

Reconceptualising global citizenship education for the age of generative artificial intelligence: An Ubuntu-informed framework for AI literacy in higher education

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ABSTRACT

The rapid adoption of generative artificial intelligence (AI) has transformed higher education, disrupting established assumptions about teaching, learning, assessment, knowledge production, and academic integrity. While institutional responses have largely centred on technical regulation, policy compliance, and AI literacy framed as operational competence, such approaches remain insufficient for addressing the deeper epistemic, ethical, and democratic challenges posed by generative AI. This conceptual article argues that higher education requires a more contextually grounded framework for responding to AI – one that moves beyond technical proficiency towards critical judgement, ethical responsibility, and relational accountability. Drawing on Global Citizenship Education (GCE), the article examines its potential as a framework for AI literacy while simultaneously engaging critical scholarship that questions its reliance on universalist assumptions and abstract forms of globalism. To address these limitations, the article reconceptualises GCE through the ethical lens of Ubuntu, positioning relational responsibility, human dignity, communal accountability, and epistemic plurality as constitutive features for engaging with generative AI in higher education. Revisiting UNESCO's cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioural dimensions of GCE through Ubuntu, the article develops an expanded conception of AI literacy that integrates critical epistemic understanding, ethical sensitivity, and contextually informed action. Rather than viewing AI literacy as the acquisition of technical skills alone, the proposed framework foregrounds students' capacities to interrogate AI-mediated knowledge, deliberate ethically about technological use, and participate responsibly within increasingly AI-mediated educational environments. Particular attention is given to the implications of generative AI for the Global South, where uncritical adoption risks reinforcing existing linguistic, cultural, and epistemic inequalities. The article concludes that higher education should reorient its responses to generative AI away from surveillance, compliance, and technological determinism towards educational practices that cultivate democratic participation, social justice, and epistemic diversity. In doing so, it advances an Ubuntu-informed framework for AI literacy that contributes to ongoing debates on responsible AI governance and the future of higher education in an increasingly digital world.

Keywords: Generative artificial intelligence; global citizenship education; Ubuntu; AI literacy; higher education; epistemic justice; relational responsibility; Global South

INTRODUCTION

Generative AI, ethics, and the limits of technical responses

Earlier digital technologies, such as the internet, were primarily used to access information. In contrast, advances in generative AI have automated many activities traditionally associated with learning in higher education, including writing, analysing, summarising, and problem-solving (Selwyn, 2019; Williamson, Eynon, and Potter, 2020). As a result, long-standing assumptions about what it means to teach and learn have been fundamentally disrupted (Bearman and Ajjawi, 2023; Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019). While technological disruption is not new to higher education, the unprecedented pace of generative AI development has resulted in reactive, ad hoc institutional responses, exposing the limitations of existing governance structures, pedagogical practices, and ethical frameworks (UNESCO, 2023).

Generative AI offers considerable educational opportunities. It can support personalised learning, provide adaptive feedback, and function as an on-demand tutor, making learning more accessible and responsive to individual student needs (Luckin et al., 2016; Holmes, Bialik, and Fadel, 2019). Rather than relying solely on teacher-centred pedagogies, students increasingly use generative AI to clarify concepts, generate ideas, solve problems, and support academic writing, positioning these technologies as forms of cognitive assistance (Mollick and Mollick, 2023). At the same time, scholars caution that such capabilities may reduce opportunities for intellectual struggle and reflective engagement, both of which are central to meaningful learning in higher education (Selwyn, 2022). Moreover, the distinction between legitimate learning support and academic misconduct has become increasingly blurred, particularly in unsupervised assessment contexts, raising significant concerns about academic integrity (Cotton, Cotton, and Shipway, 2024; Perkins et al., 2024). These developments also raise important social justice concerns, as unequal access to AI technologies and disparities in AI literacy risk exacerbating existing educational inequalities (UNESCO, 2023; Selwyn, 2022).

