



Decolonising Generative Artificial Intelligence in African Higher Education: Toward Ubuntu-ÈkÓ, Augmented Collective Wisdom and Digital Sovereignty

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ABSTRACT

The rapid diffusion of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) into higher education presents both significant opportunities and critical challenges for institutions in Africa and the wider Global South. While GenAI can expand access to information, support teaching and learning, and strengthen research productivity, its deployment also raises questions concerning whose knowledge is represented, which languages are privileged, how credibility is constructed, and who exercises control over the infrastructures and data on which artificial intelligence depends. This article critically examined the implications of these challenges through the lenses of decolonial theory, epistemic justice, African philosophical thought, and critical AI studies. Rather than treating artificial intelligence as a culturally neutral technological artefact, the article conceptualises AI as a sociotechnical system whose knowledge practices are shaped by historical, economic, linguistic and epistemological relations of power. Drawing on a critical interpretive synthesis of scholarly literature, policy documents and African philosophical perspectives, the article developed the Ubuntu-ÈkÓ Framework as an original conceptual contribution. The framework brings together relationality, ethical character, contextual responsiveness, critical consciousness and communal capability. Building on this framework, the article proposes Augmented Collective Wisdom (ACW) as a reorientation of AI from a technology primarily designed to automate or individualise knowledge work toward a sociotechnical resource that supports collective learning, human judgement, cultural integrity and community wellbeing. The article further advanced Digital Sovereignty as a strategic alternative to a narrow discourse of AI readiness. It concluded that decolonising AI in higher education does not require rejection of technological innovation; rather, it requires institutions to develop the epistemic, cultural, linguistic, infrastructural and governance capacities necessary to determine how AI is designed, interpreted, deployed and evaluated within their own contexts.

Keywords: artificial intelligence; generative AI; decolonisation; epistemic justice; Ubuntu; Ọmọlúàbí; Èkó; Indigenous knowledge systems; African higher education; digital sovereignty

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Generative Artificial Intelligence and the African Higher Education Context

Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) has rapidly become part of the global higher education landscape. Large language models and related generative systems are increasingly used for information retrieval, writing assistance, translation, coding, research support, curriculum development and other academic activities. UNESCO's guidance on GenAI in education and research recognises both the opportunities associated with these technologies and the need for human-centred approaches that address equity, privacy, cultural and linguistic diversity, human agency and ethical validation (Miao & Holmes, 2023).



For African higher education systems, however, the emergence of GenAI cannot be understood solely as a question of technological adoption. It intersects with longstanding inequalities in infrastructure, research capacity, knowledge production, language representation and access to digital resources. Consequently, the question confronting African universities is not simply whether they are sufficiently prepared to use AI. A more fundamental question concerns the terms on which AI is introduced, whose knowledge and values are embedded within it, and whose interests its deployment ultimately serves. Recent African scholarship similarly highlights the tension between AI-enabled access and risks of intellectual dependency in African universities (Woldegiorgis, 2026).

The African Union's Continental Artificial Intelligence Strategy recognises artificial intelligence as strategically important to Africa's development and emphasises an Africa-centric, development-oriented approach based on ethical, responsible and equitable AI. The strategy also connects AI with the preservation and advancement of African culture and calls for stronger African capabilities in AI skills, research, data, infrastructure and governance (African Union, 2024).

This policy direction provides an important basis for moving beyond a simple technology-adoption model. African higher education institutions require approaches that connect technological innovation with questions of culture, knowledge, language, ethics, participation and institutional agency.

1.2 The Colonial Paradox of Artificial Intelligence

The central argument of this article is that AI presents a colonial paradox for higher education in the Global South. Technologies that promise democratisation and expanded access to knowledge can simultaneously reproduce inequalities when the infrastructures, datasets, languages, assumptions and governance arrangements underlying those technologies are concentrated elsewhere.

The concept of coloniality is useful for understanding this tension. Quijano (2000) argues that colonialism did not disappear with political decolonisation; rather, structures of power continued to shape knowledge, social classification and systems of authority. Mignolo (2011) similarly demonstrates how modern systems of knowledge are connected to enduring colonial structures that privilege particular ways of knowing while marginalising others.

Applied to contemporary AI, this perspective raises a critical question: what happens when systems that increasingly participate in educational knowledge production are developed within epistemic environments that do not adequately represent the histories, languages, experiences and knowledge systems of African societies?

The concern is not that all AI systems are inherently colonial or that knowledge produced outside Africa is intrinsically inappropriate. Such an argument would itself reproduce a simplistic binary between "Western" and "African" knowledge. Rather, the concern is that asymmetrical control over technological infrastructures and knowledge resources can reproduce existing epistemic hierarchies when systems are transferred across contexts without sufficient adaptation, participation and critical scrutiny.

This distinction is important. Decolonisation should not be interpreted as the rejection of knowledge because of its geographical origin. It should instead involve examining the power relations through which knowledge is selected, validated, represented and circulated.

1.3 AI, Epistemic Injustice and Knowledge Representation

The problem therefore extends beyond algorithmic accuracy.

Fricker's (2007) concept of epistemic injustice provides a useful framework for examining situations in which individuals or groups are unfairly disadvantaged in their capacity as knowers. Testimonial injustice occurs when prejudice contributes to a deficit in credibility, while hermeneutical injustice arises when people lack adequate shared interpretive resources through which their experiences can be understood.



These concepts have increasing relevance to AI-mediated knowledge production. Generative AI systems can provide highly accessible information while simultaneously reproducing limitations in the knowledge from which their outputs are generated. If particular languages, scholarly traditions, communities and forms of knowledge are systematically underrepresented in digital knowledge environments, their relative invisibility may subsequently be reproduced through AI-mediated interactions.

This does not mean that an AI system necessarily "understands" or deliberately discriminates against a particular knowledge system. The more important issue is structural: what becomes more visible, searchable, retrievable and credible when AI mediates access to knowledge?

The question is particularly significant in higher education because universities are not merely consumers of information. They are institutions responsible for generating, validating, preserving and transmitting knowledge. Consequently, the adoption of AI can influence not only teaching and learning but also the epistemic processes through which academic knowledge is produced and legitimised.

1.4 Indigenous Knowledge and Epistemic Plurality

Indigenous knowledge systems provide an important point of departure for reconsidering these challenges. Such systems should not be treated as repositories of isolated traditional facts to be inserted into an otherwise unchanged technological curriculum. Rather, they may be understood as complex systems of observation, interpretation, practice, transmission and ethical responsibility.

The recognition of Indigenous and local knowledge within educational and technological development therefore raises questions about epistemic plurality. Instead of asking how African knowledge can be added to an already established AI framework, a decolonial approach asks how different knowledge traditions can participate in defining the problems AI addresses, the purposes for which it is deployed, the criteria through which it is evaluated and the communities that benefit from it.

This is consistent with UNESCO's emphasis on protecting cultural and linguistic diversity and ensuring that emerging AI technologies remain subject to human-centred educational and ethical governance (Miao & Holmes, 2023).

1.5 African Philosophical Perspectives and AI Ethics

African philosophical traditions can contribute to this discussion without being presented as a single, homogeneous African worldview.

Ubuntu provides one important example. Although interpretations vary across contexts, Ubuntu is commonly associated with rationality, human interconnectedness, dignity and communal responsibility. Letseka (2012) demonstrates the relevance of Ubuntu to questions of education, moral formation and democratic citizenship.

Similarly, Yoruba philosophical concepts associated with Ọmọlúàbí can contribute a virtue-oriented perspective in which ethical character, responsibility and socially situated personhood are important dimensions of human development. Èkọ́, understood in the present article as an educational and knowledge-oriented concept, provides a basis for thinking about learning as a process that involves more than the accumulation of technical information.

These traditions should not be treated as interchangeable, nor should they be assumed to represent all African societies. The present article therefore uses Ubuntu, Ọmọlúàbí and Èkọ́ as situated philosophical resources through which a broader question can be explored: how might AI in higher education be designed and governed around relationships, ethical character, contextual responsibility and collective wellbeing rather than technological efficiency alone?

1.6 From AI Readiness to Digital Sovereignty

Much contemporary discussion of AI in education is framed around AI readiness. This discourse is valuable



insofar as institutions require digital competencies, infrastructure, policies and human capacity to use AI effectively. However, readiness can become overly consumptive when it focuses primarily on enabling institutions and individuals to use technologies designed and governed elsewhere.

This article therefore proposes a shift from AI readiness to Digital Sovereignty.

Digital sovereignty does not imply technological isolation or the rejection of international collaboration. Rather, it refers to the capacity of institutions, communities and states to exercise meaningful agency over digital infrastructures, data, knowledge, languages, technologies and governance arrangements that affect their educational futures.

This interpretation is compatible with the African Union's broader policy direction, which places emphasis on African capability, ethical governance, research, infrastructure, data and culturally responsive technological development (African Union, 2024).

1.7 Problem Statement and Research Gap

The growing literature on AI ethics has produced important principles concerning fairness, transparency, accountability, privacy, human oversight and responsible innovation. However, significant questions remain concerning how these principles can engage more deeply with epistemic plurality, Indigenous knowledge, African philosophical traditions, linguistic diversity and collective forms of responsibility.

At the same time, decolonial scholarship has generated powerful critiques of coloniality and epistemic domination, but these critiques have not always been translated into operational models for governing generative AI within higher education.

The gap addressed by this article therefore lies at the intersection of three domains:

1. critical and decolonial AI scholarship;
2. African philosophical and Indigenous knowledge traditions; and
3. institutional approaches to responsible AI in higher education.

The article responds to this gap by proposing an integrated conceptual framework rather than claiming to have empirically validated a framework through an original multinational field study.

1.8 Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this article is to develop a conceptually grounded framework for decolonising GenAI in African higher education.

The specific objectives are to:

1. critically examine how AI may reproduce epistemic and structural inequalities within Global South higher education;
2. examine how selected African philosophical traditions can contribute to a more contextually responsive AI ethics;
3. develop the Ubuntu-Èkó Framework as an original conceptual model for AI education and governance;
4. conceptualise Augmented Collective Wisdom as an alternative orientation to AI-enabled knowledge production; and
5. propose Digital Sovereignty as an institutional pathway for strengthening African agency in AI development, deployment and governance.

