

The Role of Academic Institutions in Establishing AI Research Ethical Committees: Case of Universities in the Democratic Republic of Congo

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Abstract

This article examines the experiences of staff in higher education institutions with regard to research integrity about the contribution of academic institutions in the establishment of AI specific committees. AI ethics in research is an envisaged competency that researchers have to comply in the process of publication (Wirnkor, 2025; Baten, Laneuville & van Deyzen, 2023; Perkins & Roe, 2023). Existing studies address AI as catalyst for change addressing the concerns of quality education in sub-Saharan Africa (Ewulley et al., 2023; Elfert & Ydesen, 2023). The state of affairs describes paucity of research on and in AI (SSA) (Barrett, 2023, p. 287). Research shows that in the Democratic Republic of Congo (RDC), digital skills and infrastructures are not developed, with only 8.6 percent internet users in 2017 (World Bank, 2020, p. 16). Meanwhile, the focus is on how higher education institutions shape AI research ethics in the East region of DRC. With quantitative approach, the study sampled 60 university staff members of different categories. The paper applied a google form questionnaire embedding closed and open questions to collect data. The findings reveal 51.7% of informants to be familiar with the concept of AI ethics and learnt about in different times. But 70% have never had any training on AI; meanwhile 68.3% acknowledge AI ethics to be very important in academic research and development. 96.7% agree that there are benefits for institutions to establish committees in charge of AI research ethics but 93.3% describe their institutions not to have AI-specific ethical committees. Participants report that academic institutions promoting AI ethics govern misuse of AI, enhance research free of plagiarism. Higher institutions have the responsibility to set AI specific ethical committees charged to devise institutional ethical guidelines, ensure researchers align with AI ethical principles and reflect possible ways of integrating AI in curricula. The paper concludes that training of university staff is a necessity to undermine AI-related risks in academia.

Keywords: AI, AI ethics, research ethics, academic institutions, ethical committee

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1 Introduction

Since its inception at the 1956 Dartmouth Conference, artificial intelligence has captured the interest of individuals and companies alike (UNESCO, 2019, p. 8). The conference was led by John McCarthy, Marvin Minsky, Nathaniel Rochester, and Claude Shannon. The conference is widely recognized as the birthplace of AI because McCarthy coined the term “artificial intelligence,” which shaped the stage for the field’s formal establishment. The conference brought together experts interested in neural networks, the theory of computation, and creating machines that could learn and solve complex problems (Kashefi, Kashefi, & Mirsarai, 2024, p. 526).

Despite the incredible growth of AI, Africa lags behind. The continent faces many educational challenges, including a shortage of classrooms, libraries, and technology (Ewulley et al., 2023); inadequate funding; poor infrastructure; and a lack of qualified teachers (Elfert & Ydesen, 2023; Chisom, Unachukwu, & Osawaru, 2023, p. 640). Infrastructure constraints, such as poor internet connectivity, lack of electricity, low smartphone penetration, and poor network coverage, are among the reasons Africa is not keeping up (African Leadership University (ALU), 2025, p. 30). Currently, there is limited digital literacy and a lack of essential skills that could hinder Africans' engagement with AI. ALU presents Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana, Rwanda, Togo, and South Africa as countries embracing AI (p. 37). However, as of 2022, only Mauritius (2018), Egypt (2021), and Rwanda (2022) had published national AI strategies (Adams, 2022, pp. 7–8). In 2023, Senegal became the fourth African country to launch a national AI strategy (Kurien & Soglo, 2024, p. 15). These issues exacerbate the quality of the implemented education, but AI comes as a catalyst for change, offering innovative solutions to the current challenges (Chisom, Unachukwu, & Osawaru, 2023, pp. 638–639), as seen in ongoing projects across different African regions of developing national AI strategies to guide AI adoption (Adams, 2022, p. 7).

The problem which this paper investigates connects to insufficient research on and in AI in Africa (Barrett, 2023, p. 287) on one hand and the lack of understanding of AI and its benefits with regard to academic research and related ethical considerations on the other. In this regard, this paper tackles the role academic institutions are called to play in establishing AI specific ethical committees and the focus is on higher education institutions in the Democratic Republic of Congo where digital infrastructures and skills are not developed with only 8.6 percent internet users in 2017 (World Bank, 2020, p. 16). The following are research questions triggering this study:

1. What role should academic institutions play in regard to AI research ethics?
2. To which extent do academic institutions staff understand and deal with AI?
3. What benefits do AI ethical committees bring in the development of academic institutions?

