

# Exploring the Ethical Use of Artificial Intelligence in Academic Activities: A Qualitative Study of Guinean Students

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## Abstract

*The rapid integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in academic contexts has raised ethical concerns around academic integrity, plagiarism, data privacy, and responsible use, with little attention given to low-resource contexts such as West Africa. The study explores ethical concerns, student experiences, and the role of sociocultural and institutional environments in guiding students' choices related to the use of AI. The methodology of this study was Interpretive Phenomenological Design (IPD) to collect the data by semi-structured interviews in French on WhatsApp and Google Meet with 10 students who have experience in using academic AI tools, and then the data was analyzed by manual thematic coding. Two main attitudes were identified: supportive-use attitude (AI as a learning tool) and independence-preserving attitude (strengthening personal efforts and originality). Students knew the ethical principles including academic honesty but were not sure what it meant when it came to paraphrasing and graded work, as a result of unclear institutional policies, limited guidance and gaps in sociocultural and infrastructural norms. The results suggest the need for more precise guidance on the use of AI along with training on ethics and assessment frameworks tailored to the Guinean context, to inform and drive institutional and policy innovations. The study finds that the use of AI in an ethical way in Guinea is not only related to students' awareness but also to coordinated institutional action, and suggests the creation of institutional frameworks for the governance of AI in the local institutions of Guinea.*

**Keywords:** Ethical Decision Making; Artificial Intelligence in Education; Academic Integrity; Sociocultural Context; Guinea

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The fast merging of artificial intelligence (AI) with educational systems globally has spawned both novel opportunities and complicated ethical dilemmas, necessitating the critical

academic focus (T. Yang et al., 2025). With the growing use of AI-driven tools in teaching, learning, assessment, and academic integrity, institutions of higher learning must investigate how students learn, embrace, and react to these technologies (Kong & Zhu, 2025). Recent studies in the world have addressed the concept of AI literacy, ethical decision-making, preparedness, and perspectives of students in various settings, demonstrating the necessity of responsible and equity-based application (Meneses III, 2026). Although this literature is developing, little is known about how students in West African countries, namely Guinea, negotiate ethical concerns presented by generative AI in educational institutions (T. Yang et al., 2025). The existence of this gap underscores the need to investigate the AI ethics in the realities of local cultures, infrastructure, and education (Neelam Gupta, 2022).

AI is now more and more integrated in the day-to-day lives of students, such as writing, problem solving, research, and communication, which has drawn concern over academic integrity, plagiarism, privacy, bias, autonomy, and the changing cognitive activities of students (T. Yang et al., 2025). Research indicates that the perception of usefulness and ethical awareness of students, as well as institutional expectations, inform the use of AI by students (Kong & Zhu, 2025; T. Yang et al., 2025). Specifically, the ability of AI to produce content, automate logic, and control academic actions needs solid ethical standards to control responding AI is now more and more integrated in the day-to-day lives of students, (Al-kfairy et al., 2024) such as writing, problem solving, research, and communication, which has drawn concern over academic integrity, plagiarism, privacy, bias, autonomy, and the changing cognitive activities of students (H. M. Yang & Jang, 2025). Research indicates that the perception of usefulness and ethical awareness of students, as well as institutional expectations, inform the use of AI by students (Kong & Zhu, 2025; T. Yang et al., 2025).

In Guinea, the phenomenon gains more newness and meaning. The introduction of AI technologies into the Guinean higher education is at its initial phase, with sparse digital infrastructure, unequal exposure to technological tools, and not well-organized AI literacy courses (Temple et al., 2025). Compared to other nations that have already managed to build their digital ecosystem, Guinea has special issues in terms of the technological uptake, education access, and ethical control (Ajani et al., 2024). This contextual particularity renders the ethical application of AI among Guinean students a poorly researched but ever-growing pressing topic (Ajani et al., 2024). As the world of academics turns into a digital revolution, it is critical to know how Guinean students perceive, interpret, (Kong & Zhu, 2025) ethically

interact with AI in order to provide equal representation in the new knowledge economies (Usher et al., 2025; T. Yang et al., 2025). Recent efforts in the global literature have emphasized the need to develop AI literacy, such as ethical reasoning, critical awareness of algorithmic biases, knowledge of data privacy and accountable use of generative AI applications (Kong & Zhu, 2025). However, these studies mostly focus on high-technological settings, and a notable gap in literature exists on low-resource settings like Guinea. Since the ethical orientations of students towards AI are strongly affected by sociocultural, educational, and infrastructural factors, the lack of locally-based knowledge creates a problem in policy formation (Kumar Shrestha, 2025),

