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Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education

ISSN: 0260-2938 (Print) 1469-297X (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/caeh20

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To cite this article: Magezi Samuel Khoza, Samuel Fosso Wamba & Serge Nyawa (05 Aug 2026): Mapping the landscape of AI governance in higher education, Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, DOI: 10.1080/02602938.2026.2712521

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2026.2712521

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Published online: 05 Aug 2026.

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ASSESSMENT & EVALUATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION
https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2026.2712521

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Mapping the landscape of AI governance in higher education

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ABSTRACT

The rapid adoption of Artificial Intelligence (AI), particularly Generative AI (GenAI), has accelerated the need for robust governance in higher education. This study provides a comparative analysis of AI governance frameworks adopted by universities worldwide. A qualitative document analysis was conducted on 43 publicly accessible AI governance documents collected from 35 universities through official institutional websites. Using thematic analysis, the study examined governance principles, scope, institutional structures, implementation strategies, and future-oriented governance practices. The findings reveal increasing convergence around core ethical principles, particularly fairness, transparency, and accountability, alongside a shift from reactive regulation to proactive governance that supports responsible AI adoption. Universities are increasingly establishing formal oversight structures, integrating AI governance into existing institutional processes, and adopting adaptable 'living' policies to respond to technological change. Despite variations in implementation, the findings highlight growing international alignment and underscore the need for collaborative, flexible, and context-sensitive AI governance frameworks that promote innovation while safeguarding ethical and institutional values.

KEYWORDS

AI governance; higher education; academic integrity; policy framework

Introduction

The rapid evolution of Artificial Intelligence (AI), particularly Generative AI (GenAI), has brought a pivotal moment for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) globally, introducing transformative opportunities alongside complex challenges (Alfiras, Emran, and Mohamed 2026; Nguyen 2026; Sharif, Atif, and Nagra 2025; Wang, Wang, and Su 2024). AI's capabilities, from natural language generation to advanced data analysis, offer significant potential to enhance learning and operational efficiency (Molina-Carmona and García-Peñalvo 2025). However, its widespread adoption necessitates a proactive and comprehensive approach to governance to address

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emergent ethical, legal, and practical concerns (Wu, Zhang, and Carroll 2024). The increasing demand from civil society, labour unions, and other stakeholders for more urgent and effective governance of AI underscores the necessity for robust institutional frameworks (Ghimire and Edwards 2024).

The academic landscape is rapidly shifting as HEIs grapple with these new technologies (Dung et al. 2026; Şen, Vaněček, and Adnan 2026). The initial institutional responses have been ad hoc and inconsistent, often focusing on issues such as academic integrity and plagiarism in a reactive manner. This has highlighted a significant gap in understanding and implementing holistic AI governance that balances innovation with essential safeguards. While some universities have begun to formulate clear policies and guidelines, a standardised framework remains absent. This makes it challenging for institutions to ensure consistency in their approach to issues such as data privacy, algorithmic bias, and equitable access to technology. This study aims to address this critical need by mapping the global landscape of AI governance in higher education. This research will conduct a systematic analysis and comparison of public documents, including policies, guidelines, and strategic frameworks, to identify common themes, unique approaches, and varying levels of comprehensiveness in AI governance. The analysis will focus on key areas, including core principles, governance structures, practical implementation strategies, and the integration of cultural considerations.

This research highlights best practices and identifies areas for improvement by providing a detailed, side-by-side comparison of different governance models. By doing so, it contributes to a more holistic understanding of how HEIs can effectively translate ethical principles into tangible and effective governance practices. Therefore, this study provides valuable insights for universities to develop robust governance frameworks that are both internationally aligned and locally relevant.

Background

AI, particularly GenAI, is rapidly transforming higher education by reshaping teaching, learning, research, and institutional operations (Luo 2024). AI technologies offer significant opportunities to enhance learning experiences, improve operational efficiency, personalise education, and support research innovation (Molina-Carmona and García-Peñalvo 2025; Wu, Zhang, and Carroll 2024). At the same time, their widespread adoption raises complex ethical, legal, and pedagogical concerns relating to academic integrity, data privacy, algorithmic bias, transparency, intellectual property, and equitable access (Oh and Sanfilippo 2024; Pechenkina 2023). These opportunities and risks have prompted universities worldwide to develop policies and governance frameworks that encourage responsible AI adoption while safeguarding institutional values (An, Yu, and James 2025; Dabis and Csáki 2024).

The rapid diffusion of GenAI tools such as ChatGPT has accelerated this need. Although these technologies can enhance critical thinking, research, and personalised learning, their misuse threatens traditional assessment practices, originality, and learner motivation (Adarkwah 2025; Şen, Vaněček, and Adnan 2026; Wang, Wang, and Su 2024). Furthermore, AI systems may inherit and amplify societal biases embedded in their training data, creating new forms of discrimination and inequality within educational environments (Acosta-Enriquez et al. 2024). Consequently, universities increasingly

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recognise that effective AI integration requires governance frameworks that balance innovation with ethical responsibility and institutional accountability. Rather than relying solely on restrictive policies, emerging approaches advocate flexible, context-sensitive governance capable of adapting to rapidly evolving technologies (Cacho 2024).

AI governance in higher education

AI governance has evolved beyond regulating technology to encompass the institutional structures, policies, and practices that ensure AI systems are used responsibly, ethically, and transparently. Birkstedt et al. (2023) describe AI governance as the combination of rules, processes, and organisational mechanisms that align AI deployment with institutional objectives, legal requirements, and ethical principles. Within higher education, governance therefore extends beyond compliance to include leadership, stakeholder engagement, risk management, academic integrity, and continuous policy review (Fundira et al. 2024; Misra, Nirmal, and Bhat 2026).

Recent studies demonstrate that universities are responding rapidly to AI adoption through institutional policies, ethical guidelines, strategic frameworks, and governance committees (McDonald et al. 2025; Nguyen 2026). These responses increasingly promote responsible AI use rather than prohibiting it outright, recognising AI as an integral component of future teaching and research. Nevertheless, governance approaches remain fragmented across institutions, varying considerably in their scope, level of detail, stakeholder coverage, and implementation mechanisms (Ghimire and Edwards 2024; Kim and Wu 2024). While some universities provide comprehensive governance frameworks covering ethical, operational, and pedagogical dimensions, others focus narrowly on academic misconduct or assessment integrity. This variation illustrates the absence of a common institutional approach capable of balancing innovation, accountability, and educational quality across higher education.

