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Students' Ethical Perceptions of Artificial Intelligence Use: An Opportunity for Developing a Personal Ethical Compass

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ABSTRACT: *This study examines students' ethical perceptions regarding the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in academic settings, focusing on the relationship between students' engagement in unethical behaviors related AI and their expectations for ethical guidance from faculty members. It addresses the tension between institutional academic integrity policies and the practical reality shaped by students' exposure to evolving labor market norms. A quantitative survey was conducted among 399 students from six academic institutions in Israel. The research instrument consisted of a Likert-scale questionnaire measuring perceptions of unethical behavior, the perceived impact of AI use on academic performance, and expectations for ethical instruction. Data were analyzed using exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and structural equation modeling (SEM) to examine the hypothesized relationships. The findings revealed that students who reported higher levels of ethically questionable AI use also perceived improved academic performance. At the same time, they expressed a strong desire for ethical mentoring from their instructors. This paradox highlights a pragmatic approach to academic achievement, coupled with a genuine need for moral guidance within a rapidly evolving technological environment. The study has practical implications for fields such as education, the humanities, social sciences, and business—disciplines where generative AI tools are becoming increasingly prevalent. It is particularly relevant for academic policy-makers, curriculum designers, and educators seeking to promote ethical awareness and critical engagement with AI technologies in higher education. The novelty of this study lies in identifying the "ethical paradox" experienced by students—combining rule-bending behavior with a call for ethical direction. Rather than viewing this as failure or contradiction, the study frames it as an opportunity to cultivate a personal ethical compass that bridges academic values and professional readiness. This perspective offers a new pedagogical framework for fostering ethical development in the age of generative AI.*

Key words: *Academic integrity, artificial intelligence in academia, ethical guidance, personal ethical development. student ethics, unethical ai use.*

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1. Introduction

In recent years, the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies in higher education has led to a profound transformation in teaching, learning, and assessment practices. The emergence of generative AI tools such as ChatGPT, Bard, and Claude has made it possible for students to generate written content, solve complex problems, and receive personalized learning assistance with unprecedented speed and ease (Reich et al., 2023). These developments represent a significant shift in the landscape of academic work, creating new possibilities for efficiency and creativity—but also raising serious ethical concerns.

Academic institutions are now grappling with questions surrounding the authenticity of student work, the meaning of academic authorship, and the appropriate use of AI in educational contexts (Wadmany & Yaniv, 2025; Holmes & Tuomi, 2022). As AI-generated content becomes increasingly indistinguishable from that

produced by humans, longstanding principles of academic integrity are being challenged. Institutions must determine how to uphold these principles without ignoring the technological realities students face.

In many higher education institutions, both in Israel and globally, the dominant institutional response to the rise of AI tools has been regulatory: restricting or even banning the use of generative AI in assignments and exams (Asaf & Barak, 2023). However, this response often fails to reflect the practical realities in which students operate. Studies show that despite prohibitions, many students continue to use AI tools to complete academic tasks, often without clear understanding of the ethical boundaries involved (McKee, 2023). This divergence between formal policy and actual practice creates a pressing need to better understand students' perspectives.

This study addresses that need by focusing on students' ethical perceptions regarding the use of AI in academic settings. The central research question is: How do students perceive the ethical dimensions of AI use in academia, and what is the relationship between these perceptions and their expectations of ethical guidance from faculty members?

Understanding this issue is especially important in a time when the boundaries between academic and professional environments are increasingly blurred. The labor market now places a high value on digital literacy, adaptability, and the effective use of emerging technologies. From a student's point of view, using AI may not represent a breach of academic conduct, but rather a form of strategic adaptation aligned with future employability. This reflects a broader value conflict: institutional norms emphasize fairness, honesty, and independent thinking, while the marketplace often rewards speed, efficiency, and technological mastery.

This tension gives rise to what may be described as an ethical paradox. Preliminary findings suggest that students who admit to using AI in ethically questionable ways also report perceived academic benefits—yet, paradoxically, these same students express a strong desire for ethical instruction and mentorship from their instructors. This contradiction suggests that students are not indifferent to ethical issues; rather, they are navigating a complex terrain without sufficient guidance.

The motivation for this study lies in the recognition that punitive or prohibitive approaches are unlikely to resolve this tension. Instead, there is an opportunity to engage students in reflective ethical dialogue, helping them to develop a personal ethical compass—a framework through which they can evaluate the ethical implications of AI use in both academic and professional contexts.

By focusing on students' own experiences, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how ethical awareness can be cultivated in the age of AI. It offers practical implications for academic policy, curriculum development, and faculty training—aimed at fostering ethical maturity in digitally mediated learning environments.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Development of AI Use in Higher Education

Over the past decade, artificial intelligence (AI) technologies have become increasingly embedded in higher education, evolving from rudimentary plagiarism detection tools to advanced generative systems capable of producing full-length essays and solving complex problems (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019). The advent of large language models such as GPT-3 and GPT-4 significantly accelerated this trend, offering students unprecedented access to high-quality, automated content (Heidt, 2024; Kasneci et al., 2023). A systematic review by Holmes and Tuomi (2022) identified three major areas of AI application in academia: automated assessment, personalized learning, and content generation.

