



Ethical frameworks for generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) in higher education: integrating Western and African perspectives

Lorna Waddington¹ · Richard de Blacquiere-Clarkson¹ · Helen Titilola Olojede²

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Abstract

As GenAI tools become increasingly prevalent in educational settings, traditional Western ethical frameworks including deontological, consequentialist, and virtue ethics may prove insufficient to address the complex challenges that these technologies present, particularly in diverse cultural contexts. Our analysis shows that although Western ethical frameworks have increasingly aimed for integration, they still tend to prioritise individual autonomy and abstract reasoning. This focus may not fully address concerns such as cultural representation, linguistic dominance, and fair access to the benefits of technology. In contrast, Ubuntu ethics, which centres on communal relationships and the idea of “I am because we are,” offers valuable perspectives that can strengthen ethical approaches to AI (Mokoena in *Verbum Ecclesia*, 2024; Mugumbate and Chereni in *Afr J Soc Work*, 2020). Likewise, the Yoruba concept of Ọmọlúàbí provides a virtue-based framework that considers not only individual behaviour but also the moral role of the wider community. Through critical examination of empirical research documenting representational harms in AI systems and applications of Ubuntu in domains including health research and education, we synthesise Western and African ethical philosophies to identify transcultural ethical principles of relationality, community benefit and partnership, context sensitivity, virtue cultivation, rights and responsibilities, and desired outcomes. This demonstrates the potential for meaningful dialogue between ethical traditions, showing how African perspectives can enrich and extend Western approaches. The research advocates for a transcultural approach to GenAI ethics in education that balances both individual and communal values, while addressing real-world challenges such as algorithmic bias, language dominance, cultural misrepresentation, and fair access. We conclude that ongoing dialogue between Western and non-Western ethical traditions can support more inclusive and contextually aware applications of GenAI in higher education. This would help ensure that cultural diversity is respected, while also advancing shared ethical goals centred on human dignity and collective well-being.

Keywords GenAI · Ethics · Education · Ọmọlúàbí worldview · Ubuntu · Western ethics

1 Introduction

The rapid integration of GenAI tools in higher education presents unprecedented opportunities and challenges. Whilst these technologies promise to enhance learning experiences,

increase accessibility, and provide personalised education, they also raise profound ethical questions about fairness, bias, privacy, academic integrity, and cultural sensitivity. Traditional Western ethical frameworks have dominated discussions of AI ethics, but these approaches may be insufficient to address the complex, multifaceted ethical considerations in diverse educational contexts. As Wakunuma and Eke observe, the discourse on AI governance and regulatory efforts have predominantly focused on the Global North, raising concerns about the inclusivity and applicability of these measures to broader global contexts, particularly Africa [25]. This is not due to any intrinsic deficiency in Western ethics, but rather reflects the need for a comprehensive analysis that extends beyond any single cultural or intellectual tradition.

✉ Lorna Waddington
l.l.waddington@leeds.ac.uk

Richard de Blacquiere-Clarkson
r.clarkson1@leeds.ac.uk

Helen Titilola Olojede
holojede@noun.edu.ng

¹ University of Leeds, Leeds, UK

² National Open University of Nigeria, Abuja, Nigeria

This paper explores how diverse ethical frameworks, particularly Ubuntu and *Omoluabi*, can complement Western approaches to develop a more comprehensive ethical foundation for implementing GenAI in higher education. By drawing on multiple ethical traditions, we propose a framework of key ethical considerations that transcend geographical and cultural boundaries including Global North and South. This in turn can provide a sound ethical foundation for formulating strategies that promote inclusivity, equity, and cultural sensitivity in AI-assisted teaching and learning. To illustrate this framework in practice, we apply it to a widely used active learning model: the flipped classroom.

1.1 Methodology

This research is a theoretical and conceptual paper which is qualitative and library-based. Three researchers carried out separate narrative literature reviews on (1) African ethical traditions, (2) Western ethical traditions, and (3) comparisons between both traditions including application to GenAI. The findings from these reviews were subsequently synthesised through a series of structured discussions involving all three researchers. This iterative process allowed the team to examine points of convergence and divergence across the two bodies of literature, to identify a common set of core ethical principles present in both, and to articulate an overarching set of ethical principles that drew on those elements present in both traditions.

Western ethics is a research area that is already well established and extensively documented within the existing literature, and familiarity with this body of work informed the researcher's approach to identifying relevant sources. Scopus was used as a database with title, abstract and key word search terms 'deontology' or 'consequentialism' or 'ethics of care' or 'virtue theory' and 'compar*'. Results were restricted to 2015 onwards, English language and as book chapters or articles, and evaluated for inclusion by their abstract.

