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THE CRUCIAL ROLE OF TEACHERS IN GUIDING ETHICAL AI USE IN EDUCATION

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Abstract

The rapid integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in educational settings presents both unprecedented opportunities for personalised learning and significant ethical challenges. This paper argues that teachers play a central role in guiding the responsible and ethical use of AI in schools. It examines how teacher intervention can prevent misuse, promote academic integrity, and foster critical thinking and digital literacy among students. The discussion highlights the importance of modelling proper AI use, incorporating AI literacy into curricula, and establishing clear classroom guidelines. Furthermore, the paper explores the broader benefits of teacher-guided AI integration, including enhanced learning outcomes, preparation for future careers, equitable access, and the development of responsible digital citizenship. Counterarguments regarding student independence, teacher preparedness, and potential constraints on creativity are addressed and rebutted, emphasising that ethical guidance strengthens rather than limits student engagement and innovation. The paper concludes that ethical instruction in AI use is indispensable and that teachers, through intentional guidance and professional development, are key to cultivating a culture of integrity, accountability, and critical engagement with technology. Recommendations are provided for integrating AI literacy programs, supporting teacher development, setting clear policies, and encouraging reflective and responsible use among students. Overall, the study underscores that the ethical and effective adoption of AI in education is not optional but essential for preparing students to navigate a technology-driven world responsibly.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Ethical Use, Teachers, Academic Integrity, Digital Literacy

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Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly reshaping the landscape of education, ushering in new opportunities for personalised learning, enhanced assessment and administrative efficiency, but it also raises pressing ethical questions that schools must confront (Mahmud et al., 2025). In many classrooms, students already use AI tools, whether for drafting essays, generating ideas or checking grammar, without clear guidance on appropriate use. Without intentional ethical oversight, these tools risk undermining core educational values such as academic integrity, critical thinking and personal accountability. Teachers, therefore, occupy a uniquely pivotal position: they are not only facilitators of learning but also custodians of ethical behaviour in the digital milieu. In this context, the role of teachers must extend beyond basic instruction to actively guiding learners in understanding not just how to use AI tools but why and when their use is appropriate within the moral framework of education.

At the heart of the argument for teacher-led ethical guidance is the necessity of maintaining academic integrity. Across educational systems, institutions struggle with defining what constitutes acceptable AI use: should students be permitted to use generative tools to draft essays, or is that tantamount to outsourcing intellectual work? Formal guidelines such as those proposed by the European Network for Academic Integrity (ENAI) argue that the undeclared use of AI for academic credit may undermine integrity and should be treated as misconduct unless clearly acknowledged (Tauginienė et al., 2023). What this demonstrates is that ethical AI use is not self-evident; it requires explicit articulation, communication and reinforcement within the school environment. Teachers are thus essential in setting and interpreting these expectations, ensuring students understand that ethical use involves transparency and alignment with learning outcomes.

Ethical use of AI cannot be decoupled from broader issues of digital literacy and critical engagement. AI systems often reflect biases embedded in their training data and can produce outputs that are inaccurate or misleading if not critically assessed (ENAI, 2023). Students who lack this critical lens may unwittingly accept and reproduce biased or incorrect content, reinforcing misinformation rather than challenging it. To address this, teachers must embed discussions of bias, accuracy and ethical implications into their pedagogy so that students learn not simply to use AI as a convenience but to engage with it thoughtfully. As research on AI literacy education underlines, teachers' own ethical competencies are critical for fostering this nuanced understanding, yet many educators currently hold misconceptions about AI's ethical dimensions (Miao & Shiohira, 2024).

Teacher guidance is also vital in navigating the complex terrain of data privacy and student rights. As AI tools collect and process vast amounts of personal data to operate effectively, questions about consent, surveillance and security become unavoidable. While some discourses on AI ethics focus on abstract principles, practical questions, such as who has access to student data and how it may be used, require answers rooted in the lived realities of classrooms (Teachers Task Force, 2023). Educators can advocate for ethical procurement and deployment of AI systems in schools, ensuring that student privacy is protected and that data use aligns with ethical standards. This advocacy role underscores teachers' responsibility not only to students but to the broader school community, including parents and administrators.