1.9 Research Questions

The article addresses four questions:



RQ1: How can the adoption of generative AI reproduce epistemic inequalities within African and Global South higher education?

RQ2: What insights can selected African philosophical traditions contribute to the ethical governance of AI in higher education?

RQ3: How can the Ubuntu-Èkò Framework provide a conceptual basis for culturally grounded AI education and governance?

RQ4: How can higher education institutions move beyond AI readiness toward greater Digital Sovereignty?

1.10 Contribution of the Article

The article makes three principal contributions.

First, it advances an epistemological contribution by positioning AI adoption as a question of knowledge, representation, language and power rather than merely technological efficiency.

Second, it makes a theoretical contribution through the development of the Ubuntu-Èkò Framework. Importantly, this framework is presented as an original synthesis proposed in this article, rather than as an established external framework.

Third, it makes a conceptual and practical contribution through the linked concepts of Augmented Collective Wisdom and Digital Sovereignty. Together, these concepts provide an alternative way of thinking about AI in which technological capability is connected to human agency, community wellbeing, cultural integrity and institutional control.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Generative AI and the Transformation of Higher Education

Generative AI is altering established practices of writing, information retrieval, assessment, programming, research and knowledge communication in higher education. Its rapid development has created opportunities for personalised learning, accessibility, language support and research assistance, while simultaneously generating concerns around academic integrity, reliability, privacy, bias and human agency. (UNESCO, 2023).

UNESCO's guidance stresses that educational institutions should not treat GenAI as an automatically beneficial technology. Instead, its use requires pedagogical validation, ethical safeguards, protection of personal data and attention to inclusion, equity and cultural and linguistic diversity (Miao & Holmes, 2023).

This human-centred orientation is particularly relevant in African universities, where the educational value of AI cannot be separated from questions of infrastructure, language, institutional capacity and contextual relevance.

2.2 Coloniality and Artificial Intelligence

The concept of coloniality provides a deeper explanation of why technological inequalities persist after formal colonial rule.

Quijano (2000) conceptualises coloniality as the persistence of power structures that organise social relations and knowledge beyond the historical period of direct colonial administration. Mignolo (2011) extends this argument by examining the relationship between modernity and coloniality and the marginalisation of alternative epistemologies.

Within AI, the relevance of this perspective lies in the recognition that technological systems are not produced



outside society. Decisions about data, classification, language, optimisation, evaluation and deployment reflect human institutions and social priorities.

AI therefore needs to be examined as a sociotechnical system rather than as a neutral computational instrument.

A decolonial AI agenda consequently asks:

- Who defines the problems that AI should solve?
- Whose data are used?
- Whose languages are represented?
- Whose knowledge becomes searchable?
- Who establishes evaluation standards?
- Who owns and governs the resulting infrastructure?
- Who benefits from AI-generated value?
- Who bears the risks?

These questions shift the discussion from technological performance to epistemic and institutional power.

2.3 Epistemic Injustice and AI-Mediated Knowledge

Fricker's (2007) distinction between testimonial and hermeneutical injustice is particularly useful for analysing AI-mediated knowledge environments.

Testimonial injustice concerns credibility deficits experienced by knowers. In AI-mediated environments, the analogous concern is that knowledge associated with highly represented languages, institutions and scholarly traditions may be easier for AI systems to retrieve, reproduce and legitimate than knowledge that is poorly represented digitally.

Hermeneutical injustice concerns limitations in the interpretive resources available for understanding experiences. This raises an important issue for AI: a system may generate fluent responses while lacking sufficient contextual resources to represent particular cultural or epistemic experiences accurately.

The issue is therefore not simply whether AI outputs are factually correct. An output can be factually plausible while still being epistemically incomplete.

This distinction is central to the present article because decolonisation requires attention not only to whether AI produces information but also to what kinds of knowledge become visible through its operation.

2.4 Indigenous Knowledge Systems and AI

Indigenous knowledge systems are increasingly relevant to debates about sustainable development, environmental management, health, agriculture, culture and education. Their relevance to AI extends beyond the inclusion of additional datasets.

A genuinely pluralistic approach requires consideration of:

- ownership of Indigenous knowledge;
- community consent;
- appropriate representation;
- data governance;
- benefit sharing;
- cultural protocols;
- language preservation; and



- the right of communities to determine how their knowledge is digitised and reused.

This is important because digitisation can create both preservation opportunities and new forms of extraction. Turning community knowledge into machine-readable data without appropriate governance may reproduce older extractive relationships in digital form.

Accordingly, the incorporation of Indigenous knowledge into AI should be guided by participation, consent, provenance, reciprocity and community benefit, rather than simply by the volume of information that can be incorporated into a dataset.

2.5 African Philosophical Resources for AI Ethics

African philosophical traditions provide important resources for rethinking ethical relationships between humans, communities and technologies.

2.5.1 Ubuntu

Ubuntu is particularly relevant because of its emphasis on relationality and human interconnectedness. In educational contexts, Ubuntu has been discussed in relation to moral development, citizenship and communal responsibility (Letseka, 2012).

Applied cautiously to AI, Ubuntu can encourage institutions to ask whether technological systems strengthen or weaken human relationships, whether benefits are distributed fairly, and whether AI contributes to collective wellbeing.

Ubuntu therefore adds a relational dimension to AI governance.

It does not replace existing principles such as autonomy, privacy, fairness and accountability. Rather, it can extend the ethical field by making relationships, community and collective wellbeing more visible.

2.5.2 Qmólúàbí and Ethical Character

The concept of Qmólúàbí provides a complementary ethical orientation centred on character, responsibility and appropriate conduct.

For AI education, this raises a question that is often underdeveloped in competency-based approaches:

What kind of person should the learner become through engagement with AI?

Technical proficiency alone does not answer this question.

An AI-capable graduate may know how to construct effective prompts, generate content or use automated tools while lacking the ethical judgement necessary to evaluate when those tools should or should not be used.

Qmólúàbí therefore contributes a virtue-oriented dimension to the framework by foregrounding ethical character, responsibility and socially accountable action.

2.5.3 Èkó as Learning and Transformation

The concept of Èkó provides the educational dimension of the proposed framework.

Rather than conceptualising AI education solely as acquisition of technical skills, the framework understands learning as a process through which information can be transformed into understanding and, ultimately, responsible judgement.

The proposed sequence is therefore:



Ìmò → Òye → Ọgbón Knowledge → Understanding → Wisdom

This sequence is not presented as an empirically validated psychological model. It is a conceptual device proposed by the authors for translating the philosophical orientation of the framework into an educational logic.

2.6 Toward Transcultural AI Ethics

A central premise of this article is that decolonising AI should not result in a new form of epistemic exclusion.

The objective is not to replace one universalism with another.

Instead, the article advocates transcultural ethics: a dialogical approach in which ethical traditions engage critically with one another while remaining attentive to differences in history, language, culture and social organisation.

Such an approach can retain established principles such as human rights, autonomy, accountability, privacy and fairness while incorporating additional concerns around:

- rationality;
- communal responsibility;
- contextual responsiveness;
- cultural integrity;
- ethical character;
- collective benefit; and
- knowledge sovereignty.

The value of this approach lies in its capacity to avoid two extremes:

technological universalism, in which one ethical model is assumed to fit every context; and

cultural isolationism, in which ethical traditions are treated as mutually incompatible.

The objective is instead critical ethical dialogue.

2.7 Language and Epistemic Inclusion

Language represents one of the most important dimensions of AI-related epistemic justice.

African higher education operates within multilingual environments in which colonial languages continue to have substantial institutional influence. AI systems that work substantially better in dominant global languages can unintentionally reproduce these hierarchies.

The issue is not simply translation accuracy.

Language carries:

- cultural concepts;
- histories;
- metaphors;
- values;
- categories of social relationship;
- systems of classification; and
- ways of expressing knowledge.



Consequently, multilingual AI should not be understood merely as a technical translation problem. It is also an epistemic and cultural question.

The African Union's Continental AI Strategy is relevant here because it explicitly situates AI within Africa's cultural and developmental priorities and calls for strengthened African capabilities in AI development and governance (African Union, 2024).

2.8 Prompting and Epistemic Agency

Prompting has become an increasingly important interaction between humans and generative AI.

However, effective prompting should not be reduced to a technical skill. Prompts determine how questions are framed, what assumptions are embedded in an inquiry and which forms of information are requested from a system.

This means that prompting can influence epistemic agency.

A student who learns only to obtain efficient answers from AI may become dependent on the system's framing of a problem. A student who learns to interrogate the assumptions behind an AI response can instead use the technology as an object of critical inquiry.

The educational challenge is therefore to develop critical AI literacy, in which students learn not merely how to prompt but how to question:

- the assumptions underlying a response;
- the provenance of information;
- missing perspectives;
- linguistic limitations;
- cultural assumptions;
- uncertainty;
- bias; and
- the consequences of acting on AI-generated recommendations.

2.9 Digital Sovereignty

Digital sovereignty provides the strategic dimension of the article.

The concept moves beyond individual digital literacy toward institutional and national capacity.

A digitally sovereign higher education system should progressively strengthen its capacity to:

govern its educational data;
protect community and Indigenous knowledge;
develop local AI expertise;
support African languages;
evaluate AI systems critically;
participate in AI research and development;
establish contextually appropriate governance;
negotiate relationships with technology providers; and
influence rather than merely consume technological futures.

Digital sovereignty therefore does not mean that every African university must build its own large language model.

Rather, it means that institutions should possess sufficient knowledge, governance capacity, infrastructure, bar-



gaining power and epistemic agency to determine how AI technologies affect their educational missions.

2.10 Research Gap

The literature demonstrates substantial work on responsible AI, AI ethics, decoloniality, Indigenous knowledge and African philosophy. However, these bodies of scholarship are often discussed separately.

Three gaps consequently remain.

First, there is insufficient integration between epistemic justice and practical AI governance in higher education.

Second, African philosophical traditions are often discussed normatively without being translated into a coherent conceptual architecture for AI education and institutional governance.