In addition, an experimental approach was also employed by making use of the "research mode" of ChatGPT-4o. This tool was used solely as a supplementary aid to suggest potential sources and to highlight areas of literature that might warrant closer attention. All suggested materials were subsequently verified against primary academic databases and checked for accuracy and relevance. No content generated by ChatGPT was incorporated into the analysis or final written text.

For the literature on African ethics, relevant keywords such as 'Ubuntu and *Omoluabi* philosophy', were employed to search Google and Google Scholar, while useful references from the resources obtained were further employed to get other relevant papers employing content analysis and philosophical tools of argument and critical thinking. It

purposively consults sources written by Africans, including journal articles and academic works, particularly on Ubuntu and *Omoluabi* philosophy.'

For the comparison between African and Western ethical traditions, Elicit was used as a literature search tool with search terms 'ubuntu ethics', 'Omoluabi ethics', 'western ethics' and 'GenAI'. This was also an experimental approach designed to explore the extent to which GenAI research tools might usefully supplement traditional search strategies. Ten sources were identified between 2020 and 2024.

2 Theoretical foundations: Western ethical frameworks

2.1 Overview of Western ethical approaches

Traditionally, Western/Eurocentric ethics has fallen into three broad approaches: deontology (rule-based ethics), consequentialism (outcome-based ethics), and virtue ethics (character-based ethics). Each focuses on different aspects: deontology emphasises consistency and respect for persons, consequentialism emphasises sensitivity to outcomes and context, and virtue ethics emphasises character and human flourishing.

Western ethical thought in the last century has increasingly moved toward integration rather than opposition. Many Western Anglophone philosophers have adopted integrative or hybrid approaches which incorporate elements of more than one traditional ethical theory. Examples include "threshold deontology," [3] which tempers the absolutism of classical formulations such as Kant's by holding that rules should be followed until a certain threshold is reached, and "agent-relative consequentialism," [22] which takes the view that outcomes should not be judged impartially as if humans are interchangeable, but ranked relative to their value for individuals.

This integration has reached the point where some philosophers, such as Parfit [21], propose a unified theory according to which three typically contrasted ethical approaches converge like climbers taking different routes up a mountain. Even more radically, Dreier [7] argues that every plausible moral view has a consequentialist equivalent, meaning that different approaches are 'really just notational variants of one another'.

2.2 Ethics of care as a bridge

Amidst this convergence, the ethics of care emerged in the late twentieth century as a challenge to fundamental assumptions of traditional Western ethics [11, 13]. It contrasts traditional Western ethics' focus on a 'perspective of justice'

which emphasises autonomy, abstraction and rights with a perspective or voice of care which emphasises relationships, dependencies and reasoning from particulars. This approach shares significant similarities with Ubuntu in its emphasis on relationships and interdependence, though it emerged from feminist thought rather than African philosophy.

Ethics of care may be seen as a non-traditional approach to ethics which takes as fundamental a cluster of concepts around caring, dependence, relationships and particularity, whilst admitting a significant but secondary role for the cluster of more traditional ethical concepts around rights, justice, abstraction and independence.

2.3 Limitations of Western frameworks in AI contexts

All these approaches share a common limitation: they emerge from a tradition that risks placing undue emphasis on a perspective of justice characterised by individualism, abstraction, and rights-based reasoning. If so, this tradition may tacitly presume a biased perspective in favour of adult, racially privileged, masculine agents in a formal or public sphere whose decisions are unencumbered by relationships of unequal power. Even if this accusation is not sustained, applying any ethical framework that is rooted in a single cultural tradition and context to diverse global contexts will inevitably mischaracterise and distort the range of issues and concerns encountered across them all. This concern is particularly pressing when compounded by structural power imbalances between those cultural traditions, such as when Global North ethical frameworks are applied to the Global South(s), as is so often the case in AI ethics [14, 26].

While deontology provides clear principles like respect for autonomy and dignity, it can be rigid when applied to AI contexts, where complex situations may not fit neatly into predefined rules. Consequentialism evaluates actions based on their outcomes, but may struggle with unforeseen consequences of AI implementations and risks prioritising majority benefits over minority concerns. Virtue ethics, while recognising the role of character development and community, still maintains the individual as the fundamental moral agent.

Arguably, they also fail to fully capture a full range of ethical concepts, or at least place undue emphasis on some and too little on others. Their emphasis on individual autonomy, abstract reasoning, and universal principles can overlook the communal, relational, and context-sensitive dimensions of ethical life that are central to many non-Western traditions. To address these gaps and enrich our ethical understanding of GenAI in higher education, we now turn to African philosophical frameworks, specifically Ubuntu and *Omoluàbí*, which foreground interdependence,

communal responsibility, and moral character as essential to ethical reasoning. These perspectives not only challenge the assumptions of Western paradigms but, at the same time, offer complementary insights that can help shape a more inclusive and culturally responsive approach to AI ethics.