Another compelling reason for teacher-guided ethical AI use is the preservation and enhancement of distinctly human skills. As generative AI becomes more capable of producing fluent text and solving routine problems, there is a risk that students may prioritise efficiency over genuine intellectual engagement. Educators have raised concerns that over-reliance on AI tools might diminish students' development of critical thinking and creativity—skills that machines cannot replicate (AP News, 2025). This is not an argument against AI per se but a call for balanced integration: students should harness AI as a partner in learning rather than a replacement for effort and reflection. Teachers, through carefully designed assignments and assessments, can ensure that AI enhances rather than erodes students' cognitive and ethical capacities.

For ethical AI use to become embedded in school cultures, teachers themselves must be supported with training and professional development. It is unrealistic to expect educators to guide students effectively if they lack the necessary understanding of AI's capabilities and ethical implications. International recommendations emphasise the need for teacher training in AI literacy and ethical use, not merely as add-on workshops but as integral components of ongoing professional growth (Tauginienė et al., 2023). With such preparation, teachers can lead by example, modeling ethical engagement with AI, initiating classroom dialogue about its merits and pitfalls, and shaping policies that reflect shared values.

Importance of Ethical Guidance in AI Use

One of the most pressing ethical issues arising from the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into educational environments is the potential for academic dishonesty. AI tools—especially generative technologies that can produce fluent text, answers to complex questions, or even entire essays—afford students the opportunity to complete intellectual tasks without fully engaging in the learning process. If such tools are used without clear moral and procedural boundaries, they may facilitate plagiarism, unauthorised content generation, or misrepresentation of student understanding. The European Network for Academic Integrity (ENAI, 2023) emphasises that undeclared AI usage to produce work for academic credit can be considered a form of misconduct because it unfairly advantages some learners while disadvantaging others and undermines the foundational principles of academic integrity. This underscores the urgent need for frameworks within schools that define and prevent unethical AI use, and it places teachers at the centre of implementing and reinforcing such standards.

Research into student perceptions of AI use reveals that ethics and personal judgement play a central role in how learners decide whether to engage with AI responsibly. A comprehensive study by Lund et al. (2025) shows that students' own beliefs about whether AI use is "cheating" strongly predict both their ethical attitudes and their actual behaviours, more so than institutional policies. This suggests that rules alone are insufficient to deter dishonest practice; learners must internalise ethical norms. Consequently, teachers should play a proactive role in shaping these norms by discussing the ethical implications of AI tools openly and frequently within classrooms. Without such engagement, students might interpret institutional rules in a narrow, procedural sense rather than as expressions of deeper ethical values that govern scholarly work.

Educational misconduct facilitated by AI is not a novel problem, but it magnifies existing challenges in maintaining academic honesty. Birks and Clare (2023) link AI-facilitated academic

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misconduct to established prevention frameworks for traditional forms of cheating, reinforcing the idea that prevention should focus not only on detection and sanctions but also on education and culture development. In educational settings where AI is easily accessible, misconduct may manifest as copying AI-generated content verbatim, presenting such work as original, or using AI to fabricate research findings without proper verification. This is dangerous because it corrodes trust in assessment outcomes and diminishes the credibility of qualifications. Teachers must therefore be equipped to help students understand why authentic effort and original reasoning are indispensable to fair and meaningful learning experiences.

Policies designed to curb unethical AI use are emerging at institutional and national levels, but they vary widely in scope and efficacy. Some universities adopt strict bans in formal assessments, while others permit AI use within defined parameters that demand disclosure and critical reflection on its use (Nature Communications, 2024). The patchwork of approaches can confuse learners if educators do not contextualise these policies within ethical discourse. For example, while a school may prohibit AI in exams, it may simultaneously encourage its use for brainstorming or draft feedback if properly credited. Teachers, therefore, serve as interpreters of policy, translating abstract rules into practical, context-specific guidance that students can apply ethically in real-world learning tasks.

Teachers' role in mitigating AI misuse also encompasses assessment design. Authentic assessments, those requiring students to demonstrate understanding through application, synthesis and personal reflection, are less susceptible to superficial AI substitution. By prioritising tasks that hinge on students' own reasoning and decision-making processes, educators can reduce the appeal of using AI simply to generate text or answers. This aligns with educational integrity principles that stress honesty, trust and responsibility in academic work (ENAI, 2023). Moreover, when assessments are structured to require evidence of the student's own cognitive contribution, such as oral explanations, in-class problem solving, or annotated drafts, teachers reinforce the message that academic integrity is integral to the learning journey, not merely a rule to be obeyed.