The rapid integration of generative AI is also reshaping academic work. As AI systems increasingly participate in the production and mediation of knowledge, the traditional role of lecturers as primary knowledge authorities is being challenged (Bayne, 2015; Knox, 2020). Although AI has the potential to reduce academic workload through automated grading, feedback generation, and administrative support, institutional readiness has not kept pace with technological change. Many academics report uncertainty, anxiety, and limited opportunities for professional development, particularly regarding ethical AI use and assessment redesign (Mollick and Mollick, 2023; UNESCO, 2023). These challenges suggest that institutional support structures have struggled to respond effectively to the rapid evolution of generative AI in teaching and learning.

Generative AI also exposes important limitations within existing curricula. By automating lower-order cognitive tasks such as memorisation, summarisation, and routine problem-solving, these technologies challenge curricula that continue to prioritise such competencies (Bloom et al., 1956; Bearman and Ajjawi, 2023). Consequently, there have been growing calls to integrate AI literacy alongside its ethical, social, and critical dimensions within higher education curricula (Ng et al., 2021; Selwyn, 2022). Despite these calls, curriculum responses remain fragmented, with many institutions emphasising technical competencies while paying comparatively little attention to the broader ethical, political, and societal implications of AI (Williamson and Eynon, 2020). From a critical perspective, educational technologies should be understood not simply as neutral tools but as socio-technical systems embedded within relations of power, cultural contexts, and global inequalities (Waghid, Waghid, and Waghid, 2018; Tikly, 2019).

Perhaps nowhere has generative AI had a greater impact than on assessment. Traditional assessment practices, including unsupervised online examinations and electronically submitted assignments, have been fundamentally challenged by AI-generated content, raising questions about their validity and educational purpose (Bearman and Ajjawi, 2023). In response, many higher education institutions have adopted AI-detection software to identify academic misconduct. However, growing evidence suggests that these tools are unreliable, frequently generating false positives and disproportionately affecting students who are non-native English speakers (Liang et al., 2023; Cotton et al., 2024). Consequently, surveillance-oriented approaches to AI governance risk fostering distrust between students and lecturers while diverting attention from the more pressing need to redesign assessment practices (Selwyn, 2019; Fawns, 2022). Scholars argue that sustainable responses require a reconceptualisation of assessment, placing greater emphasis on authentic, dialogic, and process-oriented forms of evaluation (Boud and Falchikov, 2007; Bearman and Ajjawi, 2023). Furthermore, AI-detection tools cannot reliably distinguish between human- and AI-generated content, resulting in inconsistent and contested enforcement of academic integrity policies (Liang et al., 2023; Perkins et al., 2024). These developments raise fundamental epistemic and ethical questions concerning the purposes of higher education, the nature of knowledge, and the cultivation of human judgement within universities (Biesta, 2015; Waghid, 2014). Without such a re-evaluation, institutional responses are likely to remain superficial, characterised by vague guidelines, uneven implementation, and a predominant emphasis on prohibition rather than educational capability-building (Biesta, 2015; Selwyn, 2019; UNESCO, 2023; Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019; Miron and Facciolo, 2025).

Beyond teaching and assessment, generative AI is transforming institutional governance and administration. Universities increasingly rely on AI-driven analytics for admissions, student retention, and performance monitoring, signalling a broader shift towards data-informed decision-making (Williamson, 2017). While these developments offer considerable efficiencies, they also raise important epistemic and ethical concerns (Selwyn, 2019). Unlike earlier educational technologies, however, generative AI systems are largely developed by private corporations beyond the governance structures of higher education institutions. Limited transparency regarding how these systems operate makes it difficult for universities to evaluate, regulate, and integrate them responsibly (Williamson et al., 2020). Consequently, institutional adoption of generative AI has often been reactive rather than strategic, with governance responses struggling to keep pace with technological innovation and lacking the ethical deliberation necessary for responsible implementation (UNESCO, 2023).