Core governance challenges

Despite growing institutional attention, several governance challenges remain central to the responsible adoption of AI within universities. Academic integrity has emerged as one of the most significant concerns. Rather than depending exclusively on AI detection software, recent scholarship advocates redesigning assessment to promote higher-order thinking and authentic learning experiences that are less susceptible to AI-assisted completion (Barus et al. 2025). Effective governance also requires transparent institutional policies, consistent communication regarding acceptable AI use, and assessment practices that support inclusion and educational integrity rather than punitive enforcement (Acosta-Enriquez et al. 2024; Dawson et al. 2024; Gonsalves 2025; Nieminen and Eaton 2024).

Data privacy and security constitute a second major governance challenge. The increasing use of AI applications requires universities to process large volumes of sensitive student and institutional data, creating significant ethical, legal, and cybersecurity risks (Chen, Tallant, and Selig 2025; Miltiadis et al. 2024). Beyond technical compliance, scholars argue that AI governance should incorporate principles of data justice by addressing issues of equity, transparency, and the distribution of benefits arising from

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AI technologies (Pechenkina 2023). Without appropriate safeguards, AI adoption risks reinforcing existing educational inequalities and algorithmic biases.

Legal and intellectual property issues present a further governance challenge. The emergence of AI-generated content has complicated traditional understandings of authorship, copyright, and ownership within teaching and research (Da Mota 2024). Consequently, collaborative policy development involving universities, regulators, academics, and students has been recommended to establish governance frameworks that protect intellectual property while supporting responsible innovation (Swist, Shum, and Gulson 2024). Collectively, these challenges demonstrate that effective AI governance extends beyond technological regulation to encompass ethical leadership, institutional culture, stakeholder participation, and long-term adaptability.

Research gap and study objective

Although the literature on AI governance in higher education has expanded rapidly, important gaps remain. Existing research has predominantly examined individual institutions, national contexts, or specific governance issues such as academic integrity, assessment, or ethical AI use (Kim and Wu 2024; Oh and Sanfilippo 2024). Comparative analyses across universities remain limited, making it difficult to identify common governance principles, institutional differences, and emerging international best practices. Furthermore, many studies focus primarily on policy development while giving comparatively less attention to governance structures, implementation mechanisms, stakeholder engagement, and long-term institutional adaptability.

Addressing these limitations, this study conducts a comparative analysis of AI governance frameworks adopted by universities worldwide. Drawing on publicly available institutional policies, guidelines, frameworks, and strategic documents, the study examines foundational governance principles, governance structures, implementation strategies, and future-oriented governance practices. By identifying areas of convergence and divergence across institutions, the research contributes to a broader understanding of how higher education institutions are translating responsible AI principles into practical governance mechanisms. The findings provide evidence-based insights that can inform universities seeking to strengthen their own AI governance frameworks while contributing to ongoing international discussions on responsible AI in higher education.

Methods

A qualitative comparative study design was adopted, employing a multi-step data collection process (Creswell and Creswell 2023; Leavy 2020) to gather information from diverse and credible sources. This rigorous approach ensured the dataset was both robust and contextually relevant. The intention is to identify and evaluate existing frameworks, guidelines, and policies, and to compare how they are structured, articulated, and implemented in different institutional and regional contexts. This approach is designed to move beyond the descriptive listing of governance documents and instead explore their scope, mechanisms, and practical integration into the higher education ecosystem.

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Table 1. Criteria for document selection in AI governance.

Criteria type	Description
Inclusion criteria	Documents were required to contain substantive, complete content on AI governance, including policies, frameworks, or guidelines. Materials using alternative terms such as *Responsible AI* or *AI Ethics* were included if they addressed governance principles, procedures, or implementation practices. Only documents published or officially available in English were included to ensure consistency in interpretation and comparative thematic analysis across institutions.
Exclusion criteria	Documents were excluded if they were blank, illegible, incomplete, or too brief (e.g. less than a paragraph) to enable meaningful analysis. Materials lacking substantive governance-related content or containing only fragmented references to AI without governance guidance, or available only in languages other than English were also omitted.

Source: Developed by the researchers.

Table 2. Summary of document screening and analytical framework.

Stage/category	Description
Initial search	87 documents identified from university websites and Google searches
Final dataset	43 documents retained after screening
Exclusion reasons	Duplicates (7); announcements/news (14); insufficient governance content (13); incomplete/superseded documents (4); non-English documents (6)
Analytical approach	Thematic analysis (Byrne 2021)
Analytical framework	Four guiding questions: *Why, What, How, and Who* (Roberts, Dowell, and Nie 2019)
Comparative outputs	Comparison matrices, heatmaps, network diagrams, continuum models and thematic frameworks

Source: Developed by the researchers.

Data collection and document selection

The study used the QS World University Rankings 2025 list, available at https://www.qschina.cn/en/university-rankings/world-university-rankings/2025, as the sampling frame to select universities. Each institution's official website was examined using targeted search terms related to AI governance, including *AI guidelines*, *AI policies*, *AI regulations*, *AI governance frameworks, responsible AI, AI ethics, and related terms*. To minimise omissions, supplementary searches were conducted *via* Google to capture documents not directly accessible from university sites. The screening process involved applying explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria (Table 1).

Following the initial search, each document underwent a two-stage screening process. First, titles, document types, and summaries were reviewed to determine their relevance to institutional AI governance. Second, full-text screening was conducted against the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Where multiple versions of the same policy were retrieved from different sources, only the most recent official version published by the university was retained.

Data extraction and categorisation

The initial search identified 87 potentially relevant AI governance documents from university websites and supplementary Google searches. After applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 43 documents were retained for analysis (Table 2).

