Chapter 1
Generative Artificial Intelligence Policy for Academic Literacy in South African Higher Education

Helena Kruger-Roux
University of Pretoria, South Africa

Retha Alberts
University of Pretoria, South Africa

ABSTRACT

As artificial intelligence (AI) models become widespread, South African universities need policies that balance access and uphold standards. Literature shows generative AI offers opportunities like personalised support, but risks like plagiarism require addressing. Current university guidance focuses narrowly on misconduct, not innovation. Principles proposed for policies include recognising AI's value if governed well; developing inclusive policies through participation; regular updating as AI advances rapidly; effectively communicating policies; anticipating AI's impact across teaching, learning, research, and assessment; and partnering between universities and AI companies. Case studies show involving stakeholders is vital. Comprehensive policies outlining ethical use across contexts are lacking. Guidance tends to emphasise constraints, not possibilities. However, responsible leveraging can expand access without compromising literacy development. This needs evidence-based governance upholding enduring educational values amid emerging tools.

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INTRODUCTION

As innovative generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) models like ChatGPT become widely available, South African higher education (HE) institutions face complex governance decisions across teaching, assessment, learning and research. While GenAI offers potential benefits such as enhanced personalized learning support and increased research productivity, overreliance on machine-generated content without prudent policies can undermine the development of foundational competencies like academic literacy and threaten academic integrity. Recent research by Duah and McGivern (2024) has highlighted the differing perspectives of students and educators:

Students showed a more open engagement with GenAI, considering it a tool for overcoming obstacles rather than a means to plagiarize. Educators were generally more cautious and less optimistic about the academic role of GenAI. Lack of clear institutional policies surrounding such tools also contributed to ethical ambiguities.

To integrate GenAI into the fabric of HE effectively, inclusive multi-stakeholder decision-making frameworks are needed to engage staff, students, and administrators in steering our common digital futures transparently and responsibly. Co-designing context-appropriate policies requires balancing the opportunities for pedagogical innovation and research efficiency with the imperative to avoid uncritical adoption of technological solutionism while addressing the varying perspectives and concerns of different stakeholders.

By harmonizing emerging GenAI tools with enduring educational values, HE institutions can embed integrity safeguards throughout instructional systems to expand access and personalisation without diminishing the rigorous analytical and communication skills at the heart of higher learning. If evidence-based governance judiciously scaffolds human-AI complementarity across the diverse functions of HE, South Africa's universities can progressively transform teaching, assessment, learning and research by leveraging AI's capacity to serve the aspirations of all stakeholders. This chapter explores the policy considerations necessary to unlock the potential of GenAI to enhance the core missions of HE institutions whilst mitigating risks to academic literacy development and navigating the ethical ambiguities that arise from the lack of clear institutional guidelines.

Early Responses to GenAI by HE

Since its launch in late 2022, ChatGPT has been heralded as a revolutionary force across many fields. However, nowhere has its impact been more evident and controversial than in education. A highly cited opinion paper by 43 scholars from