3 Enriching the framework: non-Western ethical perspectives

3.1 Ubuntu ethics and community-centred AI

One of the most compelling non-Western ethical traditions that can enrich our understanding of GenAI in education is Ubuntu. Rooted in sub-Saharan African philosophy, Ubuntu is often encapsulated in the phrases ‘I am because we are’ and ‘a person is a person through other persons,’ which emphasise interconnectedness, communal values, and collective well-being. Unlike Western frameworks that often begin with the autonomous individual, Ubuntu ethics starts from the premise that personhood [19] is constituted through relationships and interdependence. This philosophical perspective has particular relevance to AI systems that are increasingly embedded in communal contexts, including educational institutions.

In “The ethics of artificial intelligence” van Norren demonstrates the relevance of worldviews of the global south to debates of artificial intelligence, arguing that Ubuntu “starts from collective morals rather than individual ethics” and “favors sharing above competition and thus an anticapitalist logic of equitable distribution of AI benefits, humaneness and nonexploitation” [24]. This principle of collective benefit over individual gain is echoed in other African philosophical traditions. In Ga ethics, the benediction ‘may our seats be thick; may our brooms be thick’ expresses the aspiration for population growth and collective prosperity, viewing technological advancement as beneficial when it enhances communal wellbeing rather than individual enrichment [4]. These communal values across African philosophical traditions promote interdisciplinary cooperation and the participation of diverse stakeholders in AI development, prioritizing community welfare over private interests or commercial profits. This perspective reframes the purpose of educational AI from individual advancement to community benefit. Van Norren [24] critiques the UNESCO Commission on the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology for predominantly relying on “universal” concepts of individual human rights, which may not be fully compatible with Ubuntu’s emphasis on relatedness [26]. They advocate for “bottom-up approaches... with intercultural deep learning algorithms” alongside rules-based approaches to ensure diversity in AI ethics frameworks. A systematic review of

Ubuntu-centred AI ethics scholarship (2018–2025) identified nine convergent themes across 33 studies, including communal data stewardship, collective responsibility, and contextual conceptions of fairness that challenge Western individualistic frameworks. However, the review found that operational mechanisms embedding Ubuntu values across the AI lifecycle remain underdeveloped, with empirical evidence of implementation sparse and uneven, underscoring the gap between normative aspirations and institutional practice [17].

Gwagwa et al. build upon this foundation, exploring how the global AI ethics community can include perspectives from Sub-Saharan Africa [12]. The authors argue that African populations have been “excluded from the benefits of previous industrial revolutions” and risk exclusion from the “fourth industrial revolution” without intentional inclusion of African ethical perspectives. They identify exclusion at both continental and national levels, noting that “global corporations, including those working on technology and data, are involved in data-mining activities in Africa that are not just amplifying existing societal tensions but also excluding African subpopulations who represent low-value data”. The authors propose that Ubuntu could be “of immense value in AI applied normative ethics,” particularly in developing an inclusive approach to implementing universal AI ethics principles. They emphasise that Ubuntu represents more than a basis for communities: it offers a framework for inclusion discourse that Africa can “export to global forums in proposing how the benefits of AI can be shared”.

3.2 Ọmọlúàbí and character development in AI education

While Ubuntu features prominently in the literature, the Yoruba ethical concept of Ọmọlúàbí provides another important African ethical framework. Ọmọlúàbí is described as a “well-behaved person” [2, 5]. It is a virtue-based concept rooted in the community’s belief system. An Ọmọlúàbí embodies specific virtues including good character (*iwà rere*), adept use of language (*òrò síṣọ*), truthfulness and honesty (*òtítọ*), humility and respect (*ìtẹ́rība àti èmí irẹ̀lẹ̀*), goodwill (*inú rere*), bravery and courage (*akinkanjú*).” [1] This concept emphasises that moral evaluation extends beyond the individual to family and community. For instance, it tells us the kind of virtues we

should embody, emphasising holistic human formation while being an integral part of a community. An errant child would be asked, ‘Whose child are you?’ With this question, it is no longer the child that is placed under moral scrutiny but the parents and even grandparents and ancestors.” This perspective has significant implications for AI ethics, suggesting that the impact of AI systems reflects not just on their creators but on their entire communities. The feature of truthfulness and honesty (*òtítọ*) particularly relates to GenAI with its potential to mar truth and create distrust (Tables 1 and 2).