The final dataset included institutional policies, guidelines, frameworks, handbooks, reports, and related governance publications, providing a broad basis for examining

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AI governance across higher education institutions. The retained documents were analysed using thematic analysis following Byrne (2021). To ensure consistency across institutions, data extraction was guided by the framework proposed by Roberts, Dowell, and Nie (2019), structured around four questions: why (governance rationale and principles), what (scope and applicability), how (governance structures and implementation mechanisms), and who (stakeholders and governance responsibilities).

The analysis examined five interrelated dimensions. First, it explored the foundational principles underpinning AI governance, including ethical values, institutional missions, and alignment with international standards. Second, it assessed the scope and applicability of governance frameworks by examining AI applications covered, stakeholder groups, and the specificity of policy guidance. Third, it investigated governance structures and mechanisms, including leadership arrangements, oversight committees, policy development processes, risk management, and compliance mechanisms. Fourth, it evaluated practical implementation, focusing on guidance for generative AI, data governance, intellectual property, training initiatives, and AI literacy resources. Finally, the study examined culture and future-proofing, including responsible innovation, policy review cycles, institutional adaptability, and external stakeholder engagement.

Extracted data were subsequently organised by institution, region, and country to facilitate cross-case comparison. Comparison matrices and visual analytical tools enabled the identification of similarities, differences, and emerging patterns in governance priorities, implementation strategies, and institutional maturity across universities.

Methodological limitations

This study analysed only publicly available English-language AI governance documents obtained from official university websites and supplementary online searches. Consequently, the findings primarily reflect institutions that have reached sufficient governance maturity to publish formal AI policies, frameworks, or guidelines. Universities with internal or unpublished governance documents were not represented, potentially overemphasising more established AI governance practices while underrepresenting institutions still developing their governance approaches. Restricting the analysis to English-language documents ensured consistency in interpretation and comparative thematic analysis but excluded governance frameworks published solely in other languages, particularly from regions where institutional policies are developed in national languages. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted as representing the landscape of publicly accessible English-language AI governance rather than the complete global picture. Nevertheless, the dataset encompasses a diverse range of leading universities across multiple regions, providing valuable insights into emerging governance trends. Future research should incorporate multilingual analyses and unpublished institutional documents to develop a more comprehensive understanding of AI governance maturity in higher education.

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Results

This section presents the findings of a comprehensive, comparative analysis of AI governance frameworks from 35 universities worldwide. The data were systematically extracted and organised according to a predetermined set of themes and categories established in the methodology. These categories include core principles, governance structures, risk assessment and compliance, and practical implementation strategies. The results, presented both quantitatively and qualitatively, provide a detailed overview of institutional approaches, highlighting the common trends and unique strategies adopted by universities globally to govern the use of AI in higher education.

Foundational principles

Core ethical values

A universal consensus on core ethical values is evident across universities' AI governance frameworks worldwide. Institutions consistently emphasise principles such as Fairness, Transparency, Ethical Use, Data Security, Accountability, and Explainability. The University of Oxford, MIT, and Tsinghua University all explicitly integrate these principles, while the University of Melbourne sets clear expectations for performance and conduct (Dizikes 2023; Gillian, Han, and Grima 2025; Liang 2026; Rodgers 2024). Princeton University and Duke University prioritise academic integrity, especially concerning generative AI (Sheh and Stanley 2026). The University of Adelaide's guidelines for Higher Degree by Research (HDR) students directly address this by stressing that students remain responsible for any errors, omissions, bias, or plagiarism introduced by their use of an AI tool (University of Adelaide 2025b). More comprehensive frameworks, such as those at New York Institute of Technology (NYIT) and UCLA, include values such as reliability, human oversight, privacy/security, and shared benefit (Avetisyan 2025). Even general IT governance documents from the University of Melbourne and the National University of Ireland Galway (NUI Galway) demonstrate an implicit commitment to accountability and transparency through their focus on community feedback and defined roles. Figure 1 presents the heatmap of core ethical values across universities.

Figure 1 illustrates areas of convergence and divergence in institutional approaches to AI governance. It shows strong alignment among leading institutions such as Oxford, MIT, and Tsinghua, which consistently emphasise fairness, transparency, accountability, and data security (Gillian, Han, and Grima 2025; Porsdam Mann et al. 2024). Other universities, like Princeton and Duke, highlight academic integrity in relation to generative AI, while the University of Adelaide addresses specific HDR student responsibilities (Sheh and Stanley 2026; University of Adelaide 2025a). Meanwhile, NYIT and UCLA broaden the spectrum by including principles such as reliability, human oversight, and shared benefit. The University of Melbourne and NUI Galway implicitly stress accountability and transparency through community engagement (Liang 2026). This visual underscores the global consensus on certain values while revealing regional or institutional nuances in emphasis.

The expanded heatmap illustrates the extent to which universities worldwide have integrated core ethical values into their AI governance frameworks. Across 18 institutions, values such as fairness, transparency, accountability, and data privacy emerge as consistent

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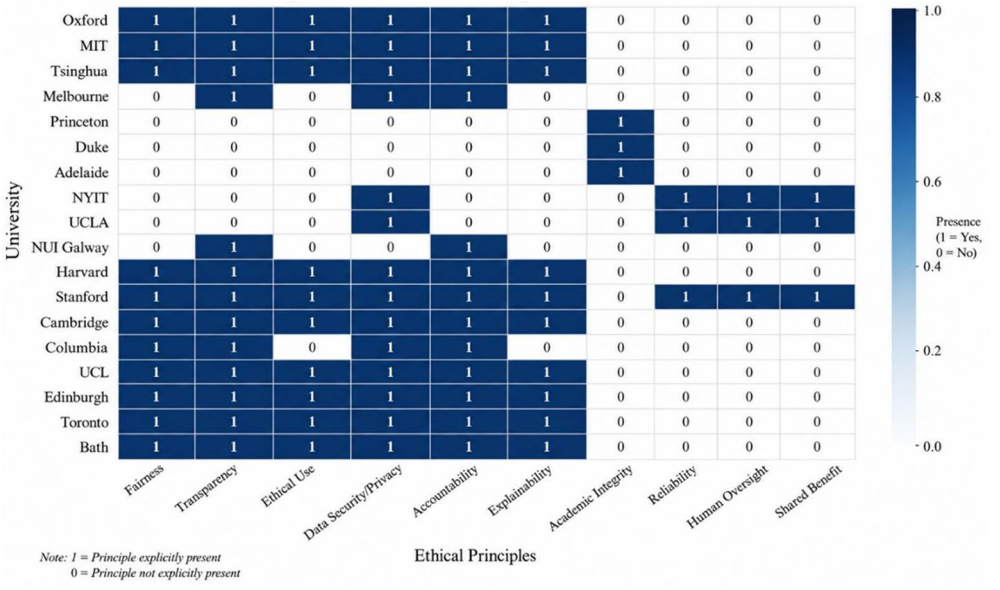