Role of Teachers in Guiding Ethical AI Use

A central responsibility of teachers in the era of widespread artificial intelligence (AI) integration into schooling is modelling proper AI use, thereby establishing ethical norms and expectations around these technologies. AI tools offer considerable potential to support personalised learning, formative feedback and differentiated instruction, but without clear examples of responsible usage from educators themselves, students may misconstrue how and when such tools should be employed. As multiple research studies emphasise, simply possessing access to AI is not sufficient; learners need guidance on engaging critically and ethically with AI outputs (Miao & Shiohira, 2024; Walter, 2024). Teachers, by their professional stature and daily classroom presence, are ideally placed to demonstrate not only technical functions such as prompt engineering and verification of AI responses, but also the values that should govern their use, such as transparency, ownership of ideas and respect for intellectual labour. This modelling extends beyond isolated lessons to permeate curriculum design and assessment practices, signalling to students that ethical considerations are integral to learning rather than optional add-ons.

Equally important is the incorporation of AI literacy into the school curriculum, a task that places teachers at the intersection of technological fluency and ethical reflection. AI literacy goes beyond knowing how an algorithm works; it includes understanding potential biases embedded in AI systems, recognising limitations in AI-generated content and appreciating the broader societal and ethical implications of AI use (Miao & Shiohira, 2024; UNESCO, 2025). Empirical research indicates that teachers' own AI literacy deeply influences their capacity to guide students ethically; without foundational knowledge, educators can inadvertently perpetuate misconceptions or fail to address misinformation critically (Nature Communications, 2024; Search0). By embedding AI literacy within subject curricula and cross-disciplinary projects, teachers can equip students with both the conceptual understanding and practical skills needed to navigate AI tools judiciously. This approach aligns with broader policy directions in education, such as recent initiatives to introduce AI and computational thinking into early schooling, that explicitly stress ethical frameworks as part of foundational AI education (Times of India, 2025).

Beyond knowledge transmission, teachers play a crucial role in establishing clear guidelines and classroom practices that define legitimate and ethical AI use. As schools and educational authorities worldwide grapple with updating academic integrity frameworks for the AI era, inconsistent policies risk confusing learners about what constitutes responsible conduct (AP News, 2025; ENAI, 2023). Teachers must translate institutional standards into concrete classroom expectations, such as when students may use AI for ideation versus when its use may constitute academic dishonesty unless appropriately cited. They can integrate reflective prompts that require students to articulate how they used AI in completing tasks, what human reasoning shaped the final work, and how they verified or critiqued AI outputs. Such practices not only reinforce ethical norms but also foster metacognitive skills that deepen learning. In doing so, the teacher serves as both a mediator of policy and a mentor in ethical reasoning.

A further dimension of the teacher's role involves fostering a culture of ethical discussion and critical engagement with AI's societal impact. AI technologies raise complex questions about responsibility, equity, privacy and algorithmic bias—issues that cannot be resolved through technical literacy alone. Teachers, therefore, have the opportunity to integrate discussions of real-world ethical dilemmas into classroom discourse, using case studies and contemporary examples to illuminate how AI decisions affect individuals and communities. By facilitating dialogue rather than mere instruction, teachers help students appreciate the nuanced interplay between technological advancement and ethical responsibility (Education Curated, 2024; AI Ethical Literacy, 2025). These reflective discussions encourage learners to become not just competent users of AI, but ethical and informed citizens capable of scrutinising the broader implications of technology in society.

In addition to classroom practice, teachers must advocate for ongoing professional development and collaborative learning communities that support ethical AI integration. Research highlights that many educators currently feel underprepared to teach AI literacy or to address its ethical dimensions, owing to a lack of formal training during their own professional education (Preprints.org, 2025; Search3). To bridge this gap, schools and education systems should prioritise continuous professional

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learning that equips teachers with up-to-date knowledge, pedagogical strategies and ethical frameworks for AI use. Peer collaboration, reflective workshops and partnerships with experts in AI ethics can strengthen teachers' confidence and competencies, creating a shared foundation for consistent ethical guidance across classrooms. A well-supported teaching force can thus lead by example, showing that ethical AI use is a shared professional priority rather than a peripheral concern.

The role of teachers in guiding ethical AI use encapsulates both instruction and inspiration. While AI tools may automate many routine tasks and provide new forms of personalised support, they cannot replicate the uniquely human capabilities that teachers bring, empathy, judgement, moral reasoning and contextual understanding (UNESCO, 2025; Search1). Teachers, by intentionally shaping how students interact with AI, contribute not only to academic integrity but also to the cultivation of critical thinking and ethical awareness. With thoughtful integration of AI literacy, explicit guidelines for responsible use and a supportive culture of ethical inquiry, teachers can prepare students to thrive in a technology-rich future without sacrificing the core human values that define meaningful education.