A person who is an Ọmọlúàbí can be likened to Socrates’ idea of a ‘virtuous man’, Plato’s ‘just man’, Aristotle’s ‘Great soul’, and Nietzsche’s ‘Nobleman.’ As a system of value, Ọmọlúàbí gives room for preferences and choices but detests and criticises excess; it exemplifies what the Yoruba calls *ìwọ̀n túnwọ̀nṣì*—‘balance’; not too little and not in excess, not too much, calling to mind Aristotle’s “golden mean” and his idea that virtue lies in the middle. In this sense, it teaches us the value of balance and limits in the use of GenAI. There might not be a need to do a wholesale adoption of GenAI, likewise not to shun its use; rather, GenAI could be considered an acquaintance we should be cautious of and not a foe. The concept of Ọmọlúàbí means living an honourable life of integrity, especially while relating with others rather than oneself. Living this honourable life while interacting with GenAI in an honest way that fosters integrity. Relying on a value system of honour and integrity, Ọmọlúàbí is expected to act in conformity with these values or risk disadvantaging oneself [8].

The Ọmọlúàbí ideal provides concrete values that can be a part of ethics by design and also guide ethical AI implementation, emphasising that the consequences of AI systems extend beyond their immediate users to reflect on broader communities and traditions.

4 The interplay between Western and African ethics

The interplay between individualism and community in Western ethical frameworks is a central issue in comparative analyses of Western and African moral philosophies. While acknowledging that traditional Western ethics places higher emphasis on the individual than on communities or

Table 1 Representation of Western and African ethical traditions in the transcultural framework

Principle	Deontology	Consequentialism	Virtue	Care	Ubuntu	Ọmọlúàbí
Relationality	Limited	Limited	Present	Strong	Strong	Strong
Community benefit and partnership	Limited	Limited	Present	Strong	Strong	Strong
Context sensitivity	Limited	Present	Strong	Strong	Strong	Strong
Virtue cultivation	Limited	Limited	Strong	Present	Present	Strong
Rights and responsibilities	Strong	Limited	Present	Present	Present	Present
Desired outcomes	Limited	Strong	Present	Present	Present	Present

Table 2 Comparative application of ethical frameworks in educational contexts

Ethical framework	Focus	Application in GenAI and higher education	Limitations
1. Deontology	Rules, duties, rights	Universities may establish strict codes of conduct regarding GenAI use in teaching, learning, and research Students may be required to credit AI tools Certain uses (e.g. AI-written essays) may be explicitly prohibited Institutions must comply with data protection laws (e.g. GDPR) and similar applicable ones	Can be overly rigid, lacking flexibility across disciplines Difficult to create universal rules in the face of rapid GenAI developments
2. Consequentialism	Outcomes, impact, utility	Adoption of GenAI may be guided by cost–benefit analyses Evaluation based on improved learning outcomes, access to education, and staff productivity Emphasis on measurable gains and efficiencies	May overlook minority concerns or marginalised groups Long-term or unintended effects (e.g. deskilling, dependency) can be unpredictable and hard to evaluate
3. Virtue ethics	Character, moral development, human flourishing	Focus on cultivating ethical character in students and educators Promotes responsible GenAI use grounded in values such as honesty, humility, and critical thinking Institutions serve as ethical role models in implementation	Offers limited concrete guidance for institutional policy-making Dependent on subjective interpretations of virtue, which can vary across individuals and cultures
4. Ethics of care	Relationships, context, care	Prioritises supportive student–teacher relationships in AI-integrated environments Attends to the needs of vulnerable students and the emotional impact of AI systems Encourages empathy, trust, and responsibility in educational design	Less formally embedded in technology policy discourse Perceived as lacking rigour or scalability compared to data-driven approaches
5. Ubuntu and Omolúábí African relational ethics	Communal harmony, interdependence, humanity	Frames learning as a collective endeavour, promoting AI tools that enhance collaboration rather than replace effort Encourages participatory governance, particularly inclusive of marginalised student voices Aligns AI use with the well-being of the educational community	May be challenging to implement in highly individualistic educational contexts Can be challenging to implement in large communities, such as universities, due to their size and complexity Requires significant cultural shift in Western educational institutions

relationships, community and relationships nevertheless feature in all cases. Each traditional approach incorporates the value of others in different ways: deontology via respect for persons, consequentialism via equal consideration of interests, virtue ethics via traits like compassion and justice developed in a community, and ethics of care via direct valuation of caring relationships.

This represents a more nuanced view than simply positioning Western ethics as purely individualistic and African as purely communal. Instead, there exists a spectrum of views on the relative primacy of individuals versus the communities in which they are situated. Deontology and consequentialism take an impartial standpoint which abstracts away from who a person is and who they are connected to, while virtue ethics and ethics of care are more situated, in that a person's identity and social connections directly influence what actions are right and wrong.