Collectively, these developments suggest that higher education's response to generative AI requires more than policy compliance, technical regulation, or procedural governance. Although institutions have introduced AI policies, detection software, and governance frameworks, these responses have largely focused on surveillance, risk management, and regulatory compliance rather than addressing the deeper epistemic and ethical questions raised by generative AI. Questions concerning knowledge production, human judgement, responsibility, justice, and the purposes of higher education remain insufficiently examined (Biesta, 2015; Selwyn, 2019; UNESCO, 2023). Viewing generative AI primarily through technical or managerial lenses risks reducing a complex socio-technical transformation to a series of reactive and procedural interventions that are unlikely to advance the broader educational purposes of universities (Biesta, 2015; Williamson et al, 2020).

Against this backdrop, Global Citizenship Education (GCE) offers a potentially valuable conceptual lens for responding to generative AI. By foregrounding ethical reasoning, critical reflexivity, global responsibility, dialogue, and social justice, GCE shifts attention from technological governance towards the moral, epistemic, and civic dimensions of AI in higher education (UNESCO, 2021; Andreotti, 2014). These forms of critical engagement remain largely absent from prevailing institutional responses, which continue to prioritise compliance and surveillance over ethical deliberation and educational capability-building (Biesta, 2015; Selwyn, 2019; UNESCO, 2023). Nevertheless, critical scholarship cautions that dominant formulations of GCE often rely on universalist ethical assumptions that may marginalise local moral traditions, indigenous knowledges, and contextually situated forms of judgement (Andreotti, 2014; Davids and Waghid, 2021). Consequently, while GCE provides an important departure from narrowly technical responses, it may not, in its conventional form, fully address

the epistemic exclusions and contextual complexities introduced by generative AI. This limitation points to the need for a complementary ethical framework that foregrounds contextual judgement, plural moral traditions, and justice in responding to AI within higher education.

(RE)CONCEPTUALISING GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

Global Citizenship Education (GCE) can be understood as a pedagogical framework that seeks to cultivate ethical judgement, critical awareness, and responsible participation within an interconnected world characterised by profound inequalities (UNESCO, 2021; Andreotti, 2014; Oxley and Morris, 2013). UNESCO (2021) argues that GCE equips students to engage critically with global issues of inequality and injustice while acting responsibly across local, national, and global contexts. Rather than promoting a singular global identity, GCE encourages learners to understand themselves as situated within diverse cultural, political, and historical contexts while recognising their interconnectedness and shared responsibilities (Andreotti, 2014; Oxley and Morris, 2013). Accordingly, GCE seeks not to assimilate identities into a universal worldview but to foster dialogue, mutual recognition, and ethical engagement across differences.

As such, GCE may be conceptualised as a critical, ethical, and participatory approach to education. It encourages students to question dominant knowledge systems, examine relations of power, and engage with complexity rather than accepting knowledge as neutral or universal (Andreotti, 2014; Pashby, 2011). Ethically, it foregrounds questions of justice, responsibility, and human dignity in responding to global challenges (UNESCO, 2021; Shultz, 2007). Participatorily, it promotes dialogue, deliberation, and collaborative engagement rather than the transmission of predetermined values (Davies, Evans, and Reid, 2005; Davids and Waghid, 2021).

These commitments are reflected in UNESCO's (2021) three interrelated dimensions of GCE: the cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioural domains. Together, these dimensions provide a useful framework for understanding how higher education might respond to the ethical and epistemic challenges introduced by generative AI.

The cognitive dimension develops students' critical understanding of global systems, power relations, and knowledge production. Rather than treating knowledge as objective or universal, it encourages learners to interrogate whose knowledge is legitimised, how inequalities are reproduced, and how technological, economic, and political systems shape opportunities and exclusions (Andreotti, 2014; Pashby, 2011; UNESCO, 2021). Within higher education, this dimension is particularly relevant as students increasingly rely on generative AI

systems that mediate knowledge production and influence how information is interpreted and legitimised (Selwyn, 2019; Knox, 2020).