2 State of research

With the increasingly spread of artificial intelligence, a lot of caution needs to be done, especially in the field of education wherein teaching and research may crumble. The rationale behind cautious posture for AI generated content obligates researchers to be aware that AI brushes data for certain subjects and this makes changes in the process of construction of the meaning (of the said-subject), which may lead to an interpretation unrelated to its content (Monte-Serrat & Cattani, 2023, pp. 5-6). In the same perspective, thinking that people should solely rely on technology is a dangerous trend (Popenici & Kerr, 2017, p. 3). As such, it is advised for researchers to take appropriate steps to minimized and control errors because failing to control appropriately AI-related errors is considered as research misconduct (Resnik & Hosseini, 2025, p. 1512).

Artificial intelligence is transforming academic research and therefore it shapes research methodologies and related ethics. So, AI has the potential both to boost and spoil research. Therefore, good use of artificial intelligence is needed to regulate the research process, from research to publication. This section describes AI and education by defining AI and clarifying how AI connects to education in a broad viewpoint. The literature also looks into AI research and ethics development. Last but not least, the role of academic institutions and publishers regarding ethics is scrutinized.

2.1 AI and education

Resnik and Hosseini, (2025, p. 1500) define AI a technical and scientific field devoted to the engineered system that generates outputs such as content, forecasts, recommendations or decisions for a given set of human-defined objectives. The authors add saying that AI is a subfield of computer science and thereof is used to refer to technologies (or tools) that can perform human tasks that require intelligence, such as perception, judgment, reasoning, or decision-making. In this regard, it is pertinent for educational system to bridge school knowledge/competences and job requirements in the digital era. But the gap between the current educational system and the increasingly technology-centered job market is noticeable (Huang, Samek & Shiri, 2021, p. 353). So, building AI expertise through higher education and research is one of the main approaches used by governments to address their respective skill gaps (UNESCO, 2019, p. 22). In recent years, AI is scaling rapidly in higher education globally (Khatri & Karki, 2023, p. 2) to the extent that it is seen as the most crucial development of the century (Seldon & Abidoye, 2018; Nguyen et al., 2023, p. 4221). It is in this framework that the Council of Europe identifies four ways AI with which interacts with education and these include learning with AI, using AI to learn about learning, learning about AI, and preparing for AI (Holmes, et al., 2022). As such, AI has the potential to contribute to the training and human capital development and therefore gives options to rapidly upskill researchers (Barrett, 2023, p. 288). Following the advent and development of AI, the paradigm shift in education is obvious since everyone will be responsible of studying what they need, and schools and universities are being transformed into a hybrid scheme (Monte-Serrat & Cattani, 2023, p. 2). Today, there is no way to disentangle education and artificial intelligence, despite the fact that AI exists for around 70 years, it remained stagnating. It is important to know that education plays a key role to make prospective workforce AI-ready (UNESCO, 2019, p. 18) but considering its profound and dynamic influences, UNESCO (2021) launched global standards for AI ethics.

Artificial intelligence in education (AIED) is a technology-based and cross-disciplinary field (Nguyen et al., 2023, p. 4223; Hwang et al., 2020, p. 2). Artificial intelligence in higher education (AIHED) profiles as a discipline susceptible for use in the upcoming years given its impulses of innovation within higher education but at the same time challenges teaching and research (Khatri & Karki, 2023, p. 3). Talking about ethical challenges in AI, bias and discrimination, privacy concerns, accountability and workforce impact (Kashefi, Kashefi, & Mirsarai, 2024, p. 528). Referring to the challenges, it sorts out that AI entails negative effects, amongst false belief of equal opportunities for searchers, and plagiarism getting intensified by easy access to internet search engines (Monte-Serrat & Cattani, 2023, p. 6). Part of the advantages inferred by AI includes authors' instant assistance in sound writing, grammar and spelling check and the alike (Bahammam, et al., 2023, pp. 152-153). In contrast, higher education experiences threats considering academic integrity issues (Kouam, 2025, p. 3). That is why authorship and originality need particular attention; otherwise threatens scientific integrity is inevitable (Wirnkor, 2025, p. 154).