This analysis suggests that the contrast between Western and African ethics may be one of degree rather than kind, with ethics of care and virtue ethics offering potential bridges between these traditions. This has important implications for developing a transcultural approach to GenAI ethics in education, one where different ethical traditions can be integrated

harmoniously to produce a set of shared principles applicable across diverse cultural and societal contexts.

5 Empirical evidence: specific challenges in GenAI implementation

The preceding discussion highlights both the complementarity and divergence between Western and African ethical traditions. In Sect. 6 below we will propose a transcultural framework that combines key principles of both traditions, combining not only their conceptual richness but also in their capacity to guide practical decision-making in real-world contexts. To ground the transcultural ethical synthesis in lived experience, we now turn to empirical evidence that illustrates the tangible ways theoretical ethical concerns manifest in the implementation of GenAI in higher education.

5.1 Bias and representational harms

Recent research has provided empirical evidence of representational harms in AI systems, particularly in text-to-image (T2I) generators. A study by Ghosh et al. [9] employed a community-centred approach, conducting focus groups with

participants from diverse Indian subcultures to examine how T2I outputs depict Indian culture. The findings revealed two novel representational harms: “exoticism,” defined as the overamplification or overrepresentation of specific cultural features in broad depictions, and “cultural misappropriation,” where culturally specific contexts are inaccurately represented by embedding details from one culture or subculture outside of their appropriate context. Specific examples documented include the overrepresentation of rural settings, female figures exclusively depicted in traditional Indian sarees, and overly colourful portrayals of commonplace markets or everyday attire. Comparable representational harms have also been observed in African contexts, though systematic studies remain limited. One recent work [10] demonstrates that such exoticism extends well beyond Indian contexts, including African cultures. For instance, people from Egypt are frequently depicted in pharaonic headgear even while performing mundane activities such as cooking or travelling by plane, Sudanese individuals are consistently portrayed in white robes and turbans regardless of context, and Ethiopians are rendered in repetitive traditional attire that overlooks the diversity of contemporary clothing. These patterns suggest that T2I systems embed superficial and ahistorical understandings of both Indian and African cultures, reducing them to narrow visual stereotypes. The implications of these findings extend beyond misrepresentation of specific cultures and beyond T2I generators to the broader use of GenAI in educational contexts. If educational AI tools incorporate similar cultural misrepresentations, they risk reinforcing stereotypes and providing inaccurate information to students. Such misrepresentations are not merely aesthetic concerns; they can have real consequences for how individuals and cultures are perceived and treated, particularly in educational settings where students are developing their understanding of diverse cultures. This approach aligns with African ethics’ emphasis on communal decision-making and could provide a model for more culturally sensitive GenAI implementation in education.

5.2 Language dominance

Suliman et al. [23] specifically address the challenges posed by English language dominance in education, noting that “English dominates the education system, overshadows other official languages, and potentially marginalises their cultural identities and perspectives”. This linguistic dominance creates barriers for non-native English speakers, particularly in academic writing and scholarly discourse. This not only creates practical barriers for non-English speakers but also risks marginalising non-Western knowledge systems and epistemologies. Omorogiuwa et al. note that generative AI “relies largely on universalised and dominant Western knowledge and ideological positions, shaped by coloniality, capitalism and patriarchy,” with training

data that “often contains very little, and at times no, African content” [20]. This data scarcity is not accidental but reflects systemic issues: datasets that accurately represent cultural and societal contexts in Africa, including linguistic diversity, are not often found on the internet owing to limited internet access or a lack of digitised information. Models trained on such non-representative data inevitably learn and reproduce biases inherent in Western-dominated internet content, resulting in systems that inadequately serve African linguistic and cultural contexts.

Suliman et al. propose integrating Ubuntu principles with GenAI to create an inclusive learning environment that accommodates diversity and cultural backgrounds. Similarly, Gwagwa et al. [12] argue that multilingual AI systems developed with Ubuntu values in mind could help address these linguistic barriers and promote greater inclusivity in higher education.

5.3 Accessibility and equity

Gwagwa et al. [12] highlight significant concerns regarding accessibility and equity in AI systems. The authors argue that Sub-Saharan populations have been “excluded from the benefits of previous industrial revolutions” and risk exclusion from the “fourth industrial revolution” without intentional inclusion of African perspectives and priorities. They identify exclusion at both continental and national levels, noting that “global corporations, including those working on technology and data, are involved in data-mining activities in Africa that are not just amplifying existing societal tensions but also excluding African subpopulations who represent low-value data.”

This creates a troubling cycle where marginalised communities are underrepresented in training data, resulting in AI systems that serve them poorly, which further exacerbates existing inequalities. In educational contexts, this can mean that GenAI tools are less effective for certain populations, creating disparities in educational outcomes.