The socio-emotional dimension focuses on cultivating ethical dispositions such as empathy, solidarity, respect for human dignity, and relational responsibility (UNESCO, 2021). Rather than viewing ethics as abstract principles, this dimension encourages sensitivity to lived experiences of inequality and injustice while fostering ethical responsiveness across diverse social and cultural contexts (Andreotti, 2014; Shultz, 2007).

The behavioural dimension concerns the translation of critical understanding and ethical commitment into responsible action. UNESCO (2021) characterises this as active democratic participation, advocacy, and responsible engagement in both local and global contexts. Similarly, Davies et al. (2005) emphasise dialogue, deliberation, and collaborative action, while Waghid (2010, 2014) argues that democratic education requires participatory engagement grounded in judgement, responsibility, and deliberation. Within higher education, this dimension suggests that responses to generative AI should extend beyond compliance towards contextually informed actions, including assessment redesign, participatory policy development, and collective deliberation about responsible AI use.

These dimensions should not be understood as discrete or sequential stages but as mutually reinforcing aspects of democratic education. Together, they provide a framework for moving beyond narrow technical responses towards a more ethically informed engagement with generative AI. For Waghid (2010, 2014), citizenship education is not primarily concerned with acquiring technical competencies but with cultivating judgement, dialogue, and responsibility in contexts of disagreement and plurality. GCE therefore transcends instrumental conceptions of citizenship centred on compliance or economic productivity by fostering ethical responsiveness, critical reflection, and accountable participation. Such a conception is particularly pertinent to higher education's response to generative AI, where institutional efforts have too often prioritised technical regulation and procedural compliance at the expense of democratic deliberation and ethical judgement.

GENERATIVE AI AS A DISRUPTIVE EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY

The rapid advancement of generative AI is disrupting many of the foundational assumptions underpinning higher education. These disruptions are both epistemic and ethical. Whereas earlier digital technologies, such as the internet, primarily expanded access to information, generative AI systems participate in the production, mediation, and validation of knowledge. Consequently, their emergence presents more than a technical challenge; it demands ethical

reflection and critical engagement with the purposes of higher education (Selwyn, 2019; UNESCO, 2023).

Generative AI is increasingly disrupting traditional notions of epistemic authority. These systems can produce persuasive outputs that are often difficult to distinguish from human-generated work, while also fabricating references and factual claims with apparent credibility. Consequently, assumptions concerning the authenticity, reliability, and transparency of knowledge production are increasingly being challenged (UNESCO, 2023). Rather than simply retrieving information, generative AI mediates knowledge, shifting aspects of intellectual work from human deliberation towards algorithmic processes (Selwyn, 2019). Within higher education, the growing reliance on AI-generated summaries, explanations, and academic writing assistance risks displacing more reflective and deliberative forms of intellectual engagement, potentially undermining universities' role in cultivating independent critical reasoning (Selwyn, 2019; UNESCO, 2023; Mollick and Mollick, 2023).

These epistemic concerns are compounded by broader questions of justice. Generative AI systems are trained on vast datasets that often reflect and reproduce existing global inequalities. UNESCO (2021) argues that digital infrastructures and knowledge systems are shaped by geopolitical and economic asymmetries rather than functioning as neutral technologies. Consequently, generative AI may normalise dominant epistemologies while marginalising local, indigenous, and context-specific knowledges, complicating universities' commitments to epistemic justice. These developments also extend to teaching and assessment. Unsupervised written assessments remain particularly vulnerable to AI-assisted outsourcing, while the automation of summarisation and routine problem-solving raises concerns that students may increasingly outsource important cognitive processes. Overreliance on these technologies therefore risks weakening the development of critical reasoning, analysis, and independent judgement.

Institutional responses have largely centred on AI-detection software and compliance-oriented policy frameworks. While these measures seek to preserve academic integrity, they also risk positioning students primarily as potential violators rather than fostering ethical agency and responsible AI use (Selwyn, 2019; UNESCO, 2023). Such surveillance-oriented approaches divert attention from the more fundamental need to redesign pedagogy and assessment. Moreover, the dialogical dimensions of higher education—including mentorship, collaborative inquiry, and democratic deliberation—may be diminished when educational interactions become increasingly mediated by automated systems rather than sustained human engagement (Waghid, 2010; Selwyn, 2019; UNESCO, 2023).