2.2 AI research and development ethics

AI entails a lot of numerous benefits to science (Kouam, 2025, p. 3) but at the same time it raises ethical issues (Resnik & Hosseini, 2025, p. 1500). In the field of education, there are opportunities and benefits connected to AI given the speed and volume of information it uploads (Monte-Serrat & Cattani, 2023, p. 11). One of the benefits is the potential of AI to help researchers in the demanding tasks of production, manipulation and search for meaning in large data (Rafik, 2023, p. 40); without ignoring that AI tools enhance research efficiency (Kouam, 2025, p. 5). But the use of AI in research raises questions of ethical issues, pedagogical concerns and academic integrity, as well as it raises issues on authenticity and originality of its contents, as it can potentially lead to plagiarism and lack of creativity in teaching, learning, research and scholarship (Khatri & Karki, 2023, p. 3). With such a situation, measures to distinguish original work from AI-generated need to be taken in order to guarantee academic honesty; considering that plagiarism has ethical and moral implications (Monte-Serrat & Cattani, 2023, p. 6). Accordingly, AI-related research should be carried out under responsible measures which imply identifying biases for control and transparency protocols about AI usage, alongside with their management, and synthetic data management (Resnik & Hosseini, 2025, p. 1505). However, it is asserted that 60% of publishers do not have AI-generated content detection tools to counter plagiarism or authorship and originality which, if not observed, threatens scientific integrity (Wirnkör, 2025, p. 154). Current research ethics boards (REBs) are not equipped with less equipment to detect unethical practice. As such, being ill-equipped to address AI-related ethical dilemmas, REBs highlight the need for new guidelines (Kouam, 2025, p. 3).

AIED may lead to increasing ethical risks (Khatri & Karki, 2023, p. 5). However, the need intensifies to evaluate institutional policies and editorial processes in order to ban unethical practices and reduce the systemic pressure and competition aligning with the “publish or perish” principle (Eckhardt & Breidbach, 2024; Kouam, 2025, p. 3). To counter the “tyrannical publish or perish” statement, researchers should evolve, making good use of data processing through research communities (Rafik, 2023, p. 40). Similarly, it would be pertinent for publishers to bring authors to disclose the use of AI, specifically in the section of acknowledgements or in the methods section (Bahammam, et al., 2023, p. 156). Doing so would enable researchers to surmount the four ethical problems labelled by Wirnkör (2025, p. 154) as he states:

(1) The problem of accuracy and bias could arise when AI generated content is used, making the credibility of research findings questionable and undermined; (2) disclosure and transparency concerns may arise in situations where an unaware reader mistakenly assumes that AI texts are original human works. For this, there is a need for unequivocal disclosure; (3) who is the author and originator of the material leads to the problem of authorship and originality; (4) deception and misinformation as malicious actors could potentially use AI to generate fabricated research.

Research ethics is described as a procedure governed by established frameworks (Samuel, Chubb, & Gemma Derrick, 2021, p. 331). Research ethics in the era of AI makes debates across the society. So, conversations on AI ethics are dominantly visible in public and private sectors such as corporations, media, academia, and public institutions (Huang, Samek & Shiri, 2021, p. 352). To date, 80+ AI ethics initiatives have contributed to the publication of ethical principles, tenets, values or other abstract requirements for AI development (Samuel, Chubb, & Gemma Derrick, 2021, p. 326). Therefore, ethical concerns in AI research are tied on data governance, focusing on privacy, data minimization, and consent (*Ibid.*, p. 329). In the framework of AI regulation approaches, the EU emphasizes data protection and privacy, in addition to the proposed “AI Act” that focuses on transparency, accountability and ethical AI (Kashefi, Kashefi, &

Mirsaraei, 2024, p. 532). The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity discusses the importance of transparency. According to this code, researchers should report any use of external services or AI and automated tools in their results and methods and considers “hiding the use of AI or automated tools in the creation of content or drafting of publications” as a violation of research integrity (All European Academies, 2023, p. 7).

2.3 Role of academic institutions and publishers regarding ethical committees towards AI

Academic institutions play a pivotal role in establishing AI specific ethical committees in order to regulate research; given that AI is largely employed to drive the research process itself (Baten, Laneuville & van Deyzen, 2023, p.15). Ethics in research is an envisaged competency that researchers have to comply with. Abiding with ethics in research means by avoiding plagiarism and observing rules, specifically of publishing journals, although with different views of AI (Wirnkör, 2025, pp. 153-154), need regulations of using AI assistants to navigate information (Baten, Laneuville & van Deyzen, 2023, p. 15). This idea is supported by research since generative AI raises questions around authorship and reproducibility (Perkins & Roe, 2023). One of the roles of institutions is to train its staff so that they comply with regulations of AI. It is in this way that in the US, the National Institutes of Health NIH and National Science Foundation (NSF) require response conduct of research (RCR) education for funded students and trainees, and many academic institutions require some form of RCR training for all research faculty. Topics mostly covered in the framework of RCR include data fabrication and falsification, plagiarism, investigation of misconduct, scientific record keeping, data management, rigor and reproducibility, authorship, peer review, publication, conflict of interest, mentoring, safe research environment, protection and human and animal subjects, and social responsibility (Resnik & Hosseini, 2025, p. 1514).