Odero et al. [18] address this concern in the context of health research, proposing an ethics framework that emphasises “equitable distribution of benefits” and “community empowerment.” These principles could be equally applied to educational contexts to ensure that GenAI implementation does not widen existing educational disparities but rather helps to reduce them.

6 Towards a transcultural ethical framework for GenAI in higher education

The empirical challenges outlined above underscore the urgent need for an ethical framework that is both inclusive and contextually grounded. In response, this section proposes a transcultural ethical framework for GenAI in higher

education that draws on the strengths of both Western and African traditions. By integrating principles from deontology, consequentialism, virtue ethics, ethics of care, Ubuntu, and *Omoluàbí*, the framework aims to guide the ethical design, deployment, and evaluation of GenAI tools in ways that are sensitive to cultural diversity, relational dynamics, and educational equity.

The literature reveals several key themes and tensions that directly impact our approach to integrating GenAI in higher education. Firstly, there is a consistent critique of Western ethical frameworks' emphasis on individualism and abstraction, which may be insufficient for addressing the complex ethical challenges posed by AI. However, as we have highlighted, Western ethics is not monolithic; it includes approaches such as the ethics of care, virtue ethics and integrated frameworks that share significant similarities with non-Western perspectives.

Secondly, Ubuntu, *Omoluàbí* and other African ethical frameworks offer alternative perspectives that emphasise communalism, interconnectedness, and relationality. These frameworks are not simply opposed to Western ethics but may complement and extend certain Western approaches. Recent guidance from the African Independent Ethics Committee emphasizes that Ubuntu principles should underline responsible AI use, including “reinforcing collective accountability and honesty” and “recognising its role as a supplementary tool rather than a replacement for human interaction” [20]. The concept of personhood in African philosophy, as something achieved through community rather than inherent in individuals, challenges fundamental assumptions about the purpose of education and the role of technology within it.

Thirdly, these alternative frameworks have concrete implications for AI development and implementation across various domains, including education and health research. The empirical evidence demonstrates that without intentional integration of diverse perspectives, AI systems risk perpetuating harmful representations (or misrepresentations) of non-Western cultures.

Fourthly, the evolution of Western ethics toward more integrated approaches suggests potential for meaningful dialogue between Western and non-Western ethical traditions. The similarities between ethics of care and Ubuntu, for instance, indicate possible points of convergence rather than irreconcilable differences.

By integrating insights from Ubuntu, *Omoluàbí*, ethics of care, and traditional Western frameworks, we can develop a more comprehensive approach to GenAI implementation that addresses the limitations of any single perspective. The practical implementation of such a transcultural framework requires robust governance mechanisms. Chagonda [6] argues that pragmatism is needed in combining the

Ubuntu approach with positive elements of Western guiding AI principles, specifically the deontological principles of beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice, to create a robust framework that would endeavour to include marginalised groups within the African context who might be excluded or suffer from AI's harms. The practical implementation of such a transcultural framework requires robust governance mechanisms. Effective AI governance can address challenges like bias through regulatory frameworks that demand rigorous testing of datasets to ensure systems are fair, transparent, and avoid discrimination. In the African context, this means governance arrangements must not only align with international standards but also be meticulously adapted to address context-specific challenges such as limited digitized information, non-representative training data, and the historical exclusion of African populations from technological benefits. The transcultural principles outlined below thus serve both as ethical guidelines and as foundations for governance policies that can ensure GenAI serves diverse communities equitably.

By integrating insights from Ubuntu, *Omoluàbí*, ethics of care, and traditional Western frameworks, we can develop a more comprehensive approach to GenAI implementation that addresses the limitations of any single perspective.

6.1 Core principles of a transcultural ethical framework

1. *Relationality* Recognition that education involves the development of personal relationships, above and beyond the autonomous individual learner assumed in many Western educational models. In some educational contexts, it may be appropriate for relationships between persons to be the primary focus of learning and educational development. How AI might be used to develop or enhance interpersonal relationships in educational contexts, rather than an exclusive focus on supporting individuals.
2. *Community benefit and partnership* Evaluating AI tools based on their contribution to community wellbeing rather than solely individual outcomes, as emphasised in Van Norren's “anti-capitalist logic of equitable distribution of AI benefits.” [24] At the same time, involving members of affected communities in the decisions which affect them, including which decisions are likely to do so. This aligns with recent African perspectives on AI ethics that emphasize collective accountability and community-centred approaches to AI implementation.
3. *Context sensitivity* Acknowledging that ethical considerations vary across both individual and cultural contexts rather than assuming universal applicability,

addressing the “Western gaze” problem identified in Ghosh et al.’s research on representational harms [9]. This includes recognition of power imbalances and critical examination of who designs, controls, and benefits from AI systems in education. The importance of social cohesion in decision-making is further illustrated in the Ga principle ‘May our circle be intact,’ which emphasizes that justice and equitable AI systems require unity between diverse voices and recognition that one-size-fits-all approaches inevitably fail to serve all communities. The same decisions in design and deployment of AI, however well-motivated, will have different impacts on individuals and communities depending on their particular contexts—one size never fits all.