Taken together, these developments suggest that the challenges posed by generative AI extend well beyond technical regulation. Issues of fabricated authority, epistemic exclusion, algorithmic bias, and democratic participation require higher education to reconsider the role of students as active knowledge agents rather than passive consumers of AI-generated content. In this sense, generative AI should be understood not merely as an operational challenge but as a democratic and ethical concern. Global Citizenship Education (GCE) offers one possible framework for responding to these challenges by foregrounding critical awareness, ethical judgement, relational responsibility, and participatory engagement (UNESCO, 2021; Andreotti, 2014).

FROM GLOBAL PROMISE TO LOCAL CRITIQUE: PROBLEMATIZING GCE

The preceding discussion suggests that GCE provides a compelling ethical framework for responding to generative AI. Nevertheless, critical scholarship cautions that dominant formulations of GCE may promote abstract forms of globalism that remain insufficiently attentive to power, context, and epistemic plurality (Andreotti, 2014; Goren and Yemini, 2017). These critiques are particularly significant when considering generative AI as a technology shaped by — and capable of reproducing — existing power relations and global inequalities.

Andreotti (2014) distinguishes between "soft" and more critical formulations of GCE, arguing that softer approaches often encourage empathy and global awareness while failing to interrogate historical injustice, coloniality, and structural power. Consequently, GCE risks becoming an abstract moral ideal that is disconnected from the material realities of inequality and geopolitical asymmetry. Similarly, Goren and Yemini (2017) argue that institutional implementations of GCE frequently remain symbolic, lacking deeper structural critique.

Within the context of generative AI, these concerns become especially salient. If GCE is framed as a universal ethical project detached from local histories, indigenous epistemologies, and situated forms of judgement, it may inadvertently reproduce the very exclusions it seeks to challenge. Although UNESCO (2021) emphasises that global citizenship should remain attentive to diversity and cultural specificity, global policy frameworks often privilege homogenised conceptions of responsibility. When these universalising tendencies intersect with generative AI systems that already reflect dominant linguistic and epistemic norms, there is a risk that technological and educational practices will converge around Global North assumptions of knowledge, marginalising local ways of knowing in the name of innovation, efficiency, and competitiveness.

Problematizing GCE is therefore not an attempt to dismiss its value, but rather to strengthen its application. In the context of generative AI, GCE must remain attentive to

contextual realities, epistemic diversity, and unequal power relations if it is to provide a genuinely ethical response to technological transformation.

RE-ENGAGING THE THREE DIMENSIONS OF GCE IN THE AGE OF GENERATIVE AI

The preceding discussion suggests that Global Citizenship Education (GCE) requires reconceptualisation in response to the ethical and epistemic disruptions introduced by generative AI. This section revisits UNESCO's (2015) three interrelated dimensions of GCE—the cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioural dimensions—through the ethical lens of Ubuntu. Doing so situates GCE within contemporary technological developments while foregrounding relational ethics, epistemic justice, and democratic responsibility.

The cognitive dimension of GCE requires students to develop critical understanding of the sociotechnical nature of generative AI. UNESCO (2015) argues that this dimension cultivates knowledge of global issues, interconnected systems, and underlying power relations. Applied to generative AI, it requires students to understand how algorithmic systems produce, mediate, and legitimise knowledge rather than assuming that AI-generated outputs are objective or neutral. The datasets underpinning generative AI are shaped by social, political, economic, and historical conditions, meaning that AI systems inevitably reproduce particular values and epistemic assumptions. Selwyn (2019) argues that generative AI not only mediates knowledge but increasingly participates in its construction, raising important questions about authorship, accuracy, bias, and epistemic authority. Similarly, Zawacki-Richter et al. (2019) highlight concerns regarding the production, transparency, and governance of AI-generated knowledge, reinforcing the need for critical digital and epistemic literacy. Read through Ubuntu, this cognitive dimension extends beyond technical literacy by encouraging students to interrogate the power relations, epistemic dominance, and inequalities embedded within AI systems rather than accepting their outputs as authoritative.