Even though the world has offered relevant models in the study of AI ethics, there is still a gap in the understanding of how these dynamics are exhibited in the context of Guinean students whose academic setting is fundamentally different compared to the ones studied in studies before (Yang T., 2025; Kong, 2025). The absence of empirical research on ethical AI application in Guinea restricts the ability of the university, teachers, and policy-makers to respond to new challenges in a commendable manner (Marín et al., 2025). In the absence of such contextualized knowledge, institutions can fall into the same trap of implementing the policies that do not reflect the realities of students, their access to technology, and their moral understanding. Hence, the lack of qualitative, context-specific data on ethical experiences and attitudes of Guinean students towards the application of AI in academic pursuits is the key issue driving this research (Burriss et al., 2024). This study seeks to address the following research questions:

- a) How do accounting Guinean students perceive and understand the ethical implications of AI use in academic contexts?
- b) What ethical challenges do accounting students encounter when using AI tools for academic tasks?
- c) How do sociocultural and institutional factors influence the ethical use of AI among Guinean students?

Aligned with these questions, the study aims to explore students' perceptions and ethical awareness regarding the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in academic activities, identify the ethical dilemmas they encounter when engaging with AI tools, and analyze the sociocultural and institutional factors that influence the ethical use of AI among Guinean students.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in the interpretivist paradigm, which seeks to understand social phenomena through the meanings individuals assign to their experiences (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022). A qualitative approach is particularly appropriate for this research because ethical perceptions, moral reasoning, and lived experiences related to Artificial Intelligence (AI) use cannot be adequately captured through numerical measurement alone. Instead, they require in-depth exploration of students' thoughts, values, and contextual realities.

Given the exploratory nature of this study and the limited prior research on ethical AI use in low-resource contexts such as Guinea, a qualitative design enables the researcher to generate rich, contextualized insights into how Guinean students understand and navigate ethical challenges associated with AI in academic activities (Usher et al., 2025)(Antony & Ramnath, 2023)

### Research Approach

The study employs a qualitative descriptive and exploratory approach, drawing on semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method. This approach allows participants to freely express their views while ensuring that discussions remain aligned with the research objectives(Chand, 2025). It also supports flexibility in probing emerging themes related to academic integrity, fairness, privacy, institutional rules, and sociocultural influences on AI use (T. Yang et al., 2025)

### Research Participants and Sampling Technique

The primary participants of this study consist of 10 Guinean students who are actively engaged in higher education and have experience using AI tools for academic purposes. The participants were selected using purposive sampling, which is appropriate when the researcher intentionally selects individuals who possess relevant knowledge and experience related to the phenomenon under investigation Pervin & Mokhtar, (2022b). The inclusion criteria for participants were as follows:

- a) Being a Guinean higher education student (particularly in accounting or related disciplines);

- b) Having prior experience using AI tools (e.g., generative AI, writing assistants, or problem-solving tools) for academic tasks;
- c) Willingness to participate voluntarily and share personal experiences related to ethical AI use.

A sample size of 10 participants is considered sufficient for qualitative inquiry, as it allows for data saturation while enabling in-depth analysis of individual perspectives Antony & Ramnath, n.d (2023).

### **Data Collection Methods**

#### a) Primary Data: Semi-Structured Interviews

Primary data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted with the selected participants. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they provide a balance between consistency and flexibility, allowing the researcher to explore predetermined themes while also capturing unexpected insights Usher et al., (2025).

The interview guide was developed based on the research questions and relevant literature on AI ethics, focusing on:

1. Students' understanding of ethical AI use in academic contexts;
2. Experiences and ethical dilemmas encountered when using AI tools;
3. Perceptions of academic integrity, plagiarism, privacy, and fairness;
4. The influence of sociocultural norms and institutional policies on AI use.

Each interview lasted approximately 30–45 minutes and was conducted in a language comfortable for the participants. With participants' consent, interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accuracy and later transcribed verbatim for analysis.

#### b) Secondary Data and Document Analysis

In addition to primary interviews, the study utilized secondary data to strengthen contextual understanding and support data triangulation. Secondary sources included:

1. Peer-reviewed journal articles on AI ethics in education;
2. Institutional academic integrity policies and guidelines (where available);
3. Reports and policy documents related to AI governance and education ethics.

Document analysis helped situate participants' experiences within broader academic and policy frameworks and enhanced the credibility of the findings Lim et al., (2025); and Burriss et al., (2024).