Figure 1. Heatmap of core ethical values across universities.

priorities, signalling a global consensus. Leading universities, including Oxford, MIT, Stanford, Cambridge, and Harvard, demonstrate explicit commitments across multiple categories, reinforcing alignment with broader international standards (Cambridge News and Events 2023; Dizikes 2023; Porsdam Mann et al. 2024). Meanwhile, variation is evident in areas such as academic integrity, reliability, and human oversight, which are emphasised more strongly at institutions such as the University of Adelaide, Princeton, and UCLA (Avetisyan 2025; University of Adelaide 2025b). The inclusion of universities such as Toronto, Edinburgh, UCL, and Bath further highlights regional nuances, particularly the emphasis on iterative governance and responsible innovation (AI Task Force 2025; Luger, Surana, and Urquhart 2024; UCL Guidelines 2025). Collectively, the heatmap reveals a strong convergence on foundational values, while also exposing important differences in emphasis, suggesting that while global principles are shared, institutional culture and context shape how these values are operationalised.

Alignment with external standards

Universities are not developing their frameworks in isolation. They are actively aligning with national and international regulations. Cambridge University and The Alan Turing Institute explicitly reference the EU AI Act and the OECD AI Recommendation. Columbia University aligns with the NIST AI Risk Management Framework, and University College London (UCL) is guided by ICO data protection regulations (Sheh and Stanley 2026; UCL Guidelines 2025). The University of Adelaide's guidelines reinforce this by requiring students to align with the University's Academic Integrity Policy and Responsible Conduct of Research Policy (UCL Guidelines 2025; University of Adelaide 2025b). This practice is also reflected in the analysis of the Canadian AI Governance Framework, which serves as a model for policy. Collaborative alliances, such as those among the University of Edinburgh, Stanford University, and Imperial College London, further demonstrate a commitment

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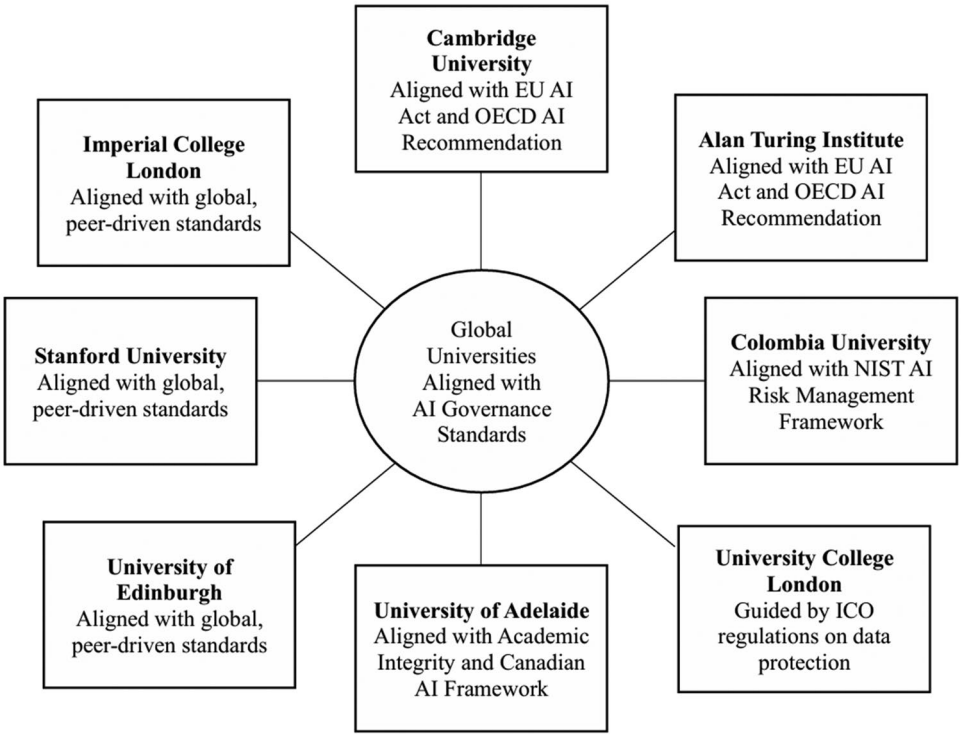


Figure 2. University alignment with external AI governance standards by region.

to aligning with global, peer-driven standards (Kahana 2026). This ensures that institutional policies remain consistent with broader regulatory landscapes.

The network diagram (Figure 2) highlights the alignment between universities and external AI governance standards, coloured by region for clarity. European institutions such as Cambridge, UCL, and the Alan Turing Institute show strong ties to the EU AI Act and OECD AI Principles, reflecting a shared regional anchor (Mollett 2024; Zidarescu 2025). North American universities, including Columbia and Stanford, align with standards such as the NIST Risk Management Framework and collaborate, while Canada's framework provides a model for policy development (Kahana 2026; Sheh and Stanley 2026). The University of Adelaide demonstrates compliance with institutional and national integrity policies, reflecting Australia's context (Australian Government 2024; University of Adelaide 2025b). By mapping these connections, the visual reveals how universities balance global regulatory frameworks with local mandates, and it illustrates regional clusters of governance alignment and collaboration.

Scope and applicability

Covered AI applications

The scope of AI applications addressed by university policies is rapidly expanding beyond aspirational principles to specific, practical uses. The most prominent example is the governance of GenAI, a focus at Stanford, the University of Melbourne, and the National University of Singapore (NUS) (Francis and Smith 2023; Liang 2026).