To sustain ethics in research within the current era, academic and journals need strong collaboration. Through such a collaboration, institutional and journals frameworks have to support ethical practices through clear policies and accountability mechanisms in order to effectively address research misconduct (Kouam, 2025, pp. 5-6). In this 21st century characterized with AI, the role of higher education can no longer be traditional whereby activities are restricted to teaching, learning and attempting to increase intellectual and moral qualities of students, but rather having teachers with high standards of teaching and research (Vacarelu, 2023, p. 30; Engwall, 2020, p. 198). So, universities at stake may not be any more considered as mere repositories of past knowledge but as creators of new knowledge (Rafik, 2023, p. 44). Research action at academies and institutes of education has to be regulated, aiming at observing rigid objective schemes (Monte-Serrat & Cattani, 2023, p. 7). In this regard, it can be understood that one of the roles of academic institutions and publishers is to help researchers produce authentic publications. Among the ways towards that end is editors and publishers to employ AI-assisted tools to screen papers for issues of plagiarism, image manipulation, and ethical concerns, etc. (Bahammam, et al., 2023, p. 153). However, there is an overt debate of whether or not to use AI in paper writing. The study by Ganjavi et al. (2024, p. 3) reveal that among journals with specific guidelines, only 1% explicitly prohibit the use of generative in manuscript, and 8% of publishers and 22% of journals indicated that their guidelines exclusively apply to the writing process (Ganjavi et al., 2024, p. 1). This suggests that the complete prohibition of AI use is rare, with most journals focusing instead on disclosure requirements and limitations on specific uses.

Given the emerging pace of AI, most scholars are already involved in the analysis of different transformations that AI takes to the university setting. Arguments are that a peculiar academic perspective is needed for questioning the quick turn to technology for answers, as the richness of human knowledge

and perspectives may remain only with little monopoly of few entities (Popenici & Kerr, 2017, p. 11; Huang, Samek & Shiri, 2021, p. 355). The rise of generative AI prompts ethical discussions regarding the implications of employing AI tools to aid in the creation of papers (Bahammam, et al., 2023, p. 154). Therefore, AI researchers have to be concerned with ethical implications of their research work (Nguyen et al., 2023, p. 4224). Wirnkor presents in the following table, the top tier journals and their viewpoints on AI use for the publication’s sake.

Table 1: List of publishers and relevant portions of AI-policy use

Publisher	List AI as author	Acceptable use	Note on use
Elsevier	Not at all	In writing, analyze data, create images or enhance	Not use to generate art works. All use requires appropriate disclosure
Science journals	Not at all	AI-generated cannot be used in publication	Figures, images or graphics not permitted for use except explicitly permitted by editor. Violation constitutes misconduct.
IEEE	Not at all	AI-generated text must cite AI system used.	All use requires appropriate disclosure
Wiley	Not at all	Use to improve spelling, grammar and editing.	Text generated must be acknowledgement. Final decision on AI use is determined by the journal editor.
Sage	Not at all	Lists sources used to generate content	Verify accuracy, validity and appropriateness of the content.
Taylor & Francis	Not at all	AI-generated stuff is not in line with authorship criteria.	If used, AGC must be acknowledged and or appropriately documented.
Springer	Not at all	Document AI use in method section.	Created images in a legally accepted manner is permitted. Images and videos must be reviewed on basis of case-by case.
Emerald	Not at all	Language and readability only	Forbidden to generate or reporting of results
University of Cambridge press	Not at all	Declared AI use and explain clearly in publications.	Author is responsible for originality, integrity and use of AI. Use of AI must not break the plagiarism policy.

Source: Wirnkor, 2025, p. 155.