## Data Analysis Technique

The data were analyzed using manual thematic coding, following established qualitative data analysis procedures. Manual coding was selected to allow close engagement with the data and deeper interpretation of meanings embedded in participants' narratives Pervin & Mokhtar, (2022). The analysis followed these steps:

1. Familiarization: Reading and re-reading interview transcripts to gain an overall understanding of the data.
2. Initial Coding: Identifying meaningful segments of text and assigning descriptive codes related to ethical awareness, AI use practices, institutional influence, and sociocultural factors.
3. Theme Development: Grouping similar codes into broader themes that reflect recurring patterns across participants' responses.
4. Interpretation: Linking the identified themes to the research questions and relevant theoretical frameworks, including Ethical Decision-Making Theory and sociocultural perspectives on technology use Kong & Zhu, (2025); and Usher et al., (2025).

Manual coding enhanced analytical reflexivity and ensured that themes emerged inductively from the data rather than being imposed by pre-existing assumptions.

## Trustworthiness of the Study and Ethical Considerations

To ensure the rigor and trustworthiness of the study, several qualitative validity strategies were employed:

1. Credibility: Achieved through prolonged engagement with participants and the use of direct quotations to represent their views accurately.
2. Dependability: Maintained by clearly documenting the research procedures and analytical steps.
3. Confirmability: Supported through reflexive analysis and triangulation between interview data and secondary sources.
4. Transferability: Enhanced by providing rich contextual descriptions of the research setting and participants, allowing readers to assess applicability to similar contexts Pervin & Mokhtar, (2022).

Ethical approval principles were strictly observed throughout the study. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research, their voluntary participation, and their right

to withdraw at any time(Salim & Habsi, 2024). Informed consent was obtained prior to data collection. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured by using pseudonyms and securely storing all research data. Given the ethical nature of the research topic, particular care was taken to respect participants' perspectives and avoid judgment regarding their AI use practices Burriss et al., (2024).

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### Results

In this section, the author will provide findings based on a thematic analysis of the interview data of ten Guinean university students. After the phenomenological approach, the findings are concerned with the lived experience and perception of participants on the ethical application of artificial intelligence (AI) in educational undertakings. The analysis came up with four major themes.

Each of the participants termed AI tools as learning aids/supports, as opposed to academic support. The primary purposes of the use of AI were to explain complicated ideas, enhance academic writing, summarize readings, brainstorm ideas and organize assignments. The participants always noted that it was their duty to do their academic assignments in the end.

Some of the participants emphasized that AI assisted them in learning course content and organizing their ideas, particularly when they are in a second language. Nevertheless, they made a distinction between the legitimate learning support and the unethical replacement of original work. No member said that they have uploaded entirely AI-generated content under their own name.

There is concern over the issue of ethical awareness and academic integrity. Very high degree of ethical awareness occurred throughout interviews. The participants showed the right interpretation of the ethical principles concerning the use of AI, especially in terms of plagiarism, originality, and academic honesty. A lot of respondents said they had actually made conscious attempts to rewrite, modify as well as critically review AI-generated content before incorporating it into their work.

Meanwhile, the participants were often uncertain and hesitant when grading assignments using AI. Ethically ambiguous situations were classified as those that include paraphrasing,

text generation or ambiguous expectations of assessment. Students in reply, tended to restrict or even to avoid AI use in order to avoid possible misconduct.

The impact of Institutional Guidelines and Lecturer Expectations is another factor that affects performance in the hospitality sector. The other aspect that influences the performance in the hospitality industry is the influence of Institutional Guidelines and Lecturer Expectations. The institutional and instructional factors were referred to as the significant factors influencing ethical use of AI. It was found that the expectations of lecturers and the rules of the university had a great influence on their choice on the use of AI. Students were getting more confident about the responsible use of AI when the guidelines were clear.

On the other hand, there was uncertainty and inconsistency as there were no clear institutional policies. The majority of interviewed respondents said that they have never undergone any formal training or official instructions on how to use AI ethically, but instead they have followed their own discretion and through peer discussions. This ambiguity usually led to the reticence or ineffective application of AI.

The respondents emphasized a number of contextual items in the use of AI ethically in Guinea. Poor access to good internet, inequalities in the access to digital gadgets, disparities in digital literacy, and peer pressure were cited very often. These were the causes of disparities in the opportunities to be engaged in responsible AI among students. Peer pressure and unawareness are some of the factors mentioned by some participants as possible causes of AI misuse, whereas other participants mentioned that students with greater access to technology could more easily apply AI ethically. These socio cultural and infrastructural limitations constituted a significant background to the ethical decision making process by participants.

## **Discussion**

This research covered the perception of artificial intelligence and its application by Guinean university students in their academic life. The discussion understands findings according to the research questions and the study objectives in terms of existing literature using the Ethical Decision-Making Theory and sociocultural perspectives as a guiding tool.

### **a) Ethical Consciousness and decision-making in AI use**

It shows that Guinean learners have a very high ethical consciousness when it comes to AI usage, especially in the context of plagiarism and academic honesty. This echoes past

studies that show that students do not lack ethics but have problems with moral ambiguity when applying generative AI tools (Kong and Zhu, 2025; Yang et al., 2025).