Benefits of Teacher-Guided Ethical AI Use

The guided and ethical use of artificial intelligence (AI) in schools offers numerous pedagogical and developmental benefits when mediated by teachers. One of the foremost advantages lies in the enhancement of learning outcomes through personalised instruction. AI has the capacity to analyse student performance in real time, identify gaps in understanding, and generate tailored recommendations for improvement. However, this potential is maximised only when teachers integrate AI insights with human judgment and contextual knowledge (Miao & Shiohira, 2024). Teachers can interpret AI-generated analytics to provide meaningful feedback, scaffold instruction, and design interventions that suit individual learners' cognitive and emotional needs. This partnership between AI and teacher expertise ensures that learning is both efficient and aligned with educational goals, preventing the over-reliance on automated systems that may misrepresent a student's true abilities.

Another significant benefit is the preparation of students for future careers and digital citizenship. As AI becomes increasingly embedded across professions, understanding how to engage with these tools ethically is an essential competency. According to UNESCO (2025), students who are taught to critically evaluate AI outputs, use AI responsibly, and reflect on ethical considerations develop skills that extend beyond academic contexts into the workplace and civic life. Teacher guidance ensures that students not only acquire technical competence but also understand the social, ethical, and professional implications of AI. For instance, tasks that require students to critique AI-generated content or collaborate on AI-assisted projects cultivate problem-solving, ethical reasoning, and teamwork—skills highly valued in contemporary work environments.

A further benefit of teacher-guided AI use is the promotion of academic integrity and ethical awareness. When teachers explicitly instruct students on responsible AI usage, students learn to recognise the boundaries between acceptable assistance and plagiarism or misconduct. ENAI (2023) emphasises that fostering a culture of academic integrity is more effective when students are educated about ethical norms rather than merely subjected to punitive measures. Teachers can introduce reflective exercises, peer reviews, and discussions that encourage learners to consider how AI tools influence their decision-making and moral reasoning. These practices nurture habits of honesty, accountability, and critical self-evaluation, which are indispensable for lifelong learning.

The ethical integration of AI also supports equity in education, particularly when teachers mediate its use. AI can personalise learning to meet diverse needs, offering additional support to students who might otherwise struggle in traditional classroom settings. Yet, without guidance, disparities may emerge if some students misuse AI or lack digital literacy to benefit from it. Teachers play a crucial role in ensuring equitable access, monitoring AI use, and instructing students on effective and fair application (Walter, 2024). By doing so, they mitigate the risk of widening educational inequalities and reinforce a classroom culture where all learners can harness technology productively and ethically.

Teacher-guided AI use encourages creative and higher-order thinking. Rather than allowing students to passively accept AI outputs, educators can design learning experiences where AI serves as a tool for brainstorming, experimentation, or simulation, thereby expanding the scope for innovative thinking. According to Mahmud et al. (2025), when AI is used in guided ways, students engage in iterative processes of evaluation and refinement, which enhances critical thinking, problem-solving, and metacognitive skills. This contrasts with unguided AI use, which risks students prioritising convenience over cognitive engagement, potentially stunting intellectual growth.

Teacher-mediated ethical AI use cultivates responsible and reflective digital citizens. Students learn that technology, while powerful, must be applied in ways that are socially responsible, respectful of privacy, and aligned with societal norms (UNESCO, 2025; AP News, 2025). Teachers who model and reinforce ethical behaviour with AI prepare students to navigate a complex digital world, anticipate consequences of misuse, and make informed decisions. These lessons extend beyond schooling into personal, professional, and civic spheres, highlighting the transformative potential of guided AI integration in cultivating both competence and character in young learners.

Counterarguments and Rebuttals

Despite the clear benefits of teacher-guided ethical AI use, several counterarguments are often raised against the necessity or feasibility of such guidance in schools. One common assertion is that today's students are digital natives who already possess the skills to navigate AI tools independently, and therefore may not require explicit ethical instruction from teachers (Prensky, 2021). Advocates of this perspective argue that adolescents intuitively understand how to use technology responsibly and can self-regulate their engagement with AI. While this argument recognises the familiarity many students have with digital tools, it underestimates the complexity and ethical implications of AI technologies. Generative AI, for instance, can produce highly sophisticated content that is easily misrepresented as original work. Research indicates that students, even those well-versed in general digital literacy, often fail to recognise subtle ethical dilemmas posed by AI, such as issues of authorship, bias, and privacy (Miao & Shiohira, 2024). Consequently, leaving ethical guidance to chance risks reinforcing misconceptions and inadvertently promoting academic misconduct.