Third, the discourse of AI readiness can obscure the larger question of institutional agency: whether universities possess the capacity to shape, govern and critically evaluate AI rather than simply adopt commercially available systems.

The present article addresses these gaps through the proposed Ubuntu-Èkó Framework, Augmented Collective Wisdom and Digital Sovereignty.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THE UBUNTU-ÈKÓ FRAMEWORK

3.1 Status and Intellectual Ownership of the Framework

A major revision required by the reviewer is clarification of the status of the Ubuntu-Èkó Framework.

The previous manuscript referred to the framework as though “Ubuntu-Èkó Framework, 2026” were an external published source. The reviewer correctly identified this as problematic.

The revised manuscript therefore makes the position explicit:

The Ubuntu-Èkó Framework is an original conceptual framework proposed by the authors in this article. It is developed through a critical synthesis of selected African philosophical traditions, decolonial theory, epistemic justice scholarship and critical perspectives on AI.

Accordingly, subsequent references to the framework are presented as the authors' framework, not as citations to an external publication.

This correction is fundamental to the integrity and originality of the article.

3.2 The Philosophical Foundation

The Ubuntu-Èkó Framework brings together three complementary dimensions:

Ubuntu → relationality and communal responsibility

Èkó → learning, knowledge development and transformation

Omọlúàbí → ethical character and responsible personhood

The framework does not claim that these concepts are identical or that they collectively represent all African philosophies. Rather, they are brought into dialogue as selected philosophical resources for developing a contextually grounded approach to AI in higher education.

The resulting theoretical proposition is:

AI should enhance human and collective capabilities while remaining accountable to relationships, ethical character, cultural context and community wellbeing.

3.3 The Four Pillars

The framework is organised around four interconnected pillars.

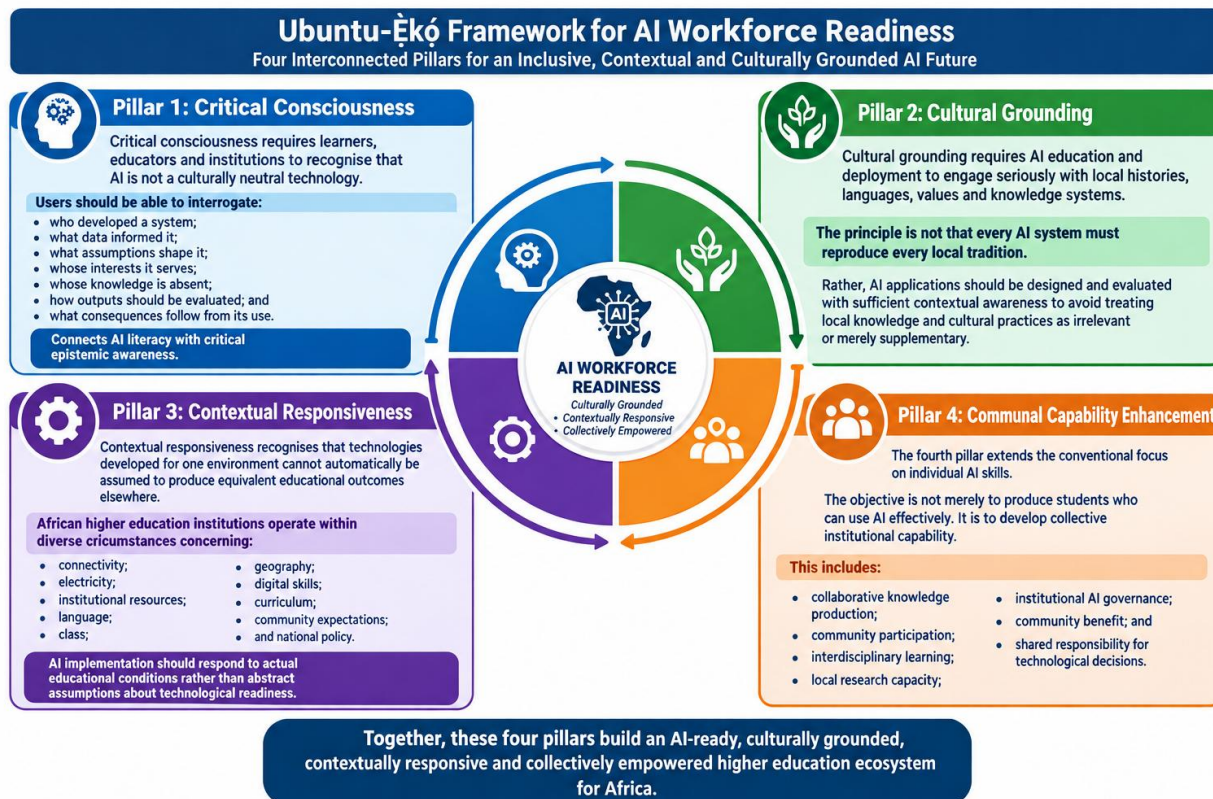
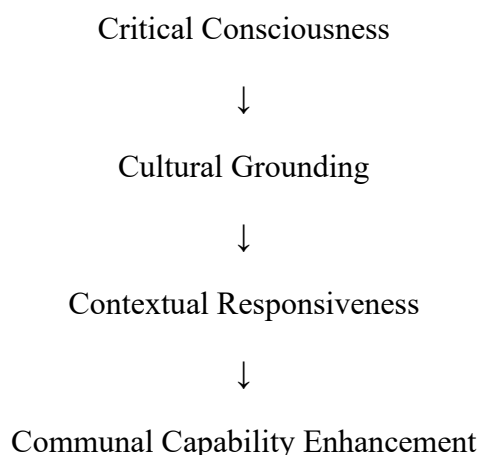


Figure 1: Authors' Framework

The four pillars are therefore mutually reinforcing:



Together they provide the conceptual foundation for the proposed framework.

3.4 The Èkó Learning Logic

The framework further proposes the following conceptual progression:



Ìwà Rere → Èkó → Ọmọlúàbí

where:

Ìwà Rere represents good character and ethical orientation;

Èkó represents learning and transformation; and

Ọmọlúàbí represents ethically responsible personhood.

Within AI education, the learning process can be expressed as:

Ímò → Òye → Ọgbón

Knowledge → Understanding → Wisdom

The significance of this formulation is that technical information should not be regarded as the endpoint of AI education.

Knowledge should be critically interpreted.

Interpretation should contribute to understanding.

Understanding should support wise and ethically responsible action.

The model therefore challenges a purely instrumental conception of AI literacy.

3.5 Artificial Intelligence as Augmented Collective Wisdom

The second major conceptual contribution of this article is Augmented Collective Wisdom (ACW).

ACW is proposed as an alternative conceptualisation of the relationship between humans and AI.

The dominant discourse frequently positions AI in terms of automation, prediction, optimisation, productivity or the simulation of intelligence. ACW instead asks:

How can AI augment the collective capacity of people and communities to learn, deliberate, create, preserve knowledge and make responsible decisions?

Under this approach, AI is not positioned as the ultimate authority.

Instead:

Human knowledge + community knowledge + critical judgement + AI capability → Augmented Collective Wisdom

This positioning retains human agency while recognising that AI can contribute computational capabilities to collective educational processes.

3.6 ACW and Human Agency

ACW therefore rests on several principles:

1. AI assists; humans remain accountable.

AI-generated information does not remove human responsibility for decisions.



2. AI augments; it does not automatically replace knowledge holders.

Communities and experts remain important sources of contextual knowledge.

3. AI supports dialogue rather than closing inquiry.

AI should stimulate questioning and comparison rather than become the final epistemic authority.

4. AI should preserve provenance.

Users should be able to distinguish generated content from human-authored or community-derived knowledge.

5. AI should remain contextually accountable.

An answer that appears plausible in one context may be inappropriate in another.

6. AI should contribute to collective wellbeing.

Technological effectiveness should be evaluated alongside social and educational consequences.

These principles are consistent with the human-centred direction advocated by UNESCO, particularly its emphasis on human agency, ethical validation, equity and cultural and linguistic diversity (Miao & Holmes, 2023).

3.7 From AI Readiness to Digital Sovereignty

The theoretical framework culminates in a movement from:

AI Readiness

toward

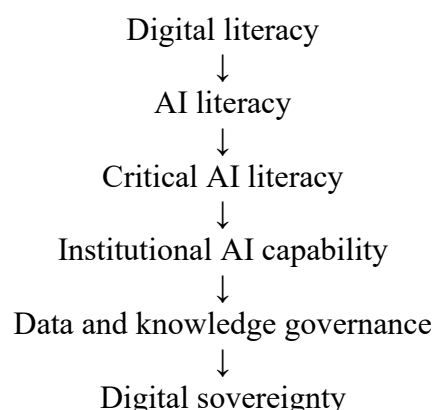
Digital Sovereignty

AI readiness focuses primarily on whether individuals and institutions possess the skills and resources required to use AI.

Digital sovereignty asks a deeper question:

Do individuals, universities, communities and states possess meaningful agency over the digital technologies that increasingly shape their educational futures?

The transition can therefore be conceptualised as:



This progression shifts the objective from technological consumption to technological agency.