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The University of Edinburgh has formed an alliance specifically to investigate AI-generated academic misconduct (Luger, Surana, and Urquhart 2024). The University of Adelaide's guidelines provide specific, practical rules for HDR students, covering the use of GenAI for written theses, image generation, and external publications (University of Adelaide 2025a). Beyond GenAI, frameworks address AI applications in health and clinical initiatives (UCLA Health), administrative functions, and broader societal impacts, as discussed in academic publications from Oxford and Cambridge (Cambridge News and Events 2023; Rodgers 2024). However, some general IT governance case studies, such as those from the University of California and NUI Galway, reveal a gap: a weakly developed focus on AI, which is often only indirectly addressed.

Target stakeholders

A multi-stakeholder approach is a critical component of AI governance. While many frameworks, including those at Stanford and Princeton, focus on providing guidance to students and instructors, others target a much wider audience (Kahana 2026). MIT's framework is for the entire community, from students to staff, while UCLA Health includes patients and providers (Dizikes 2023). The University of Adelaide's guidelines are specifically tailored to Higher Degree by Research (HDR) students; however, they also emphasise the role of supervisors, with whom students must discuss the use of AI tools prior to use (Australian Government 2024). Oxford University's resources are aimed at academics, government, and industry, and UCL extends its guidance to charities and non-profits (Porsdam Mann et al. 2024; UCL Guidelines 2025). The general IT governance case studies from the University of Melbourne, the University of California, and NUI Galway consistently emphasise a fully participatory approach, demonstrating a commitment to involving staff, faculty, students, and external partners in the governance process.

Level of detail

The level of detail in governance frameworks varies significantly, reflecting a tension between providing high-level, flexible guidance and specific, prescriptive rules. Some documents, such as Princeton's, are general statements of principles, while others, such as Oxford's 1,096-page Handbook of AI Governance, are exhaustive academic resources. Stanford and Tsinghua University provide very specific, actionable guidance for creating course policies, including concrete syllabus options (CDO Magazine 2025). The University of Adelaide's guidelines strike a practical balance, providing clear rules on permitted and prohibited uses (e.g. editing vs. generating text) while still being subject to change. In contrast, MIT's framework is built around 10 strategic questions for executives, offering a high-level approach to implementation. This range of detail allows institutions to choose an approach that best fits their culture, with some, such as the University of Oxford, explicitly seeking a balance to avoid becoming too rigid.

Figure 3 illustrates how universities vary in the level of detail within their AI governance frameworks, ranging from broad principles to highly prescriptive guidelines. At one end, Princeton adopts a general-principles-based approach, offering high-level statements rather than detailed directives. MIT provides strategic yet

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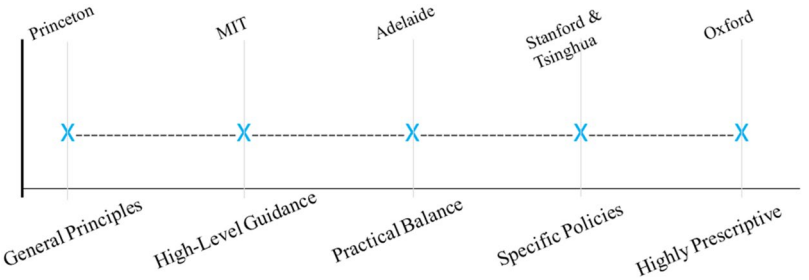


Figure 3. Continuum of detail in AI governance frameworks.

non-prescriptive guidance, structured around 10 key questions for institutional leaders. The University of Adelaide represents a balanced middle ground, providing practical yet flexible rules that adapt to evolving AI use (AAIN 2023). Moving further, Stanford and Tsinghua supply specific, actionable policies for course-level application (Gillian, Han, and Grima 2025; Kahana 2026). At the prescriptive extreme, Oxford stands out with its comprehensive 1,096-page handbook. This spectrum highlights institutional choices in balancing flexibility, adaptability, and regulatory precision in AI governance (Porsdam Mann et al. 2024).

Governance structure and mechanisms

Oversight bodies

Universities are increasingly establishing dedicated, centralised bodies to oversee AI governance. The University of California, Berkeley, has an AI Governance Working Group, while MIT has an AI Policy Committee. UCLA Health has created an AI Council (HAIC), and New York Tech has an AI Leadership Task Force. This trend is consistent with general IT governance, where committees such as the University of California's IT Strategy Committee and NUI Galway's Quality Enhancement Committee on Information Technology serve as formal points of authority, moving institutions away from fragmented, departmental efforts.

Roles and responsibilities

Clear roles and responsibilities are a hallmark of effective AI governance. Stanford's framework outlines the accountability of faculty and researchers, while ETH Zurich's guidelines emphasise that users are responsible for the correctness of the AI-generated content they use. In the academic context, instructors are typically responsible for defining AI tool use in their courses. The University of Adelaide's guidelines are explicit: the HDR student is the sole author of their thesis and is ultimately responsible for all content (University of Adelaide 2025a). Supervisors are designated as key points of discussion regarding AI use. This is consistent with general IT governance models, such as the University of Melbourne's, which delineates roles between a central IT division and individual faculties, ensuring a clear distribution of the roles and responsibilities (Liang 2026).