3 Methodology

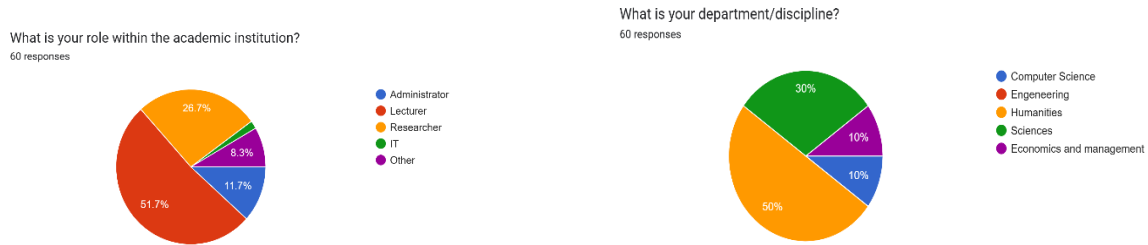
Examining the role played by academic institutions regarding the establishment of AI research ethics, the research applied quantitative approach as it was the possible way to gather data across the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

3.1 Research design and instrument

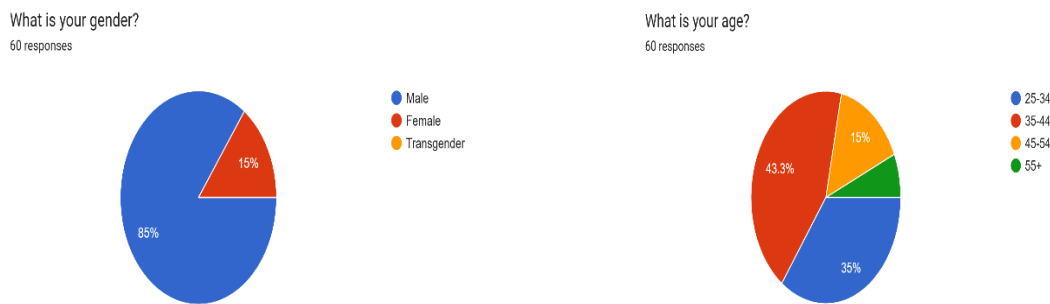
The research employed a quantitative design as it was the facilitating channel to reach prospective participants in the study. To this end, a questionnaire (see appendix) was designed and then put into a google form, made of closed and open questions. With google form, it is was easy to monitor the process and progress of data collection. Also, google form assists in generating findings alongside the collection of data. The form was shared through emails and WhatsApp forums with a notice to the key correspondents to share with colleagues working for universities in east DRC.

3.2 Participants

Data was collected from staff working in higher education institutions, including staff involved in administration, lectures, researchers, IT, and any other position; but with specificity of departments where it is applicable, as shown in the graphs below:



The participants are connected with academic institutions settled in the East of DRC. The concerned institutions are private and state-based from South and North Kivu provinces. So, the study included 60 participants (most of them young) sampled from 19 institutions. The sample is made up of 51 males (85%) and only nine females, representing 15%.



This little number of females indicates the scarcity of females in higher education institutions. The big number of young people as displayed in the graph entails the handling possibility of the information and communications technology (ICT). The population of Congo being mostly young, it is not surprising that most of the respondents are young, with the age range of 25 and 44.

4 Findings

The results of this paper articulate four points, including AI ethics awareness, the role of academic institutions, AI-specific ethical committees, and the challenges and opportunities connected to AI in Congolese universities.

4.1 AI Ethics Awareness

AI ethics awareness ranges from familiarity of the concept of AI, perspective of training in AI and the report of the importance of AI ethics in academic research and development.

Familiarity of the concept of AI ethics

29 informants (48.3%) report not to be aware of the concept of AI ethics. Yet, the 31 who are aware (51.7%) state that they learnt about AI ethics by doing research, through education at university, by means of online workshop, and from social media.

Training & capacity building	The role of Information, Training and sensibilization; Training teachers/researchers and students on AI ethics; Training of teachers and students; Quality teaching.
Curriculum development & courses	Academic institutions should add the course of Ethics in all the promotions; Introduce AI ethics in the curriculum.
Governance, rules & policies	Set regulations of AI use...; Guide the use of AI...; Establish guiding norms for AI use; Monitoring and ethics policy role.
Academic integrity (plagiarism, responsible use)	Training, promoting responsible use of AI which avoids fraud and plagiarism; Provide training on the ethical use of AI...; Teach students... by asking them to avoid plagiarism.
Strategic leadership / key institutional responsibility	Main role !; Leading role; Crucial role; A very Big role in emphasizing it at all levels; A leading role in raising awareness among young students and researchers.
Research quality and support	Critical role in research...; Support researchers to sensitize people through conferences and workshops; Student supervision; Establishing the truth based on facts.
Management, regulation and use of AI tools	Management and regulation; Make an inventory of all the AI tools used locally...; Institutions must capitalize on the facilities that AI makes available to us.

Academic institutions insurance of AI research and development alignment with ethical principles

The following table sheds light on the thematic roles which academic institutions play.