3.8 The Integrated Ubuntu-Èkọ Model

The theoretical logic of the article can therefore be represented as follows:

AFRICAN PHILOSOPHICAL RESOURCES

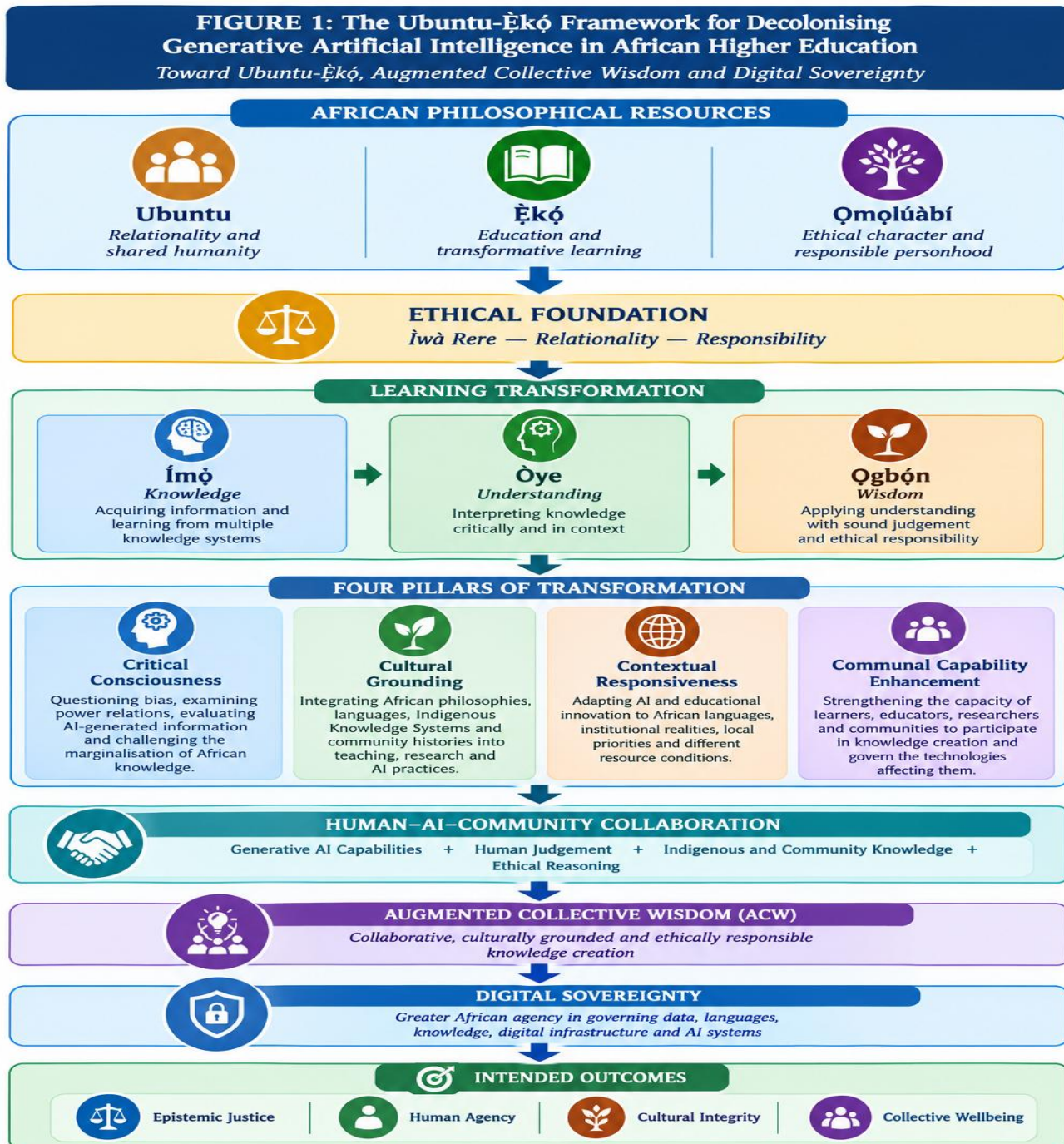


Figure 1. The Ubuntu-Èkọ Framework for Decolonising Generative Artificial Intelligence in African Higher Education: Toward Ubuntu-Èkọ, Augmented Collective Wisdom and Digital Sovereignty.

3.9 Theoretical Proposition

The article consequently advances the following proposition:



When AI is critically grounded in relational ethics, culturally situated knowledge, contextual responsiveness and communal capability, higher education can move from passive technological adoption toward Augmented Collective Wisdom and greater Digital Sovereignty.

This proposition is deliberately presented as a theoretical proposition, not as an empirically validated causal claim.

That distinction is important because the present article does not retain the unsupported multinational empirical dataset that appeared in the previous version.

3.10 Theoretical Significance

The Ubuntu-Èkó Framework contributes to AI scholarship in three ways.

First, it introduces an explicitly relational and communal dimension into discussions that often focus heavily on individual autonomy and technical competence.

Second, it connects AI ethics with educational formation, asking not merely what AI can do but what forms of knowledge, judgement and character educational systems should cultivate.

Third, it connects ethical AI with institutional agency, thereby providing the conceptual bridge between AI ethics and Digital Sovereignty.

The framework is therefore not proposed as a replacement for existing AI ethics frameworks. It is proposed as a contextually grounded complementary framework that can enter into dialogue with established approaches to responsible and human-centred AI.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Approach and Philosophical Orientation

This article adopts a critical-interpretive qualitative approach grounded in decolonial theory, epistemic justice and selected African philosophical traditions. The approach is appropriate because the purpose of the inquiry is not to measure the prevalence of particular attitudes or behaviours, but to interrogate how generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) may reproduce, redistribute or challenge existing relations of knowledge, power, representation and participation in higher education.

The inquiry is informed by three complementary intellectual orientations. First, decolonial theory provides a lens for examining how coloniality continues to shape knowledge hierarchies, categories of legitimacy and relations between centres and peripheries of knowledge production (Mignolo, 2011; Quijano, 2000). Second, epistemic justice provides a framework for examining whose testimony, concepts, languages and interpretive resources are recognised as legitimate within knowledge systems (Dotson, 2011; Fricker, 2007). Third, selected African philosophical traditions provide constructive ethical and epistemological resources through which AI can be reconsidered in relation to community, character, responsibility, relationality and human flourishing.

The methodological orientation therefore differs from a conventional technology-adoption study. Rather than asking only whether universities are ready to use AI, the analysis asks what conception of knowledge, personhood, learning and social responsibility is embedded in AI adoption. This distinction is central to the article's argument that technological readiness without epistemic and ethical agency may reproduce rather than resolve existing inequalities.

The approach also recognises that AI is not simply a technical artefact. AI systems are produced through relationships among data, computational infrastructures, commercial interests, labour, institutions, languages, regulatory systems and cultural assumptions. Crawford (2021), for example, demonstrates the material and



political dimensions of AI, while Noble (2018) and Benjamin (2019) illustrate how algorithmic systems can reproduce social hierarchies rather than operate as culturally neutral instruments. Accordingly, the present inquiry treats GenAI as a socio-technical and epistemic phenomenon.

4.2 Methodological Clarification and Scope

A methodological clarification is necessary because the earlier version of the manuscript presented what appeared to be a large multinational empirical investigation involving universities, academics, students, policymakers and Indigenous knowledge holders. The associated numerical results and participant quotations could not be traced to an independently verifiable dataset. They are therefore not retained in this revised version.

The present article makes no claim to have conducted the previously described multinational interviews, focus groups or institutional fieldwork. Similarly, the percentages previously presented as findings are not treated as original empirical results. This correction strengthens rather than weakens the manuscript because it aligns the evidentiary claims with the actual basis of the argument.

The revised study is consequently positioned as a critical-interpretive synthesis and documentary-conceptual inquiry. Its findings are analytical findings generated through interpretation and synthesis of relevant scholarship, policy documents and philosophical literature. They should therefore be read as propositions and patterns emerging from the literature rather than as statistically generalisable empirical findings.

This methodological repositioning also changes the meaning of the word findings. In Sections 5 and 6, “findings” refers to analytical findings of the synthesis, not participant-reported findings. No fabricated participant quotations are used.

4.3 Corpus of Literature and Documentary Sources

The analytical corpus comprises four interconnected categories of sources.

The first consists of scholarship on AI, algorithmic power and the social consequences of artificial intelligence. This literature provides the basis for examining bias, representation, technological power, data extraction and the political economy of AI (Benjamin, 2019; Crawford, 2021; Noble, 2018).

The second category consists of scholarship on coloniality, decoloniality and epistemic injustice. Quijano's (2000) account of coloniality of power and Mignolo's (2011) work on decolonial options are used to examine the persistence of epistemic hierarchies beyond formal colonial rule. Fricker's (2007) distinction between testimonial and hermeneutical injustice, together with Dotson's (2011) work on epistemic violence and silencing, provides the conceptual vocabulary for analysing exclusion from knowledge-making processes.

The third category comprises literature on Ubuntu, African philosophy and African approaches to education and ethical life. Ubuntu is treated as a philosophical resource concerned with relationality, personhood, responsibility and communal flourishing rather than as a simplistic cultural slogan. Letseka (2012), for example, demonstrates the potential of Ubuntu as a moral and educational resource while also cautioning against treating its values as uniquely or exclusively African. This observation is particularly important for the critical reflexivity developed later in the article.

The fourth category comprises policy and institutional documents concerning AI in education, responsible AI and African digital transformation. UNESCO's guidance on GenAI calls attention to human agency, inclusion, equity, linguistic and cultural diversity, ethical validation and locally relevant applications (Miao & Holmes, 2023). The African Union's Continental Artificial Intelligence Strategy similarly frames AI as a strategic developmental resource for Africa while emphasising ethical, responsible and equitable approaches and the preservation and advancement of African culture (African Union, 2024).

Together, these sources enable the article to place technological questions within wider epistemological, cult-



ural and political contexts.

4.4 Selection and Analytical Criteria

Sources were considered relevant where they contributed substantively to at least one of the following domains:

generative AI and higher education;
AI ethics and governance;
coloniality, decoloniality and digital colonialism;
epistemic justice and knowledge exclusion;
Indigenous and local knowledge systems;
African philosophy and ethics;
linguistic and cultural representation in AI;
human agency and critical AI literacy; and
digital sovereignty and locally grounded technological capacity.

Priority was given to authoritative scholarly publications, recognised philosophical works, institutional policy documents and recent literature addressing the rapid development of GenAI. Foundational theoretical works were retained where they remain conceptually indispensable.

The purpose was not to produce a statistical estimate of the literature but to identify conceptual relationships, recurring concerns, unresolved tensions and constructive alternatives relevant to the research questions.

4.5 Analytical Procedure

The analysis proceeded through four interconnected stages.

Stage 1: Conceptual Mapping

The first stage mapped the central concepts linking AI with coloniality, epistemic justice, African philosophy and higher education. Particular attention was given to the relationships among power, knowledge, language, representation, agency and governance.