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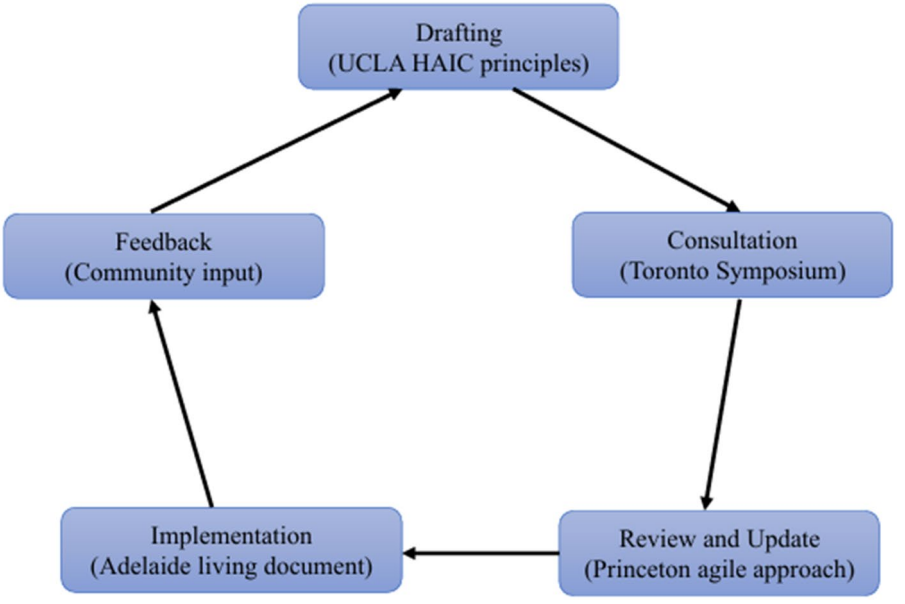


Figure 4. Iterative cycle of AI policy development in universities.

Policy development process

Policy development is characterised by collaboration and an iterative, responsive approach. The University of Toronto's process began with a symposium and listening tour (AI Task Force 2025), while UCLA's HAIC adopted principles from a working group before developing its own policies. Princeton explicitly states that its policies are evolving alongside AI technology, highlighting an agile approach (Sheh and Stanley 2026). The University of Adelaide's guidelines are a living document that is subject to change over time, reflecting the rapid evolution of AI technology (University of Adelaide 2025b). Similarly, general IT governance case studies emphasise the importance of community feedback, discussion, and continuous efforts to ensure policies remain effective and relevant.

The iterative cycle diagram illustrates the dynamic and evolving nature of AI policy development within universities (Figure 4). It highlights that effective governance is not achieved through a one-off policy but rather through a continuous, collaborative process. The cycle begins with consultation, as demonstrated by the University of Toronto's symposium and listening tours, where diverse stakeholders contribute perspectives (AI Task Force 2025). This is followed by drafting, such as UCLA HAIC's adoption of working group principles, which shape initial policy direction. Feedback is then sought through community engagement to ensure inclusivity and contextual relevance. The implementation phase, seen in the University of Adelaide's living document approach, ensures that policies are applied in practice while remaining adaptable. Finally, as explicitly stated by Princeton, reviews and updates reflect agile policy adjustments in response to technological change. Together, this cycle underscores universities' commitment to responsive, participatory, and forward-looking AI governance.

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Risk assessment procedures

Universities are keenly focused on mitigating AI-related risks. Stanford's guidelines address risks such as hallucinations, bias, and copyright issues (Kahana 2026). MIT's framework is designed to counter AI attack vectors such as model theft and privacy attacks. UCLA's HAIC is developing a comprehensive risk and impact assessment strategy (Dizikes 2023). The University of Adelaide's guidelines provide clear risk warnings, such as the potential for AI tools to introduce errors, omissions, bias, or plagiarism, and the risk of uploading sensitive information or unprotected intellectual property, which could breach ethical or legal obligations and jeopardise future commercialisation (University of Adelaide 2025b).

Compliance and enforcement

Compliance is becoming mandatory, with enforcement handled through existing academic integrity channels. Princeton and Duke both state that the misuse of generative AI constitutes academic dishonesty. Tsinghua University's guidelines include specific consequences for non-disclosure, such as the re-evaluation of assignments (CDO Magazine 2025). The University of Adelaide requires students to maintain their own records of AI use, which may be requested by supervisors or examiners, and to include a statement of AI use in the acknowledgments page of their thesis, making their use transparent and auditable. This shows that, while guidelines are often advisory, they are backed by the potential for disciplinary action, as in the NUI Galway case study, which noted strict monitoring of policy implementation.

Practical implementation and resources

Guidance for generative AI

Institutions are providing practical resources and guidance. Stanford offers an AI Playground for safe experimentation, while Duke encourages faculty to define their own policies in their syllabi and provides concrete examples. The University of Adelaide provides clear examples of acceptable and unacceptable uses, such as using AI for editorial purposes (clarity, expression, spelling), but not for generating thesis text. It also provides guidance for using AI for image generation, requiring clear acknowledgment in the diagram legend or footnote.

Data governance and privacy

Data governance and privacy are consistent concerns. Stanford advises students to avoid using AI tools with sensitive data, and New York Tech's principles include protecting both user and institutional data (Kahana 2026). The University of Adelaide's guidelines explicitly prohibit HDR students from uploading sensitive or confidential information to AI tools, citing potential ethical or legal breaches. Guidelines from Cambridge University and the University of Bern also explicitly require compliance with data protection regulations such as GDPR (Mollett 2024).

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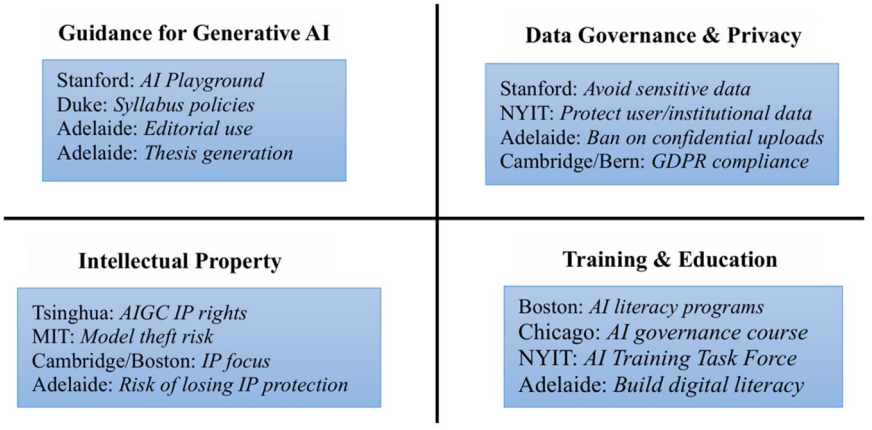


Figure 5. Quadrant dashboard – practical implementation and resources in AI governance.