4. *Virtue cultivation* How and to what extent can AI be used to facilitate and enhance the development of our own characters, to support the flourishing of both individuals and communities? This principle provides a counterbalance to the excessive emphasis often placed on rules and outcomes in Western educational systems, despite virtue and character development occupying a significant role in Western as well as African ethical traditions.
5. *Rights and responsibilities* Consideration of the interplay between rights and responsibilities remains a significant feature of both Western and African approaches to ethics. In an educational context, this involves establishing and maintaining clarity regarding standards of behaviour and treatment of each other (whether set by law, policy or common agreement), the obligations they place upon us all, and how AI can be used to support or enhance this. Additionally, to consider whether and at what point AIs would be included as bearers of rights and responsibilities directly.
6. *Desired outcomes* This ethical principle is also well-represented across Western and African traditions. Clarity of vision for the educational goals and outcomes that we want to achieve through the use of AI will greatly increase the likelihood of results that address our needs as individuals and communities. This stands in contrast with the tech-first approach common in educational technology, which prioritises adoption over pedagogical rationale and so places excessive emphasis on commercial outcomes over educational ones.

7 Limitations

1. *Theoretical scope*
The research is primarily theoretical and conceptual, relying on narrative literature reviews and philosophical

analysis. It does not include empirical data from implementation of GenAI tools in educational settings. This limits the ability to predict practical outcomes with certainty.

2. *Literature selection and bias*

The literature reviewed is restricted to sources available in English, using the specified databases and AI research tools. The focus on Anglophone sources does not represent Francophone and indigenous African scholarship, or European scholarship in languages other than English. This may have led to the exclusion of relevant works published in other languages or less accessible outlets, potentially narrowing the diversity of perspectives represented. This is partly a reflection of the scarcity of published articles in African languages, and of journals willing to publish them.

While none of the content of the research report generated by ChatGPT 4o was included in this article, it is possible that when using it to identify sources the researchers were nevertheless unconsciously influenced to some degree by its content.

3. *Reproducibility*

As a combination of narrative literature reviews using a variety of research tools, followed by iterative conversations synthesising findings and applying then to AI, this desk-based research would be difficult to reproduce.

4. *Cultural generalisation*

While the paper seeks to synthesise Western and African ethical traditions, both are sophisticated and diverse, and cannot be fully characterised in a discussion of this length. The representation of Ubuntu and *Omoluàbí*, may not capture the full range of African ethical thought, nor do the main Western frameworks discussed here represent all Eurocentric or Global North approaches. As such the transcultural framework proposed may not fully account for the nuances and variations within and between these cultural traditions, balancing clarity and simplicity with the risk of overgeneralisation. It also is currently limited to two major global ethical traditions, and would require further research to establish the extent to which it applies to other ethical traditions.

5. *Rapid change*

The framework aims to address persistent issues such as bias, language dominance, and equity, which may be exacerbated and amplified by GenAI, and as such remain relevant for the foreseeable future. It may not anticipate all unintended consequences of GenAI deployment, and it is possible that some of the issues identified here will lose relevance, especially as new forms of AI and educational models emerge.

8 Conclusion

The ethical integration of GenAI in higher education requires moving beyond the limitations of traditional Western ethical frameworks. By incorporating African ethical perspectives such as Ubuntu and *Ọmọlúàbí*, we can develop more inclusive, equitable, and contextually sensitive approaches to technology implementation.

These African ethical frameworks remind us that education is fundamentally about relationships and community development rather than merely individual achievement. As Suliman [23] argues, the interconnectedness of Ubuntu principles with GenAI “may improve and provide customised learning, access quality education, collaboration, inclusivity, strengthen lecturer support and development, and a culturally relevant experience that acknowledges the communal interests of all stakeholders.”

Ubuntu challenges the assumption that technological progress is value-neutral or universally beneficial and instead asks us to carefully consider who benefits, whose knowledge is privileged, and how technology affects community bonds. We agree with Gwagwa et al. [12] who emphasise that “a collective rights approach to AI ethics could be beneficial to the rest of the world if Africa’s Ubuntu ethics and the normative principles emerging from it are incorporated into the global AI ethics discourse.” This suggests that Ubuntu has value not only for African contexts but for global AI ethics more broadly.