Stage 2: Critical Thematic Analysis

The second stage involved identifying recurring analytical themes within the selected literature. These themes included:

- technological and infrastructural dependency;
- epistemic marginalisation;
- algorithmic and representational bias;
- linguistic hierarchy;
- unequal participation in AI development;
- human agency;
- communal responsibility;
- Indigenous knowledge protection; and
- digital sovereignty.

The analysis was interpretive rather than statistical. Themes were compared across sources and examined for convergence, divergence and conceptual tension.

Stage 3: Philosophical Synthesis

The third stage brought the identified themes into dialogue with selected African philosophical resources.



Ubuntu was considered primarily in relation to relationality and communal responsibility, while Ọmọlúàbí was examined through character, ethical formation and social responsibility. Èkọ was interpreted as an educational and transformative process connecting knowledge, understanding and wisdom.

The purpose was not to claim that these traditions constitute a single African philosophy. Instead, the synthesis identifies complementary conceptual resources that can contribute to a broader transcultural approach to AI ethics.

Stage 4: Framework Development

The final stage involved integrating the analytical themes into the Ubuntu-Èkọ Framework and the related concept of Augmented Collective Wisdom. The framework was constructed deductively from the conceptual relationships identified in the literature and developed inductively through synthesis of the philosophical and technological dimensions of the problem.

The resulting framework is therefore a theoretical proposition, not an empirically validated model. Its validity in practical settings remains an important question for future research.

4.6 Trustworthiness and Analytical Rigour

Trustworthiness in this form of conceptual research depends less on statistical reliability and more on transparency, conceptual coherence, evidentiary traceability and reflexivity.

Four strategies were therefore adopted.

First, the argument distinguishes between claims supported directly by existing literature and propositions developed by the authors. Second, foundational concepts are attributed to their original or established intellectual sources wherever possible. Third, the analysis avoids presenting illustrative examples as empirical evidence. Fourth, the authors explicitly recognise the limits of transferring concepts across culturally diverse contexts.

This approach is particularly important in decolonial scholarship because the act of representing another knowledge tradition carries its own epistemic risks. The article therefore does not claim to speak on behalf of all African communities or all Indigenous knowledge systems.

4.7 Reflexivity and Positionality

Reflexivity is central to the methodology because the article itself participates in the knowledge production it seeks to critique. A framework described as “African” can reproduce the very homogenising tendencies associated with colonial knowledge systems if it treats the continent as culturally or philosophically uniform.

The analysis therefore uses the expression “selected African philosophical traditions” rather than treating Ubuntu, Ọmọlúàbí or Èkọ as representative of all African societies. The traditions discussed originate in different historical, linguistic and cultural contexts and should not be collapsed into a single undifferentiated philosophical system.

Ubuntu, for example, has been interpreted differently across Southern African contexts, while Ọmọlúàbí and Èkọ emerge from Yoruba intellectual and cultural traditions. Their inclusion in the same analytical framework is consequently an act of theoretical synthesis, not a claim of historical identity.

This distinction is important. The Ubuntu-Èkọ Framework does not claim that Africa possesses one alternative to Western AI ethics. Rather, it proposes that selected African philosophical resources can enter into critical dialogue with other ethical traditions to produce more contextually responsive approaches to AI.



4.8 Ethical Considerations

Because the revised study does not report original human-participant research, it does not make a claim of institutional ethics approval for interviews, focus groups or participant observation. No participant data are presented, and no quotations are attributed to unidentified or unverifiable individuals.

The principal ethical concern therefore concerns intellectual representation. The article seeks to represent philosophical traditions accurately, acknowledge their internal diversity and avoid extracting Indigenous concepts from their cultural contexts merely to legitimise technological projects.

Particular care is also required when discussing Indigenous knowledge. Such knowledge should not automatically be treated as open training data. Questions of ownership, consent, benefit sharing, cultural protocols and community authority remain important considerations in any future development of AI systems involving Indigenous knowledge.

4.9 Data Availability Statement

No original human-participant dataset was generated for this article. The article is based on published scholarship, publicly available policy materials and conceptual analysis. Consequently, there is no participant dataset to deposit or share.

Future empirical studies designed to test the Ubuntu-Èkó Framework should develop appropriate protocols for informed consent, community participation, Indigenous data governance, secure data management and responsible data sharing.

5. ANALYTICAL FINDINGS

5.1 Overview of the Analytical Findings

The critical-interpretive synthesis produces eight interconnected analytical findings. Unlike the previous version, these findings do not claim numerical prevalence or empirical validation. They identify conceptual and structural patterns supported by the literature and policy corpus.

The eight findings are:

the colonial paradox is structural rather than merely technological;
epistemic injustice is an important dimension of AI governance;
Indigenous knowledge requires recognition beyond symbolic inclusion;
AI can widen an emerging scholarship and capability divide;
prompting and human-AI interaction have epistemic consequences;
language is a central site of AI inclusion and exclusion;
selected African philosophical traditions provide generative ethical resources; and
digital sovereignty provides a more substantive goal than technological readiness alone.

These findings provide the bridge between the literature reviewed in Sections 1–3 and the theoretical contribution developed in the discussion.

5.2 Finding 1: The Colonial Paradox Is Structural Rather Than Merely Technological

The first analytical finding is that the colonial paradox of AI cannot be reduced to whether African universities possess sufficient hardware, connectivity or technical expertise. The deeper issue concerns who designs AI systems, whose data and languages inform them, whose values influence their governance and who has authority to determine their purposes.

This interpretation is consistent with decolonial accounts of coloniality as a continuing structure of power



rather than a historical condition that ended with political independence (Mignolo, 2011; Quijano, 2000\). Applied to AI, coloniality can therefore appear through infrastructure, data ownership, platform dependency, knowledge representation and standards-setting.

The significance of this finding is that technological adoption may occur without corresponding epistemic autonomy. An institution can become highly proficient in using externally developed AI systems while remaining dependent upon external infrastructures, proprietary models and knowledge architectures.

The problem is consequently not simply that Africa may lack AI capacity. It is that capacity itself can be defined according to externally established priorities.

This interpretation is compatible with the African Union's contemporary AI strategy, which calls for an Africa-centric, development-focused approach to AI and explicitly links AI development with African culture, inclusion and equitable participation (African Union, 2024).

Theoretical implication

The colonial paradox therefore provides the structural rationale for moving beyond the conventional concept of AI readiness. Readiness must include the ability to question, adapt, govern and, where appropriate, redesign technological systems.

5.3 Finding 2: AI Raises an Epistemic Justice Problem

The second finding is that AI governance cannot be understood solely through conventional principles such as safety, privacy, transparency and accountability. These principles are necessary, but they do not completely address the question of whose knowledge becomes visible, credible and retrievable through AI systems.

Fricker's (2007) concept of epistemic injustice is useful here because it directs attention to injustice occurring within practices of knowing. Testimonial injustice concerns the unfair discounting of a person's credibility, while hermeneutical injustice concerns unequal access to interpretive resources through which experiences can be understood.

AI introduces new technological mechanisms through which such problems can be reproduced. If certain languages, publications, concepts and knowledge traditions are disproportionately represented in training and retrieval environments, then AI systems may provide apparently neutral outputs while reproducing historically unequal knowledge structures.

This does not mean that every AI system inevitably commits epistemic injustice. Rather, it means that epistemic justice should become an explicit design, evaluation and governance criterion.

Theoretical implication

The Ubuntu-Èkó Framework consequently extends AI ethics from the question:

Is the AI system safe and fair?

toward the additional questions:

Whose knowledge does the system recognise?

Whose knowledge does it marginalise?

Who has the authority to correct it?

Who benefits from its outputs?



These questions place epistemic justice at the centre of responsible AI.

5.4 Finding 3: Indigenous Knowledge Requires More Than Symbolic Inclusion

The analysis further indicates that Indigenous knowledge cannot be adequately addressed by simply adding a few local examples to otherwise unchanged AI curricula or datasets.

Indigenous knowledge systems often involve relationships among knowledge, community, environment, language, history, identity and ethical responsibility. Consequently, extracting individual items of Indigenous knowledge and placing them into technological systems without community governance risks reproducing an extractive model of knowledge production.

The issue is therefore not merely representation, but authority and governance.

A decolonial approach should distinguish between:

- knowledge that communities choose to make publicly available;
- knowledge subject to cultural restrictions;
- knowledge requiring community consent;
- knowledge requiring attribution and benefit sharing; and
- knowledge that should not be incorporated into AI systems at all.

This principle aligns with the broader human-centred orientation advanced by UNESCO, which emphasises cultural and linguistic diversity, human agency and locally relevant applications of GenAI (Miao & Holmes, 2023).

Theoretical implication

The Ubuntu-Èkò Framework therefore treats cultural grounding not as an optional “local content” component but as a governance condition.

5.5 Finding 4: AI May Intensify an Emerging Scholarship and Capability Divide

The analysis identifies a further structural concern: access to AI does not necessarily produce equal participation in knowledge production.

Higher education institutions differ substantially in access to computational resources, high-quality datasets, research infrastructure, digital expertise and institutional support. These differences can produce an emerging hierarchy in which some institutions primarily consume AI, while others have greater capacity to develop, customise, evaluate and govern AI.

This distinction is particularly important for universities because knowledge production is itself increasingly mediated by digital technologies.

The resulting divide should therefore not be understood simply as a conventional digital divide. It is more accurately described as an AI capability and epistemic participation divide.

The distinction can be represented as follows:

Access → Use → Critical Use → Adaptation → Development → Governance

Institutions located primarily at the first two stages may depend upon systems developed elsewhere. Institutions that move toward the final stages acquire greater epistemic and technological agency.



Theoretical implication

This finding strengthens the article's proposed transition from AI readiness to Digital Sovereignty. Readiness describes the ability to use a technology; sovereignty incorporates the ability to shape the conditions under which the technology is used.

5.6 Finding 5: Prompting Has Epistemic Consequences

The analysis indicates that prompting should not be treated exclusively as a technical skill.

A prompt is an interaction between a human knower and an AI system. It determines the language, framing, assumptions, context and desired output through which knowledge is requested. Consequently, prompt design can influence which forms of knowledge are made visible.