Intellectual property considerations

Universities are beginning to address the complex Intellectual Property (IP) issues posed by generative AI. Tsinghua University has informed its community about regulations on the IP rights of works generated by AIGC (Gillian, Han, and Grima 2025). The MIT framework also addresses the risk of model theft, while Cambridge University and Boston University mention IP as a key consideration (Cambridge News and Events 2023; Seldon 2024). The University of Adelaide adds a specific warning about the risk of uploading unprotected intellectual property to AI tools, stating it could reduce your ability to protect and/or commercialise your research in the future (University of Adelaide 2025b).

Training and education programs

Training and education are crucial for responsible AI governance. Boston University recommends developing AI literacy for both faculty and students (Seldon 2024). The University of Chicago offers a course on AI governance, and New York Tech has a dedicated AI Education and Training Task Force, demonstrating a commitment to continuous learning and knowledge transfer. The University of Adelaide's guidelines, by encouraging students to use and experiment with AI tools appropriately, implicitly promote the development of these digital literacy skills.

Figure 5 illustrates how universities are translating AI governance principles into practical implementation and resources. In the top-left quadrant, guidance for generative AI is shown through examples such as Stanford's AI Playground for safe experimentation, Duke's syllabus-level policy guidance, and Adelaide's clear rules distinguishing acceptable editorial use from prohibited thesis text generation. The top-right quadrant highlights data governance and privacy measures, including prohibitions on uploading sensitive data (Adelaide), GDPR compliance (Cambridge and Bern), and principles to protect user and institutional data (NYIT) (University of Adelaide 2025a). The bottom-left quadrant addresses intellectual property concerns, where Tsinghua and MIT caution against risks such as model theft, while Adelaide emphasises potential loss of protection from unprotected uploads (CDO Magazine 2025).

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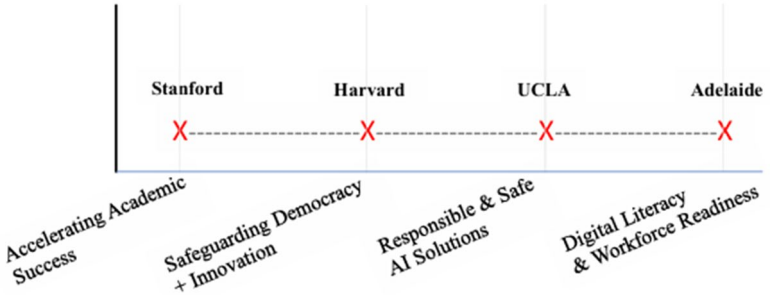


Figure 6. Spectrum of responsible innovation in AI governance.

Finally, the bottom-right quadrant shows training and education programs, with Boston, Chicago, NYIT, and Adelaide promoting AI literacy and structured learning initiatives. Collectively, the dashboard captures diverse institutional strategies for practical AI governance.

Culture and future-proofing

Promotion of responsible innovation

AI governance is viewed as a means to foster responsible innovation, not stifle it. Stanford University actively encourages the use of GenAI to accelerate academic success. Harvard's framework focuses on safeguarding democracy while encouraging innovation, and UCLA promotes the use of innovative, responsible and safe AI solutions. The University of Adelaide's preamble reflects this cultural shift by noting that digital literacy skills, including those required to use AI effectively, are likely to be increasingly important in the workforce.

The spectrum visual illustrates how universities conceptualise AI governance as a catalyst for responsible innovation rather than a restrictive force (Figure 6). At one end, Stanford actively promotes the use of generative AI to accelerate academic success, framing AI as an enabler of student achievement. Harvard balances innovation with the safeguarding of democratic values, reflecting its emphasis on ethical and civic responsibility. UCLA highlights the importance of responsible and safe adoption, underscoring the dual goals of innovation and protection. The University of Adelaide situates AI governance within a workforce readiness agenda, linking digital literacy to future employability (University of Adelaide 2025a). Collectively, the spectrum demonstrates how institutions anchor governance in cultural narratives that encourage innovation while aligning with broader societal expectations.

Adaptability and review cycle

The dynamic nature of AI technology necessitates flexible, adaptable frameworks. Princeton's guidelines are designed to be regularly reviewed and updated, and the University of Oxford regards its framework as a living document (Rodgers 2024). The University of Adelaide's guidelines are explicitly subject to change from time to time, acknowledging the rapidly evolving landscape of generative AI. This proactive stance, mirrored by institutions such as the University of Bath, ensures that

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policies can keep pace with technological advancements, as highlighted by NUI Galway's emphasis on an iterative policy review process.

Princeton's framework is explicitly designed for regular review, while Oxford positions its framework as a living document, adaptable to new developments (Porsdam Mann et al. 2024; Rodgers 2024). The University of Adelaide adopts a similarly flexible stance, stating that its guidelines are subject to periodic change (University of Adelaide 2025b). The University of Bath and NUI Galway further reinforce this principle, advocating proactive updates and iterative review cycles to keep pace with rapidly evolving technologies. The circular format, with continuous arrows, reflects this dynamic approach, conveying that governance policies are never finalised but evolve in tandem with technological advances. This visual underscores adaptability as a defining feature of sustainable AI governance in higher education.

Discussion

The comprehensive analysis of AI governance frameworks across various universities reveals a set of shared principles and a common direction, along with notable differences in their application and level of detail. The findings largely support and expand upon existing literature on AI governance, particularly in the academic sphere, as detailed in the introduction and background sections.

Comparative analysis of AI governance framework in universities globally

The primary objective of this study was to conduct a comparative analysis of AI governance frameworks adopted by universities worldwide. The findings reveal a clear convergence towards formal AI governance, particularly for generative AI, with institutions increasingly adopting structured policies, governance mechanisms, and implementation strategies (Sharif, Atif, and Nagra 2025).

Across the analysed frameworks, universities consistently emphasise fairness, transparency, and accountability as the core ethical principles underpinning AI governance. These principles are increasingly operationalised through practical guidance, such as assigning responsibility for AI-generated outputs and promoting responsible AI use (AAIN 2023; University of Adelaide 2025a). This convergence reflects growing alignment with international governance initiatives, including the EU AI Act and the NIST AI Risk Management Framework (Sheh and Stanley 2026).