The socio-emotional dimension foregrounds values of dignity, empathy, solidarity, and justice. UNESCO (2015) positions ethical responsibility and a sense of shared humanity as central to GCE. In the context of generative AI, this dimension becomes increasingly significant because technologically mediated interactions risk distancing individuals from the relational and ethical consequences of their actions. Ubuntu provides an ethical foundation that emphasises care, mutual recognition, responsibility, and respect for others. Waghid and Hungwe (2023) argue that ethical conduct emerges through relationships and lived encounters rather than through abstract principles alone. This perspective is particularly important in AI-mediated educational environments, where efficiency and automation may overshadow

questions of justice and human dignity. Similarly, Prinsloo (2020) argues that AI-enabled educational systems must remain attentive to issues of power, vulnerability, and fairness, particularly where students are subjected to algorithmic decision-making. An Ubuntu-informed socio-emotional dimension therefore cultivates ethical sensitivity and relational awareness, ensuring that engagement with generative AI remains grounded in dignity, care, inclusion, and epistemic justice.

The behavioural dimension concerns how critical understanding and ethical commitment are translated into responsible action. UNESCO (2015) describes this dimension in terms of democratic participation, responsible engagement, and active citizenship across diverse contexts. Within higher education, generative AI requires students to make increasingly complex ethical decisions regarding when, how, and why AI should be used. Yet institutional responses have largely focused on surveillance, compliance, and rule enforcement rather than cultivating ethical agency. Consequently, responsible engagement with generative AI cannot be reduced to procedural compliance but must involve contextually informed judgement and reflective action. Waghid (2014) argues that democratic education develops the capacity for deliberation, judgement, and responsibility, enabling individuals to act accountably within shared communities. Likewise, Waghid and Hungwe (2023) emphasise that ethical action is inherently relational, requiring attentiveness to how one's actions affect others, particularly in contexts characterised by inequality and epistemic marginalisation. Floridi et al. (2018) similarly contend that ethical AI governance should prioritise accountability, transparency, justice, and human-centred decision-making. An Ubuntu-informed behavioural dimension therefore encourages students not merely to comply with institutional AI policies but to engage critically with AI technologies, question their implications, and act in ways that uphold human dignity, epistemic diversity, and relational responsibility.

Taken together, these three dimensions reposition GCE as more than a framework for responsible global citizenship. Reinterpreted through Ubuntu, they offer a contextually grounded ethical framework for engaging with generative AI—one that moves beyond technical compliance towards critical judgement, democratic participation, and relational responsibility. In doing so, GCE becomes not simply a response to technological disruption but a means of cultivating ethically responsible graduates capable of navigating increasingly AI-mediated educational environments.

TOWARDS AI LITERACIES ALIGNED WITH GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

Reconceptualising the three dimensions of Global Citizenship Education (GCE) through Ubuntu has important implications for how AI literacy is understood within higher education.

If generative AI raises fundamentally epistemic, ethical, and democratic questions, then AI literacy cannot be reduced to technical proficiency or operational competence alone. Rather, it must equip students to engage critically with AI systems, deliberate ethically about their use, and participate responsibly within increasingly AI-mediated educational environments. This argument aligns with UNESCO's (2023) position that AI literacy should cultivate critical, ethical, and socially responsive capacities that extend beyond technical skills. Similarly, the World Economic Forum (2023) identifies critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and complex problem-solving as essential capabilities for navigating rapidly evolving digital environments, while acknowledging the limitations of approaches that privilege technical competence in isolation from broader social and ethical considerations.