This is particularly important where AI systems have been trained predominantly through dominant languages and knowledge traditions. A user who possesses the conceptual vocabulary expected by the system may obtain richer responses than a user whose knowledge is organised through different linguistic or cultural categories.

Prompting can therefore involve a form of epistemic translation.

For example, a student seeking to explore an Indigenous concept may have to reformulate that concept in terminology that an AI system recognises. The student may consequently perform additional interpretive work before the AI can respond meaningfully.

This does not mean that prompting itself is inherently colonial. Rather, the finding is that the conditions under which prompting becomes effective are socially and linguistically situated.

Theoretical implication

Critical AI literacy should therefore include not only “how to prompt,” but also:

- how to interrogate the assumptions embedded in a prompt;
- how to identify knowledge omissions;
- how to compare AI outputs with local sources;
- how to recognise linguistic bias;
- how to challenge culturally inappropriate responses; and
- how to retain human epistemic authority.

5.7 Finding 6: Language Is a Central Site of AI Inclusion and Exclusion

The literature further indicates that linguistic diversity is inseparable from epistemic diversity.

Language does not merely transmit knowledge. It carries categories, metaphors, histories, social relationships and culturally specific ways of interpreting reality. When AI systems privilege a narrow range of languages, the problem is therefore not simply reduced translation accuracy.

It can become a problem of conceptual translation.

UNESCO explicitly identifies linguistic and cultural diversity as considerations in the responsible educational use of GenAI and calls for plural expressions of ideas and locally relevant applications (Miao & Holmes, 2023).

For African higher education, this has significant implications. Multilingual institutions cannot assume that an English-language AI response is culturally neutral simply because it is grammatically correct.



The challenge is particularly acute where concepts have no direct equivalent across languages. A system may translate a word while failing to preserve the cultural relationships embedded within the concept.

Theoretical implication

Cultural grounding within the Ubuntu-Èkó Framework must therefore include linguistic grounding.

This means supporting African languages not only through translation but through:

- locally grounded datasets;
- language-specific evaluation;
- community validation;
- culturally responsive interfaces;
- multilingual scholarship; and
- preservation of conceptual diversity.

5.8 Finding 7: Selected African Philosophical Traditions Provide Generative Ethical Resources

The analysis confirms the conceptual value of selected African philosophical traditions for rethinking AI ethics.

Ubuntu contributes a relational understanding of personhood and responsibility. Its importance for education is supported by scholarship that treats Ubuntu as a moral and educational resource rather than merely a cultural symbol (Letseka, 2012).

Ọmọlúàbí contributes an emphasis on ethical character and responsible conduct, while Èkó provides a useful conceptualisation of learning as transformation rather than simple information acquisition.

The synthesis produces the following relationship:

Ìwà Rere → Èkó → Ọmọlúàbí

with the learning process represented as:

Ímò → Òye → Ọgbón

In the proposed framework, therefore:

- Ìwà Rere represents ethical grounding;
- Èkó represents learning and transformation;
- Ímò represents knowledge;
- Òye represents understanding;
- Ọgbón represents wisdom; and
- Ọmọlúàbí represents the ethically formed human being.

The significance of this synthesis is that it shifts AI education from technical competence alone toward ethical and epistemic formation.

5.9 Finding 8: Digital Sovereignty Is a More Substantive Goal Than AI Readiness

The final analytical finding is that AI readiness is insufficient as an educational objective.

A university may be AI-ready if its students and staff know how to use AI tools. However, this does not necessarily mean that the institution can determine how those systems process data, represent local knowledge, protect institutional information, support local languages or serve community priorities.



Digital sovereignty therefore represents a broader aspiration.

In this article, Digital Sovereignty refers to the capacity of institutions, communities and states to exercise meaningful agency over:

- digital infrastructure;
- data;
- knowledge;
- languages;
- AI systems;
- technological standards;
- governance arrangements; and
- the purposes for which technology is deployed.

Digital sovereignty does not mean technological isolation. It means having sufficient agency to participate in technological relationships without surrendering the ability to determine one's own educational and knowledge priorities.

The African Union's Continental AI Strategy provides a contemporary policy basis for this direction by positioning Africa as an active participant in responsible AI development rather than merely a recipient of externally produced technologies (African Union, 2024).

6. DISCUSSION

6.1 Reinterpreting the Colonial Paradox of AI

The analytical findings suggest that the colonial paradox should be understood as a relationship between technological dependency and epistemic dependency.

The central problem is not simply that many African institutions use technologies developed elsewhere. Global knowledge exchange has always involved technological and intellectual circulation. The deeper concern arises when technological systems become the dominant arbiters of what counts as relevant knowledge while the communities using them have limited influence over their design, data, evaluation and governance.

This interpretation extends decolonial theory into the contemporary AI environment. Quijano's (2000) account of coloniality highlights how power can persist through systems of knowledge and classification even after formal colonial rule has ended. Mignolo (2011) similarly emphasises the need to challenge the epistemic structures through which modernity establishes particular forms of knowledge as universal.

AI can become part of this process when systems designed around dominant epistemologies are presented as universal representations of intelligence.

The implication is not that Western knowledge is inherently illegitimate. Rather, the issue is the asymmetry of epistemic authority.

The decolonisation of AI therefore requires moving from:

technology transfer

toward:

knowledge dialogue → contextual adaptation → shared governance → epistemic agency.



6.2 Epistemic Justice as an AI Governance Principle

The findings also extend conventional AI ethics by positioning epistemic justice as an explicit governance concern.

Current AI governance frequently addresses privacy, transparency, safety, accountability and fairness. These remain indispensable. However, the analysis suggests that another question must be asked:

What happens when a system is technically accurate according to its dominant knowledge base but contextually wrong for the community using it?

This is particularly important in higher education because universities are not simply consumers of information. They are institutions responsible for producing, validating, preserving and transmitting knowledge.

Fricker's (2007) theory is valuable here because it demonstrates that injustice can occur within the processes through which knowledge is produced and recognised.

Applied to AI, epistemic justice requires attention to:

representation;
credibility;
interpretive resources;
linguistic inclusion;
knowledge provenance;
human contestability; and
community authority.

The Ubuntu-Èkó Framework contributes to this discussion by connecting epistemic justice with ethical formation and communal responsibility.

6.3 Ubuntu-Èkó as a Theoretical Contribution

The central theoretical contribution of the article is the Ubuntu-Èkó Framework, which is explicitly presented as an original conceptual framework proposed by the authors.

The framework does not attempt to replace existing AI ethics frameworks. Instead, it provides a culturally grounded analytical lens through which those frameworks can be questioned, supplemented and transformed.

Its four pillars are:

Pillar 1: Critical Consciousness

AI users must understand that AI systems are socio-technical artefacts rather than neutral sources of truth.

Pillar 2: Cultural Grounding

AI education and governance should recognise local languages, histories, knowledge systems and cultural values.

Pillar 3: Contextual Responsiveness

AI systems should be evaluated according to their responsiveness to actual institutional and community contexts rather than universal assumptions.



Pillar 4: Communal Capability Enhancement

The objective of AI adoption should extend beyond individual productivity toward collective capability and community benefit.

The framework therefore shifts the unit of analysis from the individual AI user to the human–AI–community relationship.

This is one of the manuscript's most important theoretical distinctions.

6.4 From AI as Intelligence to AI as Augmented Collective Wisdom

The concept of Augmented Collective Wisdom (ACW) represents the second major conceptual contribution.

Conventional discourse often frames AI around the question:

How intelligent can machines become?

The ACW perspective asks a different question:

How can computational systems augment human and collective capacities for knowledge, judgement, learning and problem-solving without displacing human and community authority?

This distinction is important because intelligence and wisdom are not synonymous.

A system can produce an apparently sophisticated answer without possessing cultural understanding, moral responsibility or community accountability.

ACW therefore positions AI as an augmentative rather than sovereign epistemic actor.

The conceptual relationship can be expressed as:

AI capability + human judgement + contextual knowledge + community knowledge + ethical reasoning → Augmented Collective Wisdom

This formulation preserves the productive capabilities of AI while resisting the assumption that computational output should automatically become the final authority.

It is also consistent with UNESCO's human-centred approach, which emphasises human agency, ethical validation and pedagogically appropriate interaction with GenAI (Miao & Holmes, 2023).

6.5 Digital Sovereignty as Educational Transformation

The transition from AI readiness to Digital Sovereignty has implications beyond technology departments.

It requires transformation across at least five dimensions.

Infrastructure

Universities need sustainable digital infrastructure and access to computational resources appropriate to their educational and research missions.

Human capability

Students and educators need AI literacy, data literacy and critical AI literacy, rather than simple familiarity with commercial AI tools.



Knowledge governance

Institutions need mechanisms for deciding which institutional, community and Indigenous knowledge can be collected, processed, shared and incorporated into AI systems.

Curriculum

AI education should address ethics, power, language, epistemology and cultural context alongside technical competence.

Institutional governance

Universities need governance structures capable of evaluating AI systems according to educational, ethical, cultural and epistemic criteria.

This approach transforms Digital Sovereignty from a technological slogan into an educational governance agenda.

6.6 Prompting, Human Agency and Epistemic Autonomy

The discussion of prompting has another important implication.

If students become dependent on AI-generated formulations, the risk is not simply plagiarism or reduced academic effort. A deeper risk concerns epistemic delegation.

Epistemic delegation occurs when learners increasingly transfer the responsibility for framing questions, interpreting evidence and determining relevance to an AI system.

The danger is especially significant when the AI system operates through knowledge categories that are not fully aligned with the learner's cultural context.

The Ubuntu-Èkó approach therefore proposes a different model:

Human question → AI augmentation → critical interrogation → contextual validation → human judgement → collective learning

rather than:

Human question → AI answer → acceptance.

This distinction should become central to AI pedagogy in higher education.

6.7 Transcultural Ethics Rather Than Cultural Replacement

The analysis does not support a binary choice between “Western ethics” and “African ethics.”

Such a binary would reproduce the same epistemic simplification that the article seeks to overcome.

Instead, the manuscript proposes transcultural ethics.