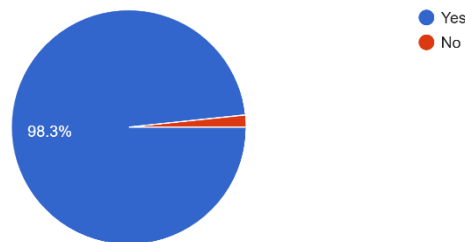
Table 3: Quality assurance roles of institutions

Thematic role of institutions	Key statements from the respondents
Monitoring and continuous evaluation	Doing continuous monitoring and evaluation on the use of AI in the academic institution; Make a serious follow-up to avoid plagiarism; Through monitoring and continuing education; Conducting monitoring; When submitting research work.
Governance, guidelines and internal policy	By implementing guidelines and policy activities; Have an ethical guideline; Academic institutions should develop guidelines and an internal ethical framework; defining a management policy... with a focus on AI ethics.
Committees, quality assurance and control structures	In formalizing an internal AI ethics committee; Each institution should schedule a specific commission in charge of this concern; By establishing a cell or committee for quality; AI committees or quality assurance would work for that; Through a quality assurance unit.

Detection tools and technical control	Tools to assess AI-generated text should be implemented; Develop software that can detect the use of AI; With anti-AI software...; Use plagiarism checker software; Using software to detect the use of AI; Creating apps which can help verification [1].
Regulation of AI use and respecting research principles	By authorizing the using of AI with regulation; Academic institutions should evaluate the use of AI in their research by setting clear rules...; By making clear rules; In coping with research principles; Pave the way of its usage but controlling it through scenarios [1].
Teaching, curriculum and awareness	They should integrate courses related to AI ethics into the modules; Academic institutions must consider teaching ethics in AI programs; When curricula are followed in accordance with the national program.
Ensuring research quality and preventing plagiarism	By auditing the quality of research outcomes avoiding plagiarism; Ensure that AI is used only to improve science production; When AI is used... and it improves the quality of searches.
Embedding ethics and social control in broader institutional and legal frameworks	Institutions must invest efforts in social control... include ethics as a necessity in quality assurance; Reference to state legal drafts (cybercrime, etc.) to regulate the use of AI.

Responsibility of academic institutions for developing guidelines for AI ethics

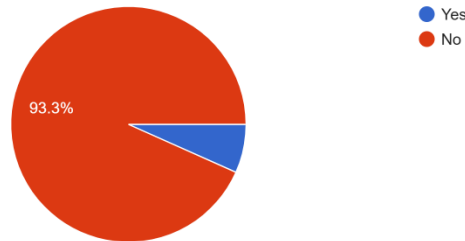
Should academic institutions be responsible for developing guidelines for AI ethics?
60 responses



4.3 AI-Specific Ethical Committees

Institution’s AI-specific ethical committee

Does your institution have an AI-specific ethical committee?
60 responses

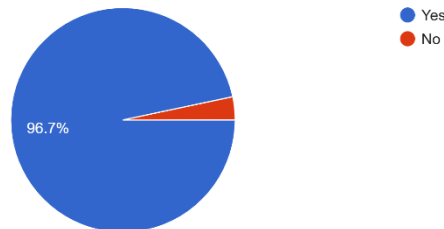


Primary roles of this committee

Respondents elaborate roles of ethical committees mentioning the setting of research ethics regulation, combating plagiarism in scientific research, guiding and/or mentoring learners, checking whether research ethics is observed by a researcher for practical works or dissertation, making sure ethical considerations are met, setting measures and regulating its usage, and checking or detecting AI in all works.

Benefits of establishing such a committee

If no, do you think establishing such a committee would be beneficial?
60 responses



4.4 Challenges and Opportunities

Challenges for establishing AI-specific ethical committees in academic institutions

Table 4: Challenges of AI ethical committees

Thematic role for institutions	Examples of challenges / needs from the document
Building human expertise and training	Deficit of trained staff; Lack of trained human resources; La formation manque; Lack of training; Lack of qualified personnel; Currently, there is still a lack of local expertise; Need to find people who understand AI and ethics; That he should first be trained.

