p. 11), addressing data privacy, algorithmic bias, and risk-reduction approaches are significant factors and should be included to support responsible AI use. Understanding ethical dimensions cultivates critical thinking and awareness of AI use. Supporting this view, Chan & Hu (2023, pp. 12–13) point out that unclear policies may give rise to ethical dilemmas and have an impact on students' professional development and social understanding. By addressing both the technical and social aspects of AI ethics, we assist students and lecturers in handling ethical dilemmas, making responsible judgments, and contributing to culture on an institutional level.

Ethical reflection on the use of AI is essential, and it fosters a broader perspective of how technologies influence our daily lives, social interactions, and decision-making (Southworth et al., 2023, p. 3). As a result, improving AI literacy helps to navigate ethical dilemmas, as Chiu (2024, p. 3) and Krause (2025, p. 2) point out. By adopting ethical reflection, we not only support learners' progress in the digital world but also educate them to deal with various ethical dilemmas that might arise in connection with AI (Jermstad & Rønning, 2024, p. 249; Lee et al., 2024, p. 9). This reflective approach invites lecturers to critically analyze the impact of AI on students' learning and privacy, resulting in more responsible AI incorporation into the educational

environment. Finally, ethical reflection allows students to make decisions and judgments, identify possible outcomes, and balance the pros and cons of AI.

With AI, it is crucial to ensure a balance between 'technical robustness and ethical constraints' (Aler Tubella et al., 2024, p. 7). On the one hand, the AI systems should be stable, safe, and protective. On the other hand, implementation should be driven by ethical principles and human values such as honesty and responsibility. Furthermore, AI may also pose a conflict between democratic and ethical norms such as human agency, inclusiveness, privacy, and openness (Aler Tubella et al., 2024, p. 9). AI can also have an impact on students' professional growth, particularly in terms of preparation for everyday practice, which requires relationship-building and social interaction (Chan & Hu, 2023, p. 12). AI may hinder the development of social competence and relationship-building skills by limiting opportunities for personal interaction. It can particularly have an impact on active listening, because students receive information passively and do not engage with others' views. Furthermore, AI may impede the development of empathy, since AI cannot replace understanding of other people's feelings. Communication skills can also be affected, because a good dialogue involves both verbal and non-verbal communication. Finally, AI may hinder teamwork, since it cannot substitute for collaborative and problem-solving abilities.

Concluding remarks

The analysis of the review articles makes it possible to conclude that the safe integration of AI in higher education requires a clear policy framework. In addition, the increase in AI in higher education may reduce critical thinking, writing, and problem-solving skills. Several institutions have integrated AI literacy into their curricula, emphasizing the importance of responsible use of AI. In this process, innovative pedagogical approaches are crucial, and they should be based on critical reflection, evaluation, and digital formation. Based on the key findings of several studies, AI pedagogy is founded on AI literacy, learning, and co-creation with AI. It involves lecturers and students understanding how to use AI responsibly. As is emphasized in the analyzed

articles, AI pedagogy highlights how AI can support learning and teaching, and it is essential to create a clear understanding for both lecturers and students. Since social interaction is a core element of pedagogy, lecturers and students should reflect on and evaluate the role of AI in higher education, and implementing an ethical framework is significant. Within this context, critical reflection, evaluation, ethical considerations, and awareness play a crucial role (Jermstad & Holovchuk, 2025).

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Del 2

Etikk og danning i klasserommet