Transcultural ethics involves the deliberate encounter of ethical traditions in which neither tradition is assumed to possess an automatic monopoly on moral truth.

The six principles developed earlier in the manuscript can therefore be retained, but with greater theoretical precision:

Relationality — ethical decisions consider relationships and interdependence.



Community benefit — AI should contribute to collective as well as individual flourishing.
Context sensitivity — ethical judgement must attend to cultural and institutional context.
Virtue cultivation — ethical AI use requires responsible human character and judgement.
Rights and responsibilities — individual rights should be considered alongside social responsibilities.
Human flourishing — AI should ultimately be assessed by its contribution to dignity, capability and collective wellbeing.

These principles should not be understood as exclusively African. Rather, African philosophical traditions provide important resources for expanding the ethical vocabulary through which AI is understood.

6.8 Critical Reflexivity: Avoiding the Essentialisation of “African Ethics”

A strong decolonial argument must also be self-critical.

The concept of “African ethics” can become problematic when it assumes that the continent has one unified ethical worldview. Africa contains thousands of languages, cultures, histories and intellectual traditions. Ubuntu itself has multiple interpretations and applications.

Letseka (2012), for instance, notes that values associated with Ubuntu should not automatically be treated as uniquely African. This is an important corrective because decolonisation should not replace one universalising epistemology with another.

The Ubuntu-Èkó Framework should therefore be interpreted as a situated synthesis, not a continental essence.

Three safeguards follow.

First, the framework should remain open to revision by scholars and communities working within the traditions from which its concepts are drawn.

Second, future empirical applications should investigate how Ubuntu, Ọmọlúàbí and related concepts are interpreted in specific contexts rather than assuming universal agreement.

Third, the framework should remain dialogical. Its purpose is not to reject Western ethical traditions but to create space in which multiple intellectual traditions can question and enrich one another.

This reflexive position strengthens the theoretical contribution because it demonstrates that decolonisation itself requires continuous critical examination.

6.9 Implications for Higher Education

The findings have implications for teaching, research, governance and institutional strategy.

Curriculum

AI curricula should move beyond technical operation and include:

- epistemology of AI;
- algorithmic bias;
- Indigenous knowledge;
- African philosophy;
- multilingual AI;
- data governance;
- critical prompting; and
- digital sovereignty.



Pedagogy

Educators should design activities in which students compare AI-generated responses with local scholarly, cultural and community sources.

Students should be required to explain why they accept, modify or reject an AI-generated response.

Assessment

Assessment should increasingly value:

- critical reasoning;
- source verification;
- contextual interpretation;
- ethical judgement;
- collaborative problem-solving; and
- responsible use of AI.

Research

African universities should move from being predominantly consumers of AI research toward becoming active sites of AI research, evaluation and innovation.

Governance

University AI policies should address not only academic integrity and privacy but also:

- data ownership;
- knowledge provenance;
- Indigenous knowledge;
- linguistic inclusion;
- model evaluation;
- transparency;
- community participation; and
- institutional accountability.

6.10 Implications for Policy

The African Union's Continental AI Strategy creates an important continental policy environment for this discussion. Its emphasis on an Africa-centric, development-oriented and ethically responsible approach to AI provides a policy foundation for greater African participation in AI development and governance (African Union, 2024).

At the national level, policymakers should therefore avoid defining AI education exclusively through workforce productivity.

A broader policy framework should recognise three interconnected objectives:

AI capability → epistemic capability → digital sovereignty.

This means investing not only in connectivity and infrastructure but also in:

- African language technologies;
- African-led AI research;
- open and responsible data infrastructures;



- interdisciplinary AI programmes;
- teacher and lecturer development;
- Indigenous knowledge governance;
- public-interest AI; and
- regional research collaboration.

Such a policy orientation would reposition African higher education institutions from passive recipients to active participants in AI futures.

6.11 Limitations of the Present Study

This revised article has several limitations.

First, it is a critical-interpretive and conceptual inquiry rather than an original empirical investigation. Its conclusions therefore cannot be interpreted as statistical estimates of AI practices across African universities.

Second, the framework draws on selected African philosophical traditions rather than attempting to represent the full diversity of African intellectual traditions.

Third, the literature on GenAI is developing extremely rapidly. New models, policies, applications and risks may emerge after the completion of the present analysis.

Fourth, the concept of Digital Sovereignty requires empirical operationalisation. The article proposes its conceptual dimensions but does not establish quantitative indicators for measuring institutional sovereignty.

Fifth, the Ubuntu-Èkó Framework has not yet undergone empirical validation. Future research should test its four pillars in different institutional, linguistic and national contexts.

These limitations should be understood not as weaknesses in the conceptual contribution but as a clear boundary between what the article establishes theoretically and what future empirical research must investigate.

6.12 Directions for Future Research

Future research should proceed in at least five directions.

First: Empirical validation

Studies should examine how the four Ubuntu-Èkó pillars operate in actual universities across different African contexts.

Second: Comparative research

Comparative studies could examine how the framework interacts with different African philosophical traditions and with established AI ethics frameworks.

Third: Linguistic research

Research should examine AI performance across African languages and investigate how linguistic differences affect knowledge representation and educational outcomes.

Fourth: Institutional governance

Universities should be studied as sites of AI governance, with particular attention to data ownership, procurement, academic integrity, Indigenous knowledge and community participation.



Fifth: Longitudinal research

Longitudinal studies are needed to determine whether culturally grounded AI strategies produce sustainable changes in student learning, academic research, institutional capability and community participation.

6.13 Synthesis of the Discussion

Taken together, the analytical findings support the central proposition of this article:

When AI is critically grounded in relational ethics, culturally situated knowledge, contextual responsiveness and communal capability, higher education can move from passive technological adoption toward Augmented Collective Wisdom and greater Digital Sovereignty.

The proposition contains four interconnected relationships:

Critical consciousness → epistemic agency

Cultural grounding → contextual relevance

Communal capability → collective benefit

Institutional agency → Digital Sovereignty

These relationships provide the conceptual bridge between the Ubuntu-Èkó Framework and the wider objective of decolonising AI in higher education.

The central argument is therefore not that Africa should reject generative AI. Nor is it that every Western ethical principle should be displaced.

The argument is more precise:

Africa should participate in AI on terms that preserve epistemic agency, cultural integrity, human dignity and the capacity to determine collective technological futures.

That is the point at which AI readiness becomes Digital Sovereignty.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The analysis presented in this article suggests that decolonising generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) in African higher education requires more than increasing access to digital technologies or improving individual AI literacy. It requires a coordinated transformation of curriculum, pedagogy, institutional governance, research capacity, language policy, Indigenous knowledge governance and digital infrastructure. The recommendations below are therefore derived directly from the analytical findings and the Ubuntu-Èkó Framework proposed in this article.

7.1 Reframe AI Literacy as Critical AI Literacy

Higher education institutions should move beyond approaches that define AI literacy primarily as the ability to operate generative AI tools. Students and educators should instead develop the capacity to interrogate AI systems as sociotechnical and epistemic systems.

Critical AI literacy should include the ability to examine the provenance of information, identify possible omissions and biases, evaluate generated content against authoritative sources, recognise linguistic and cultural limitations, understand the implications of data use and determine when AI should not be used.



Within the Ubuntu-Èkó Framework, this recommendation corresponds particularly to the pillar of Critical Consciousness. The objective is to develop learners who can use AI productively without surrendering their capacity for independent judgement.

AI education should therefore move from:

AI operation → AI literacy → Critical AI literacy → Epistemic agency.

This progression would help universities cultivate graduates who are not merely competent users of AI but critical participants in AI-mediated knowledge production.

7.2 Embed African Epistemic and Philosophical Perspectives in AI Education

AI-related curricula should create meaningful space for African philosophical traditions, Indigenous knowledge systems and locally situated epistemologies.

Such integration should not involve adding superficial references to African culture to otherwise unchanged curricula. Rather, students should be encouraged to examine fundamental questions concerning knowledge, personhood, responsibility, community, ethics and human flourishing.

Ubuntu, Ọmọlúàbí and Èkó can provide selected conceptual resources for such engagement. Ubuntu can support discussion of relationality and communal responsibility; Ọmọlúàbí can contribute to questions of ethical character and responsible conduct; and Èkó can support an understanding of learning as transformation rather than information accumulation.

However, universities should avoid presenting these traditions as a single or homogeneous African philosophy. Their use should remain situated, dialogical and open to interpretation by scholars and communities connected to the traditions.

7.3 Develop Culturally and Linguistically Responsive AI

African universities should invest in AI systems and educational applications that recognise linguistic and cultural diversity.

Language policy should extend beyond translation. African languages should be supported through locally grounded datasets, language-specific evaluation, multilingual scholarship, culturally responsive interfaces and community participation in the development and evaluation of language technologies.

This recommendation follows directly from the finding that language is not simply a communication mechanism but also a carrier of concepts, histories, relationships and culturally situated knowledge.

Universities should therefore ask not only:

“Can AI translate this language?”

but also:

“Can AI represent the knowledge, concepts and meanings carried through this language without reducing them to categories developed elsewhere?”

This distinction is fundamental to epistemic inclusion.

7.4 Establish Indigenous Knowledge Governance Mechanisms

Higher education institutions should establish explicit governance arrangements for the responsible use of Indigenous and community knowledge in AI-related research and education.



Such governance should address:

- community consent;
- knowledge ownership;
- provenance and attribution;
- cultural protocols;
- access restrictions;
- benefit sharing;
- data sovereignty;
- responsibilities of researchers and technology providers; and
- circumstances in which knowledge should not be digitised or incorporated into AI systems.

Indigenous knowledge should therefore not automatically be treated as an open resource for machine learning.

The principle should be:

Participation → Consent → Provenance → Reciprocity → Community Benefit.

This approach would help prevent the reproduction of historical extractive relationships through contemporary digital technologies.

7.5 Establish University-Level AI Governance Structures

Universities should develop multidisciplinary AI governance structures that extend beyond information technology departments.

Such structures could bring together expertise from education, law, ethics, information technology, data science, Indigenous knowledge, languages, research administration and student representation.

