

Exploring the philosophy and practice of AI literacy in higher education in the Global South: a scoping review

Research – Full text

Brenda van Wyk

University of Pretoria, South Africa

Brenda.vanwyk@up.ac.za

ORCID: [0000-0003-3898-7042](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3898-7042)

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Abstract

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is at the top of the agendas of higher education and education leaders are required to give direction in educating the next generation of students and citizens. AI holds positive answers to technological innovations, but the potential for continued inequities, exclusion and divides must not be ignored. As a relatively new concept, AI literacy is often viewed as a complex concept requiring more detailed conceptualisation. Furthermore, with the recent hype around generative AI (GenAI), discussions and explorations around what AI literacy is, are now being deliberated. Historically AI was the domain of mathematicians and computer scientists. This is changing as the wider implication of AI permeates all aspects of society, in particular the ethical and informed use of AI and GenAI is paramount. This leaves higher education with the dilemma of deciding who is responsible in teaching and facilitation AI literacy. Keeping in mind that there is an abundance of new literacies in academia. This problem is particularly pronounced in the Global South countries, where digital exclusions and social injustice are becoming more complex. This scoping review evaluated 40 screened and eligible peer reviewed articles and conference proceedings published between 2020- 2024 on AI literacy in higher education in the Global South. The aim of the study was to gauge the extant research on AI literacy and its subsequent ethical implications in higher education in the Global South. The study further explored which philosophies and frameworks inform and guide AI literacy research and support in higher education within the selected region. Findings are that while the disciplines of education are engaging in research, other disciplines such as

Information Science are interdisciplinary actors in teaching and facilitating AI literacy, but that there is a pronounced paucity in research being conducted.

Keywords

AI, AI support, AI education, AI Ethics

Conclusion

The forty studies selected and evaluated covered a range of empirical research findings on AI literacy in higher education in the Global South. The selected sources mainly considered how AI literacy is handled, but also looked at the philosophy and practice of AI literacy in higher education in the Global South. The prevailing notion is that even UNESCO's work involving the needs of the Global South is founded in Western principles and philosophies. It excludes dimensions of less universal philosophies such as African Ubuntu ethics. Norren(2022) professes that the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and European Union (EU) precedence are used to contextualise AI literacy and AI ethics on behalf of the Global South. Most of the studies in the search results studies comes from the discipline of education, while there is a noticeable paucity of research from LIS sector and also Information Science. A number of noteworthy LIS studies from Malaysia covers the application of AI in LIS services. Library and information services has a negligible number of research studies on the topic, and those that were identified centres around the reasons and challenges why AI literacy facilitation is not yet in place. Asian regions such as China produce most of the research on AI literacy in higher education.

The philosophy of information is under-represented in these studies, and this may resonate with sentiments that many philosophical paradigms subscribe to Western approaches. Much greater diversity in how we approach ethics applied to AI is urgently required to represent the world's plurality of perspectives. In that sense, a culture grounded study of ethics and its applications to AI should irrigate any teaching pertaining to the subject.

Most studies connect AI literacy with ethics and the responsible use of AI. Some studies equate digital literacy to AI literacy, though it is apparent that these are distinctly different. Researchers and authors emphasise the need for further studies and frameworks that will enable higher education institutions to use AI responsibly and effectively, thereby improving overall quality of Education. Norrc ongoing research is needed to address the emerging field of AI literacy in teaching and learning. The interdisciplinary nature of AI literacy and subsequently AI ethics calls for better collaboration within higher education.