Viewed through the lens of GCE, AI literacies should therefore encompass three interconnected capabilities. First, students require critical epistemic literacy that enables them to understand how generative AI systems produce, mediate, and legitimise knowledge, while recognising the power relations, biases, and inequalities embedded within the data and algorithms on which these systems rely. Second, AI literacy should cultivate ethical sensitivity, enabling students to remain attentive to questions of human dignity, justice, inclusion, and the broader consequences of AI use for themselves and others. Third, students require the capacity for responsible and contextually informed action, allowing them to make reflective judgements about when, how, and why generative AI should be used in ways that are accountable and socially responsible. This reconceptualisation moves AI literacy beyond instrumental or skills-based understandings towards a more holistic framework that integrates knowledge, ethical values, and responsible action.

Such an understanding closely aligns AI literacy with GCE's emphasis on critical awareness, relational responsibility, and democratic participation. Waghid (2014) similarly argues that higher education should prioritise the cultivation of judgement and ethical responsibility within democratic contexts. Accordingly, AI literacy is not simply about knowing how to use generative AI, but about developing the capacity to determine when its use is appropriate, why it is justified, and what consequences it may have for individuals, communities, and knowledge itself.

Ubuntu further strengthens this reconceptualisation by grounding AI literacy within local ethical traditions and lived realities. Through its emphasis on relational ethics, human dignity, communal accountability, and epistemic plurality, Ubuntu ensures that AI literacy remains attentive to contextual differences rather than reproducing universalised technological assumptions. This is particularly significant because global AI systems may marginalise local knowledge traditions and reinforce existing epistemic inequalities.

Aligning AI literacies with Global Citizenship Education therefore provides a practical educational response to generative AI that extends beyond technical competence. It foregrounds critical reflection, ethical judgement, relational responsibility, and democratic participation as integral components of AI literacy. Consequently, the role of higher education is not merely to prepare students to use generative AI effectively, but to cultivate graduates capable of engaging with AI critically, ethically, and responsibly within diverse and unequal societies.

CONCLUSION

Re-centring the local in global technological futures

This article has argued that the rapid adoption of generative AI in higher education presents challenges that extend well beyond technical implementation to encompass fundamental epistemic, ethical, and democratic concerns. Although generative AI offers significant opportunities to enhance teaching, learning, and knowledge production, its uncritical adoption risks reinforcing existing inequalities, reproducing epistemic hierarchies, and marginalising locally situated forms of knowledge. As Pullen and Waghid (2023) and Waghid and Hungwe (2023) argue, educational responses to emerging technologies must remain attentive to context, relational responsibility, and the situated nature of knowledge.

These concerns are particularly significant within the Global South, where the uncritical adoption of globally developed AI systems may inadvertently reproduce dominant linguistic, cultural, and epistemic norms. Rather than importing universalised models of AI governance, higher education institutions should develop contextually responsive approaches that foreground epistemic diversity, social justice, and ethical responsibility. Such approaches recognise that responsible AI adoption is not simply a matter of technological innovation but of ensuring that technological change serves local educational priorities and communities.

This argument also has important pedagogical implications. Preparing students for an AI-mediated future requires more than technical training; it demands the cultivation of critical understanding, ethical judgement, relational responsibility, and democratic participation. While Global Citizenship Education provides a valuable framework for advancing these aims, this article has argued that its application must itself be critically reinterpreted. Re-grounding GCE through Ubuntu offers an ethical framework that re-centres dignity, interdependence, communal accountability, and epistemic plurality, thereby addressing the limitations of both technocratic approaches to AI governance and abstract formulations of global citizenship. In doing so, it repositions AI literacy as an educational practice concerned not only with

technological competence but also with critical judgement, ethical deliberation, and responsible participation.

Ultimately, the central question confronting higher education is not whether generative AI should be adopted, but on whose terms, in whose interests, and according to which ethical commitments. By bringing Global Citizenship Education into dialogue with Ubuntu, this article advances a contextually grounded framework for AI literacy that is simultaneously critical, democratic, and ethically responsive. Such a framework contributes to ongoing debates about responsible AI in higher education while reaffirming that the future of educational technology should be shaped not only by technological capability, but by human dignity, epistemic justice, and the capacity of universities to cultivate critically engaged citizens capable of shaping just technological futures.

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