Their responsibilities should include:

1. evaluating AI tools before institutional adoption;
2. developing ethical and pedagogical guidelines;
3. assessing data protection and privacy implications;
4. examining linguistic and cultural representation;
5. monitoring AI-related academic integrity issues;
6. protecting institutional and community knowledge;
7. reviewing relationships with commercial AI providers; and
8. establishing mechanisms through which AI-generated outputs can be challenged or corrected.

This would operationalise the principle that AI governance is simultaneously a technical, educational, ethical, epistemic and institutional responsibility.

7.6 Redesign Assessment Around Human Judgement

The widespread availability of GenAI requires higher education institutions to reconsider assessment practices.

Assessment should increasingly reward capabilities that cannot be demonstrated adequately through the reproduction of AI-generated content alone. These include: Recent scholarship likewise argues that assessment can become a site for rethinking what forms of intelligence and literacy higher education values in an AI age (Bradley et al., 2024).

- critical reasoning;
- source verification;
- contextual interpretation;



- ethical judgement;
- reflection;
- argumentation;
- collaborative problem-solving;
- oral defence;
- practical application; and
- responsible use of AI.

Students should, where appropriate, be required to disclose how AI was used and to explain why they accepted, modified or rejected AI-generated material.

Such practices would transform AI from an invisible substitute for student thinking into an object of critical learning and epistemic interrogation.

The pedagogical sequence should therefore become:

Human question → AI augmentation → critical interrogation → contextual validation → human judgement → collective learning.

7.7 Strengthen African AI Research Capacity

African universities should move progressively from being predominantly consumers of AI technologies toward becoming active contributors to AI research, evaluation and innovation. Recent African higher-education scholarship similarly identifies opportunities for GenAI to support teaching and research while emphasising the need for context-sensitive capability development (Modiba et al., 2025).

This requires investment in:

- AI and data science programmes;
- interdisciplinary research;
- African language technologies;
- locally relevant datasets;
- responsible computing infrastructure;
- open and public-interest AI;
- research networks;
- postgraduate training; and
- collaboration among African universities.

Research should also investigate how AI performs within African educational, linguistic and institutional environments rather than assuming that systems evaluated elsewhere will necessarily produce equivalent outcomes locally.

Such investment is essential if AI adoption is to contribute to epistemic capability rather than merely technological consumption.

7.8 Develop Institutional Digital Sovereignty Strategies

Universities should explicitly incorporate Digital Sovereignty into institutional digital transformation strategies.

Such strategies should address at least eight areas:

1. Infrastructure sovereignty — strengthening sustainable digital and computational infrastructure;
2. Data sovereignty — establishing control over institutional and educational data;



3. Knowledge sovereignty — protecting institutional, Indigenous and community knowledge;
4. Linguistic sovereignty — strengthening African language technologies;
5. Technological agency — developing the capacity to evaluate and adapt AI systems;
6. Research sovereignty — increasing African participation in AI research and innovation;
7. Governance sovereignty — developing institutional capacity to negotiate technological relationships; and
8. Epistemic sovereignty — ensuring that African institutions retain the authority to determine what knowledge is valued, represented and produced.

Digital Sovereignty should therefore not be interpreted as technological isolation. Rather, it represents the institutional capacity to participate in global technological systems while retaining meaningful agency over educational and knowledge priorities.

7.9 Develop AI Partnerships Based on Reciprocity

African higher education institutions will continue to collaborate with international technology companies, universities, research organisations and development agencies. Such collaboration can provide important access to expertise, infrastructure and technological resources.

However, partnerships should be structured around reciprocity rather than dependency.

Institutional agreements should consider:

- ownership and use of data;
- intellectual property;
- knowledge transfer;
- local capacity development;
- transparency of algorithms and models where feasible;
- sustainability;
- African research leadership;
- community benefit; and
- exit or renegotiation provisions.

The objective should be to transform international collaboration from a model of technology transfer into a model of knowledge partnership.

7.10 Develop a Pan-African Research Agenda on Decolonial AI

The issues identified in this article cannot be adequately addressed by isolated institutional initiatives.

African universities, governments, regional organisations and research networks should therefore develop collaborative research programmes examining:

- African language AI;
- Indigenous knowledge and AI;
- AI and epistemic justice;
- AI governance in higher education;
- culturally responsive AI;
- responsible educational technology;
- AI and community development;
- digital sovereignty; and
- human-AI collaboration.



Comparative research across different African linguistic, cultural and educational environments would be particularly valuable because it would prevent the Ubuntu-Èkó Framework from being interpreted as universally applicable without empirical examination.

7.11 Operationalise the Ubuntu-Èkó Framework Through Institutional Indicators

The Ubuntu-Èkó Framework remains a conceptual contribution and requires empirical operationalisation.

Future institutional assessment instruments could therefore examine whether an AI initiative demonstrates:

Critical Consciousness

- Can users identify limitations and assumptions within AI systems?
- Can they evaluate AI-generated information critically?

Cultural Grounding

- Does the initiative recognise local languages and knowledge systems?
- Are cultural protocols incorporated?

Contextual Responsiveness

- Does the technology respond to actual institutional and community conditions?
- Has local contextual suitability been evaluated?

Communal Capability Enhancement

- Does AI strengthen collaborative capability?
- Does it produce meaningful institutional or community benefit?

Such indicators would provide a pathway for future researchers to transform the framework from a conceptual proposition into an empirically examinable model.

7.12 Position AI Within a Human and Community-Centred Educational Philosophy

Finally, higher education institutions should resist defining the success of AI primarily through efficiency, automation or productivity.

The central question should instead be:

What kind of educational, intellectual and social capability does AI help universities to develop?

This requires evaluating AI according to its contribution to:

- human dignity;
- student learning;
- critical thinking;
- ethical character;
- community wellbeing;
- cultural integrity;
- knowledge diversity;
- institutional capability; and
- human agency.



This recommendation reflects the central proposition of the article that technological capability becomes educationally meaningful only when it remains connected to human judgement, contextual knowledge and collective wellbeing.

8. CONCLUSION

Generative artificial intelligence presents African higher education with a profound opportunity, but also with a fundamental epistemological challenge. The central issue is not simply whether African universities can acquire and use increasingly powerful AI technologies. The more consequential question concerns the terms under which those technologies enter African educational systems: whose knowledge they represent, whose languages they privilege, whose assumptions they reproduce, who governs their deployment and who possesses the authority to challenge or reshape them.

This article has argued that the challenge can be understood through the concept of the colonial paradox of AI. Generative AI can expand access to knowledge while simultaneously reproducing asymmetries in technological infrastructure, data, language, representation and epistemic authority. Consequently, technological adoption without corresponding epistemic and institutional agency may reproduce forms of dependency even where access to technology has increased.

The article has responded to this challenge through an original conceptual contribution: the Ubuntu-Èkó Framework. The framework brings selected African philosophical resources into critical dialogue with decolonial theory, epistemic justice and contemporary AI ethics. Ubuntu contributes relationality and communal responsibility; Ọmọlúàbí contributes ethical character and responsible personhood; and Èkó provides an educational orientation centred on learning and transformation. These resources are organised through four pillars: Critical Consciousness, Cultural Grounding, Contextual Responsiveness and Communal Capability Enhancement.

The framework further advances the concept of Augmented Collective Wisdom (ACW). ACW challenges the assumption that the principal objective of AI should be automation or the substitution of human intelligence. Instead, it conceptualises AI as an augmentative resource that can contribute computational capability to human judgement, community knowledge, critical inquiry and collective learning. Under this formulation, AI remains a tool within a broader human and social knowledge ecology rather than becoming the ultimate epistemic authority.

The article has also argued for a transition from AI readiness to Digital Sovereignty. AI readiness remains important because institutions require infrastructure, skills and technological competence. However, readiness alone is insufficient if universities remain unable to influence the technologies, data, knowledge architectures and governance arrangements that increasingly shape their educational futures.

Digital Sovereignty therefore represents a deeper institutional objective. It involves the capacity to govern data, protect knowledge, support languages, develop expertise, evaluate technologies, negotiate with providers, participate in research and influence technological futures. It does not require technological isolation. Rather, it requires the ability to participate in global technological systems without surrendering epistemic and institutional agency.

The analysis also demonstrates that decolonisation should not be interpreted as the replacement of one universalism with another. The objective is not to construct a binary between “African” and “Western” knowledge. Such a binary would reproduce the very simplification that decolonial scholarship seeks to overcome. The more productive direction is transcultural ethical dialogue, through which different intellectual traditions can interrogate, challenge and enrich one another while remaining attentive to differences in history, culture, language and social organisation.

The theoretical proposition advanced by this article can therefore be stated as follows:



When AI is critically grounded in relational ethics, culturally situated knowledge, contextual responsiveness and communal capability, higher education can move from passive technological adoption toward Augmented Collective Wisdom and greater Digital Sovereignty.

This proposition remains theoretical rather than empirically validated. The Ubuntu-Èkó Framework requires testing across different African universities, languages, disciplines and institutional environments. Future empirical research should therefore examine whether its four pillars can be operationalised, measured and adapted across diverse contexts.

The ultimate argument of this article is consequently neither a rejection of artificial intelligence nor an uncritical celebration of technological innovation. It is a call for epistemically conscious participation.

African higher education should not merely ask whether it is ready for AI.

It should ask whether it possesses sufficient knowledge, cultural confidence, institutional capacity, technological capability and governance authority to shape the role that AI will play in its educational future.

That is the movement from AI readiness to Digital Sovereignty.

And it is within this movement that the deeper promise of decolonised, human-centred and collectively intelligent higher education can emerge.

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Final Editorial Quality Note

This Gold Submission version treats the Ubuntu-Èkó Framework as an original conceptual contribution of the authors rather than as a pre-existing published framework. The article is presented as a critical-interpretive/documentary conceptual inquiry, not as an original empirical study. Unsupported participant counts, percentages, institutional quotations and claims of empirical validation have been excluded from the article body. The theoretical proposition, Augmented Collective Wisdom and Digital Sovereignty are explicitly presented as conceptual contributions requiring future empirical testing.