Similarly, the *Ọmọlúàbí* framework offers valuable insights through its emphasis on character development and communal accountability. The principle that moral evaluation extends beyond the individual to family and community—reflected in the question “Whose child are you?” asked of an errant child—has profound implications for how we think about responsibility in AI development and use. This perspective suggests that the impacts of GenAI systems reflect not just on their creators but on their entire communities and traditions, encouraging a more holistic approach to accountability.

As we implement GenAI in educational settings, we must not only ensure these technologies serve the development of virtuous character (as emphasised in *Ọmọlúàbí*), strengthen community relationships, respect diverse cultural contexts, and promote equity, but also ensure its developers embody these virtues. By building on the wisdom of African ethical traditions, we can harness the potential of GenAI while avoiding the pitfalls of ethical frameworks too narrowly rooted in Western individualism.

The literature suggests that rather than replacing Western frameworks entirely, an integrative approach that incorporates diverse ethical perspectives may be most effective. As Odero [18] proposes, “taking what has already worked well at

the international research ethics level and integrating this with indigenous African worldviews” can create more comprehensive and inclusive ethical frameworks for AI. This integration is particularly relevant for higher education, where GenAI tools are increasingly being implemented across diverse cultural contexts.

The path forward therefore requires ongoing dialogue between Western and non-Western ethical traditions, continuous refinement of implementation strategies, and humility about the limitations of any single ethical approach. By embracing this complexity rather than seeking simple universal principles, we can develop AI educational systems that truly serve diverse human communities rather than reshaping humanity to fit technological constraints.

As Ghosh et al. [10] demonstrate, the stakes of getting AI ethics right are not merely theoretical but have concrete impacts on how cultures are represented and understood. Without intentional integration of diverse ethical perspectives, AI systems risk perpetuating harmful stereotypes and misrepresentations, particularly of non-Western cultures. This underscores the importance of the transcultural approach we have proposed, which centres both individual and communal values while addressing concrete challenges such as algorithmic bias, language dominance, cultural misrepresentation, and equitable access.

8.1 Takeaway

Using GenAI in higher education isn’t just a technological or policy question—it is fundamentally an ethical one. No single ethical framework is sufficient on its own:

- *Western integrative ethics* helps build balanced, flexible policies that respect individual rights and autonomy.
- *Ethics of care and Ubuntu* remind us to centre people, relationships, and equity, challenging us to consider the communal impacts of technology.
- *Ọmọlúàbí* offers a virtue-based approach that extends responsibility beyond individuals to their communities, encouraging holistic accountability.

Appendix

Together, these diverse ethical traditions help educators, institutions, and students navigate the complexities of AI in ways that are not only intellectually sound but also humane and culturally responsive. By developing ethical frameworks that draw on both Western and non-Western traditions, we can create educational environments where GenAI serves human flourishing in all its cultural diversity rather than narrowing our conception of what it means to be human (Table 3).

Table 3 Implementation challenges and strategies

Implementation challenge	Traditional approach	Transcultural ethical approach	Practical strategies
Curriculum integration	Top-down implementation of AI tools without consideration of cultural context	Co-designed implementation that considers diverse ethical perspectives and community needs	Establish diverse curriculum design teams. Conduct cultural impact assessments before implementation. Create feedback loops with students and community members
Assessment Design	Emphasises individual performance metrics focused on standardised outcomes	Balanced assessment that values both individual achievement and community contribution	Value process, including ethical reflection, alongside product. Design assessments that evaluate how students contribute to collaborative projects and how they support peers' learning
Faculty development	Technical training focused on tool functionality, baseline literacy	Holistic development that includes ethical dimensions and cultural awareness	Create faculty learning communities focused on ethical AI integration. Provide resources on diverse ethical frameworks. Encourage reflection on cultural assumptions in AI tools
Student support	Focus on individual technical assistance and academic support	Community-oriented support that addresses linguistic, cultural, and accessibility barriers	Develop culturally responsive support approaches for diverse student populations. Implement peer support networks for GenAI use. Provide multilingual support resources
Institutional policy	Policies developed from Western ethical and legal frameworks, focusing on compliance and risk management	Inclusive policy development incorporating diverse ethical perspectives and community input	Establish culturally diverse AI ethics committees. Create community consultation processes for policy development. Implement ongoing policy review with diverse stakeholders
Research and evaluation	Evaluation metrics focused on individual outcomes and system performance. Highly abstracted from context on individuals and communities involved	Holistic evaluation that considers community impact, cultural sensitivity, and ethical implications	Develop mixed-methods evaluation approaches that capture community perspectives. Include cultural representation metrics in AI evaluation. Create participatory research models for ongoing assessment

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