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A second counterargument centres on teacher preparedness and workload. Critics suggest that expecting educators to provide ethical guidance on AI use is unrealistic because many teachers lack sufficient training in AI technologies, and schools are already overburdened with curricular demands (Preprints.org, 2025). While these concerns are legitimate, they can be addressed through professional development and systemic support rather than abandoning the ethical imperative. Evidence shows that when teachers receive structured training in AI literacy and ethics, they are more confident and effective in guiding students, integrating AI into pedagogy without overloading existing workloads (Walter, 2024; UNESCO, 2025). This indicates that the challenge is not the necessity of teacher guidance but the need for investment in teacher capacity building.

Another critique suggests that strict ethical guidance may stifle innovation and creativity. Some argue that overly rigid rules on AI use might prevent students from experimenting and exploring AI's full potential, limiting their capacity for problem-solving and innovation (AP News, 2025). However, studies demonstrate that teacher-guided frameworks do not inhibit creativity; rather, they channel AI's capabilities towards meaningful learning outcomes while ensuring ethical responsibility (Mahmud et al., 2025). By setting boundaries, teachers encourage students to reflect critically on AI outputs, verify information, and produce original work informed by AI support, rather than simply replicating content. This approach enhances creative and critical engagement rather than suppressing it, reinforcing the idea that ethical instruction complements rather than contradicts innovation.

A further counterargument posits that ethical use of AI should be learned organically through experience and peer collaboration, rather than through formal teacher intervention (Lund et al., 2025). Proponents of this view suggest that young people can develop ethical reasoning by experimenting with AI in low-stakes environments and reflecting on outcomes. While experiential learning is valuable, it is insufficient on its own because students may not always recognise ethical breaches, or may normalise practices such as plagiarism or uncredited AI use. Teachers provide essential scaffolding in these experiential processes, guiding students to critically evaluate their choices, understand consequences, and internalise ethical standards (ENAI, 2023). Without teacher mediation, students' interpretations of right and wrong may be inconsistent and potentially harmful.

In rebuttal to all these counterarguments, the evidence strongly supports the central thesis that teachers must actively guide ethical AI use in schools. Students' familiarity with technology does not equate to ethical competence, and teacher support ensures that AI is used to enhance learning while reinforcing values such as integrity, critical thinking, and responsibility. Professional development addresses concerns about preparedness, while thoughtfully designed guidelines preserve creative exploration without compromising ethical standards. Ultimately, the teacher's role is indispensable in cultivating a culture of responsible AI engagement, balancing innovation with accountability, and preparing students for both academic success and ethical participation in a technology-driven world.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the integration of artificial intelligence into educational environments presents both remarkable opportunities and significant ethical challenges. Throughout this paper, it has been demonstrated that teachers occupy a central role in guiding students to use AI responsibly, ensuring that technological tools enhance rather than undermine learning. By modelling ethical practices, embedding AI literacy into curricula, setting clear guidelines, and fostering critical reflection, educators can cultivate a culture of integrity, creativity, and accountability within schools. While counterarguments raise concerns about student independence, teacher preparedness, and potential constraints on innovation, it is evident that structured guidance does not inhibit growth but rather channels AI use toward meaningful and responsible engagement. Ultimately, the responsibility of shaping how students interact with AI lies with teachers, who, through thoughtful instruction and ethical leadership, prepare learners to navigate a technology-driven world with discernment, integrity, and confidence. The overarching deduction is clear: ethical guidance in AI use is not optional but essential, and teachers are the linchpin in cultivating the next generation of responsible and capable digital citizens.

Recommendations

Based on what have been discussed and concluded upon, the following recommendations were made:

1. Schools should implement structured AI literacy programmes that integrate ethical considerations into all levels of the curriculum.
2. Teachers should receive ongoing professional development and support to enhance their knowledge and confidence in guiding ethical AI use.
3. Educational institutions should establish clear policies and classroom guidelines that define acceptable AI use and reinforce academic integrity.
4. Students should be encouraged to engage critically with AI tools through reflective exercises, discussions, and assessments that prioritise originality and responsible use.

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