The findings also demonstrate a shift from reactive governance, centred primarily on academic integrity, towards broader institutional governance covering teaching, research, administration, publication, and generative AI applications (Francis and Smith 2023). Correspondingly, universities are establishing dedicated oversight structures, including specialised committees and clearly defined governance responsibilities. Examples from institutions such as MIT and UCLA Health illustrate an increasing trend towards centralised governance and coordinated institutional oversight (Avetisyan 2025; Dizikes 2023).

Risk management is another prominent feature of contemporary AI governance. Most frameworks explicitly address data privacy, intellectual property, cybersecurity,

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and academic misconduct, often integrating AI governance within existing institutional policies rather than creating entirely separate regulatory systems. However, although consensus exists regarding governance principles, considerable variation remains in implementation. Some universities adopt principle-based, high-level guidance, whereas others provide detailed operational instructions for staff and students (Gillian, Han, and Grima 2025; Kahana 2026). This variation suggests that institutional context, resources, and risk tolerance influence governance implementation.

Finally, the analysis indicates that universities increasingly promote responsible innovation rather than restricting AI use. Most frameworks encourage ethical adoption through transparency, disclosure, and continuous policy review, with many explicitly describing their policies as 'living documents' capable of evolving alongside technological developments. Collectively, these findings demonstrate that while universities broadly agree on the principles of AI governance, implementation strategies continue to evolve in response to institutional priorities and the rapidly changing AI landscape.

Scope and applicability

While many frameworks are focused on students and instructors, a multi-stakeholder approach is increasingly common. The results suggest a divergence from older, less developed IT governance frameworks, which were often poorly focused on AI. Newer policies, such as those at the University of Bath and the University of Adelaide, provide specific guidance for a wider range of activities, including image generation, external publications, and even administrative functions (AAIN 2023). This shift indicates that universities recognise AI as a pervasive technology that requires comprehensive, not siloed, governance, supporting the concept of an AI Ecological Education Policy Framework that considers pedagogical, operational, and governance dimensions (Cacho 2024).

Governance structure

The data shows a clear trend towards the creation of dedicated oversight bodies, such as the AI Governance Working Group at the University of California, Berkeley, and the AI Leadership Task Force at New York Tech. This finding supports the hypothesis that universities are centralising their approach to AI governance rather than leaving it to individual departments or faculties. The roles and responsibilities are becoming more defined, with students being held accountable for their work and supervisors or instructors tasked with setting clear expectations. This aligns with Birkstedt et al. (2023)'s definition of AI governance as a system of rules and processes to ensure alignment with an organization's values.

Risk assessment and compliance

The findings demonstrate a strong emphasis on risk mitigation, with policies that directly address issues such as data privacy, intellectual property, and academic misconduct. The University of Adelaide's explicit warning about uploading sensitive information to AI tools and the University of Bath's ban on submitting student work

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to fundamentally flawed AI detection tools are definite examples of this (University of Adelaide 2025b). The data suggests that while universities are embracing the opportunities presented by AI, they are also being very deliberate in managing the associated risks. The reliance on existing academic integrity policies for enforcement suggests that institutions are integrating AI into their existing structures rather than creating entirely new ones. This finding supports the literature's identification of academic integrity, data privacy, and IP issues as core governance challenges (Dabis and Csáki 2024; Miltiadis et al. 2024).

Practical implementation

The results suggest that universities are providing practical, actionable guidance and resources. Examples such as Stanford's AI Playground and the University of Adelaide's requirement for a statement of AI use in a thesis are concrete examples of this. The widespread emphasis on AI literacy and training, as highlighted by Boston University and New York Tech, suggests that education is seen as a key component of a successful governance strategy (Seldon 2024). This finding is directly supported by the background literature, which emphasises the need to develop AI literacy for both students and faculty (Chan 2023; Chen, Tallant, and Selig 2025).

Culture and future-proofing

The findings support the idea that universities are actively promoting a culture of responsible innovation. The data shows a move away from a banning approach towards a *permissive but transparent* one. Policies from the University of Bath and the University of Adelaide explicitly state their goal is to equip students with the skills for a future workforce (AAIN 2023). This finding aligns with the literature, which describes a shift from a reactive to a proactive stance, encouraging the productive use of AI (McDonald et al. 2025; Şen, Vaněček, and Adnan 2026). The continuous review cycle of these policies is also a definite finding, as policies are explicitly described as living documents, which seems to be a proactive approach to keeping pace with the rapid evolution of AI.

Conclusion

This study mapped and compared AI governance frameworks adopted by universities worldwide, revealing an emerging convergence around the core principles of fairness, transparency, and accountability. These principles underpin most institutional frameworks and demonstrate increasing alignment with international standards, including the EU AI Act and the NIST AI Risk Management Framework. Such convergence provides a foundation for developing more consistent and globally relevant approaches to AI governance in higher education.

Despite this common foundation, universities differ considerably in how governance is operationalised. While some institutions adopt broad principle-based guidance, others provide detailed, prescriptive policies tailored to teaching, research, and administrative contexts. The increasing use of living documents further reflects

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recognition that AI governance must remain adaptable as technologies, risks, and regulatory environments continue to evolve.

The findings also indicate a shift from restrictive governance towards a culture of responsible innovation. Rather than discouraging AI use, universities are embedding ethical principles, transparency, AI literacy, and digital skills into institutional practice, positioning AI as an enabler of teaching, learning, and research. Effective governance is further strengthened through multi-stakeholder engagement involving students, academics, administrators, policymakers, and external partners.

The findings should, however, be interpreted in light of the study's reliance on publicly available English-language governance documents, which may not fully represent institutions with unpublished or non-English policies. Future research should extend comparative analyses to multilingual and non-public governance frameworks while evaluating the effectiveness of governance models in practice. Such research will provide deeper insights into how universities can balance innovation, ethical responsibility, and institutional resilience as AI continues to transform higher education.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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