Providing resources, infrastructure and financial support	Funding, human capital, technical skills; Lack of limited financial resources; Challenges related to technical aspects of equipment; High cost of internet data; High cost of anti-AI software; Support from the committee; Availability of substantial resources.
Designing and empowering effective AI-ethics committees	Risk of “phantom” committees; Need for means and power of action; The establishment of AI ethics committees faces a lack of expertise and support; reluctance to follow up and limited technical resources; committees unable to draw the line between good and bad use.
Ensuring ethical, responsible and non-misleading use of AI	Raise awareness of the risks of abuse, academic fraud, plagiarism, and misinformation; Anti-plagiarism promotion; Plagiarism; Intellectual laziness; Difficulty detecting what comes from AI; Many institutions have a lack of AI tools control.
Promoting awareness, motivation and ethical culture	No more sensitization at authorities’ level; Absence of good will; Dishonesty as a nationwide practice; Missing the learning community; The challenge that some staff will not respect ethics; Helping AI users do so with complete accountability.
Managing equality of access and avoiding exclusion	Non-users and poor users of AI will be left behind and eventually replaced; Delays in ICT training for many instructors and students; The integration of AI in school and capacity of researchers to follow and welcome it.
Aligning with national frameworks and global standards	Lack of approved national policy/legal framework on AI; Need to be at the same level as other institutions in the world; Reference to state cybercrime services and electronic identification systems as examples of broader governance context [1].

Opportunities for academic institutions to promote AI ethics and responsible AI development

Table 5: Opportunities for promotion of AI

Thematic role for institutions	Example statements from the document
Updating knowledge and keeping pace with science	Be updated on the current scientific use of AI in research; Opportunity to be up to date with institutions that have succeeded in promoting AI; Exchange of experiences with other institutions around the world.
Promoting research quality, originality and standards	AI ethics enable institutions to ensure originality in new knowledge; Combating plagiarism and cut and paste; Quality will be insured and reliable scientific developments; Avoid plagiarism, make researchers responsible, maintain originality.

Supporting effective and efficient research and teaching	It helps learners develop lifelong learning autonomy; It strengthens and eases research; Good scientific research; Promptness in performing scientific tasks; Saving time; Facilitating research and promoting technological advancement.
Training, education and sensitization	Through taught courses, workshops, conferences and seminars; Trainings and associations; Training programs focused on AI ethics; Raise awareness among the general public, train future engineers; Teach learners how to use AI responsibly.
Curriculum and program development	Raise awareness among the general public, train future engineers, integrate AI modules into all areas of research; Develop a management culture with a focus on AI.; Academic institutions can promote AI ethics via curricula.
Internal structures, services and quality assurance	The existence of a quality assurance committee is an opportunity; Initiate AI services or units in academic departments for curriculum preservation and monitoring; Create training centers.
Enhancing access, infrastructure and support	Rapid access to information and work tools; Access to internet; Academic institutions have human resources and can develop AI even with poor infrastructures; Possibility of accessing PTFs to finance this sector.
Strengthening responsibility and ethical culture	Emphasize human responsibility (the user remains accountable); Efficiency and responsibility in using AI, not as robots; Promote responsible use of AI to boost productivity; Prevent the worst drawbacks of AI.
Broadening research horizons and global positioning	Openness to broader and more diverse fields of research; this facilitates the development of research and puts the university on the global development map; Being among curious researchers paying attention to AI's impact.

Table 6: Summary analysis table

Dimension	Key findings
Sample profile	Respondents are mainly lecturers, with additional researchers, administrators, IT, and “other” staff, across Humanities, Sciences, Computer Science, and Economics & Management; most are aged 25–54, predominantly male ^[1] .
Awareness of AI ethics	Many respondents report being familiar with AI ethics, but a substantial minority say they are not or are unsure; awareness often comes from informal channels such as radio, social media, online workshops, or general ICT courses ^[1] .

Formal training	Dedicated AI-ethics training is limited; where it exists, it is recent (around 2020–2025) and often tied to specific universities or workshops, while many participants report having had no formal training at all [1].
Perceived importance	Most participants rate AI ethics as “Very important”; a smaller group choose “Important” and a few “Less important”, indicating a strong consensus that AI ethics matters in academic research and development [1].
Expected institutional role	Institutions are expected to inform, train, and sensitize staff and students, integrate AI ethics into curricula, organize seminars/workshops, and generally take a leading or “main” role in promoting responsible AI use [1].
Governance structures	A large majority think institutions should develop AI-ethics guidelines; many say there is not yet an AI-specific ethics committee in their institution, but most consider creating such a committee beneficial [1].
Ethical practices proposed	Suggested practices include setting clear rules, ethical guidelines and internal regulations, using plagiarism/AI-detection tools, continuous monitoring of AI use, and creating quality-assurance or ethics cells at various institutional levels [1].
Main challenges	Frequently mentioned challenges are lack of trained staff and local expertise, weak digital culture, limited funding and infrastructure, high cost of detection software, general lack of will, and risks of plagiarism and academic fraud [1].
Perceived opportunities	Opportunities include improving research quality and originality, reducing plagiarism, saving time, opening new research fields, fostering lifelong learning autonomy, and helping institutions align with global standards in AI use [1].