The ethical Decision-Making Theory can be used to understand this phenomenon: students are aware of ethical principles; however, there are circumstances that affect their decisions, including ambiguity of expectations in assignments and fear of punishment. Kong and Zhu (2025) identified both similar patterns and discovered that ethical awareness does not ensure ethical conduct in the absence of clear contextual orientation.

b) Institutional Action in Conditionalizing Ethical AI Practices.

The high level of lecturer and institutional regulations in this research is consistent with the research of Usher et al. (2025), as they note that higher education institutions are the central drivers in developing ethical AI application. In Guinea, there is no formal AI policy and comprehensive training programs, which spell out a gap in governance. The Guinean students have to use informal norms and personal judgment, as opposed to high-resource educational systems. This result supports the idea presented by Lim et al (2025) that unclear institutional direction may negatively affect responsible use of AI unintentionally or even result in inconsistent ethical behavior.

c) Sociocultural Background and Low-Resource Limitations.

Infrastructural and sociocultural factors observed in this study validate sociocultural theories of technology use, which point to the fact that ethical practices are conditioned by the larger social and material circumstances (Usher et al., 2025). In Guinea, the lack of digital penetration and unequal AI literacy is a distinguishable feature of this context, unlike the ones considered in the majority of the existing research.

This result fills the gap in the literature as it offers empirical data on a low-resource environment. It points out that AI ethical systems created within technologically advanced settings cannot be simply applied in settings such as Guinea without a contextual modification. The implications of policy and practice will be discussed. The findings indicate that enhancing ethical AI application in Guinean higher education institutions needs interventions on the institutional level (Bourne, 2025). The demands of participants to have proper policies, formal training, and integration of curriculum are familiar with requirements in the world (Kong and Zhu, 2025; Usher et al., 2025), but should be adapted in terms of infrastructural constraints and sociocultural conditions.

Placing ethical consciousness in students in their institutional and social contexts, this paper turns the focus of ethical awareness to the institution and systemic levels, which will help toward a more level and context-focused view of AI ethics in higher education (Septiawan et al., 2022). The division between results and discussion will enable this study to present the lived experiences of the participants in a transparent manner and give a theoretically sound explanation. The results present a novel contribution to the underrepresented context and justify the necessity of ethically informed AI governance that has a local basis in the sphere of higher education.

#### d) Contribution of the Study

The research contributes a lot to the body of knowledge regarding artificial intelligence ethics in higher education because it provides a context-specific finding in Guinea, a low-resource and underrepresented location in the literature. The qualitative phenomenological approach to the lived experiences of Guinean university students, which the research suggests, expands the existing AI ethics research to the non-technologically advanced worlds. It shows that students have a high level of ethical awareness when it comes to the use of AI, but are often exposed to moral ambiguity because of the institutional ambiguity and a lack of contextual support. This discovery further enhances current ethical AI models by demonstrating that making ethical decisions is not always an individual ethical process, but an institutional and sociocultural environment one.

Further, the research has significant practical and policy implications to institutions of higher learning and policy makers. The results offer evidence-based knowledge that can be used to shape the design of the explicit AI governance policies, curriculum-based AI ethics education, and specific training programs of students and teachers in Guinea. The design of responsible AI practices by highlighting the importance of context-sensitive and fair solutions to the integration of AI in local infrastructural realities and by establishing the context of broader global endeavors to encourage the ethical and inclusive application of artificial intelligence in higher education is supported by this study.

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

This paper investigated the perceptions of Guinean university students and their ways of going about using artificial intelligence to conduct academic activities in a low-resource higher education setting. The results indicate that students tend to be comparably ethically conscious

and consider AI more of a tool of learning, as opposed to a replacement of independent study. Of significant concern to participants was the matter of plagiarism, originality and academic integrity, as they tended to be careful when the ethical lines were not very clear. Nevertheless, in spite of such awareness, students were often confused about the proper AI usage, particularly, with reference to graded tasks and plagiarism, which underscores the role of situational ambiguity in ethical decision-making.

The paper also confirms that institutional directives and social cultural factors have a very strong influence on how Guinean students conduct their business with AI. The lack of clear policies, formal training, and consistent guidance in instruction makes students largely responsible in terms of ethical judgment, whereas the lack of digital infrastructure and disparities in the access to technology only adds to the complexities of responsible AI engagement. This would allow this research to add to the literature on AI ethics in education across the globe and help emphasize the importance of context-sensitive institutional frameworks. Formulating definitive AI policies, introducing ethics into academic programs and offering specific training is necessary to promote responsible and fair AI applications in Guinean higher education and other low-resource institutions.

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