5 Discussion

Following the findings, the participants rate AI ethics as “Very important”. In this regard, strong perceived importance among academic staff mirrors global surveys where practitioners and scholars widely acknowledge AI-ethics concerns, especially in knowledge-intensive sectors (Khan et al., 2023; Jantunen et al., 2024). Many informants claim familiarity with AI ethics, but a substantial group is not familiar or unsure; many learned informally (radio, social media, workshops). This gap between awareness and structured understanding reflects findings that AI ethics is often discussed informally, while systematic competence remains uneven across institutions and regions (Mbiazi et al., 2025; Daza & Ilozumba, 2022). Similarly, research highlights uneven, context-dependent awareness (Mbiazi et al., 2025) and fragmented understanding (Daza & Ilozumba, 2022). Formal training in AI ethics is limited; where present, it is recent (around 2020–2025) and linked to specific courses or foreign universities, connects to studies showing that dedicated AI-ethics curricula are still emerging and often concentrated in particular universities or programs rather than being mainstreamed (Mbiazi et al., 2025; Zhou et al., (2020). Moreover, there is strong consensus that academic institutions should lead: training, sensitization, integrating AI-ethics into curricula, organizing seminars, and setting rules and guidelines. In this framework, literature on AI-ethics governance stresses the central role of universities in norm-setting, education, and interdisciplinary dialogue, especially in low- and middle-income contexts where public regulation may lag (Mbiazi et al.,

2025; Jantunen et al., 2024). Respondents almost unanimously support institutional responsibility for AI-ethics guidelines and creation of AI-specific ethics committees, though most say their institution does not yet have such committees. This demand for internal governance aligns with proposals for institutional AI-ethics boards or AI-specific extensions of research ethics committees to operationalize high-level principles within organizations (Nitta et al., 2022; Zhou et al., 2020). The concerns of plagiarism, misuse, academic fraud, “intellectual laziness”, loss of originality, and threats to data protection and human integrity reflect widely discussed AI-ethics risks around academic integrity, transparency, fairness, and respect for human agency noted in empirical and conceptual studies of AI in education and research (Jantunen et al., 2024; Khan et al., 2023; Daza & Ilozumba, 2022). It is important to note key challenges, including lack of trained human resources and local expertise, weak digital culture, high cost of anti-plagiarism/AI-detection tools, limited funding and infrastructure. As such, resource and capacity constraints match evidence that implementing AI-ethics frameworks are particularly difficult in resource-constrained institutions, where both technical infrastructure and specialized expertise are scarce (Mbiazi et al., 2025; Daza & Ilozumba, 2022). Concerning opportunities: raising research quality and originality, reducing plagiarism, saving time, opening new research fields, supporting lifelong learning, and aligning with global standards. These perceived opportunities echo research that frames AI as a tool for augmenting human capabilities and expanding research productivity, provided that clear ethical and governance frameworks are in place (Jantunen et al., 2024; Daza & Ilozumba, 2022).

Conclusion

Thinking about the role of academic institutions in establishing AI specific ethical committees has been central to this paper. Therefore, academic staff in East DRC universities largely recognize AI ethics as a very important driver for academic research and development. Congolese university staff expect their institutions to set norms, train, and control misuse of AI. However, following the findings, many respondents lack training in AI or AI ethics, and familiarity (for those who are concerned) often comes from informal channels. While almost all participants consider AI-specific ethics committees beneficial, the vast majority report that such committees and guiding norms do not yet exist, leaving a governance gap at a time when AI is rapidly entering academic practice. Regarding the findings, universities are positioned as pivotal institutions where AI’s potential to enhance research quality, efficiency, and global visibility coexists with heightened risks of plagiarism, academic fraud, and erosion of scientific integrity if ethical frameworks are not institutionalized. In this regard, establishing AI-ethics structures and building staff competencies become urgent priorities for universities in the DRC. Considering the findings, recommendations for practice highlight the development of institutional AI-ethics policies and guidelines, the establishment and empowerment of AI-specific ethics/quality committees in order to build staff and student capacity in AI and AI ethics and to strengthen academic integrity mechanisms. For further study, the authors suggest qualitative research for in-depth exploration research integrity in this AI era.

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