In the Israeli context, Gilboa and Cohen (2023) noted a fragmented landscape in AI adoption across institutions—some encouraging responsible integration, others opting for restrictive or even prohibitive policies. This divergence reflects the broader global challenge of aligning innovative technologies with traditional pedagogical frameworks. It also highlights the institutional ambivalence toward technological innovation in education—viewed by some as a pedagogical opportunity and by others as a threat to academic standards.

2.2. Ethical Dilemmas in AI Use in Academic Contexts

The integration of AI tools into education has raised complex ethical dilemmas that transcend questions of technological feasibility. Macfarlane (2021) identified three central concerns: (1) issues of authorship and authenticity, particularly the erosion of student ownership over submitted work; (2) risks of algorithmic bias

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and inequality in both instructional design and assessment; and (3) threats to student privacy due to data-intensive AI systems. These dilemmas suggest that the use of AI in education is not ethically neutral—it involves a set of value-laden decisions that must be critically addressed by educators and institutions alike.

Yan et al. (2021) emphasized the tension between the pedagogical benefits of AI—efficiency, personalization, and scalability—and the ethical risks it entails, particularly the risk of reducing education to mechanistic performance metrics. Fan et al. (2022) further explored the moral complexity students face, noting that decisions to use AI despite institutional bans are shaped not only by individual ethics but by institutional culture, peer behavior, and broader social norms.

In Israel, Ben-David and Levy (2022) found that 67% of students report using AI tools at least weekly, and approximately 40% continue to do so even when use is explicitly prohibited. These findings align with McKee (2023), who observed a growing global gap between institutional policies and students' actual practices. This discrepancy underscores the fact that ethical compliance is not determined solely by the existence of formal rules, but by how those rules resonate with students' lived academic experiences.

2.3. The Role of Instructors in Promoting Ethical AI Use

Given the widening gap between policy and practice, increasing attention is being paid to the pedagogical role of instructors in fostering ethical AI use. Liu et al. (2022) advocate for a shift away from purely regulatory responses and toward proactive educational models that promote ethical reflection and digital literacy. This includes embedding discussions of AI ethics within curricula and creating safe spaces for students to engage with ethical dilemmas openly and critically.

This shift, however, presents its own challenges. As Chen et al. (2023) argue, instructors themselves often require additional support in developing both technological fluency and the confidence to address ethical uncertainties. Eckhaus and Klein (2022) note that many faculty members face a knowledge gap in relation to their students, who are often more fluent in AI tools. This asymmetry hinders effective mentorship and may lead to missed opportunities for dialogue and ethical growth.

Rubinstein (2022) highlights that in the Israeli academic context, many instructors report a lack of clarity regarding institutional expectations around AI, further complicating their ability to serve as ethical guides. Without clear frameworks, educators may resort to rigid enforcement or avoidance, rather than engaging in meaningful discussions with students about ethical use.

2.4. Dual Ethical Expectations: Academic Integrity vs. Professional Relevance

A major theme emerging from recent literature is the ethical tension students experience between academic integrity and future professional demands. On one side, academic institutions promote values such as independence, authenticity, and personal accountability. On the other, the modern labor market rewards adaptability, efficiency, and technological proficiency, including mastery of AI tools (Goldstein & Lavi, 2023). The resulting friction creates a dual value system that students must navigate.

Levy and Dagan (2024) found that over 80% of Israeli students identify this conflict as a genuine ethical dilemma rather than a technical issue of compliance. This finding indicates that students are not simply flouting rules, but grappling with broader questions of purpose, responsibility, and identity within their academic journeys. Similarly, Thompson et al. (2022) describe students' experience of a "dual ethical contract"—one anchored in institutional expectations, and another in their aspirations for employability and relevance.

This ethical paradox is central to the present study: students who engage in behavior that institutions define as unethical often do so not out of disregard, but out of a belief that such behavior is aligned with real-world demands. That they simultaneously seek ethical mentorship from instructors complicates the binary framing of rule-breaking versus compliance.

2.5. Students' Ethical Perceptions of AI Use

Research focusing on students' own ethical perceptions reveals a more nuanced picture than simplistic moral binaries suggest. Chen and Cheng (2023), in a large-scale survey in the U.S., found that while 82% of students use AI tools for academic purposes, only 31% report such use to instructors. The reasons for nondisclosure include fear of punishment, confusion about institutional policies, and a sense that regulations have not kept pace with technological change.

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Wang et al. (2022) emphasized the ambiguity surrounding AI use in academia, noting that students often perceive their behaviors as occupying a "gray zone" between explicit permission and implicit prohibition. Although students expressed a desire for institutional clarity, many continued to use AI tools regardless of formal guidelines. This suggests that students are navigating ethical uncertainty in a context lacking clear norms or shared understanding.

In Israel, Levinson and Sharon (2023) found that 65% of students view the use of tools such as ChatGPT as a normative academic behavior—even when such use may technically violate academic integrity codes. Importantly, students who reported frequent AI use were also those most vocal in calling for clearer ethical boundaries from instructors. These findings reinforce the idea that students are not indifferent to ethical norms but feel inadequately supported in interpreting them.

2.6. Identified Research Gap and Contribution of the Present Study

Despite the expanding body of literature on AI in education, relatively little empirical work has explored the intersection between students' ethically ambiguous behaviors and their simultaneous desire for ethical mentorship. Existing studies tend to focus either on institutional responses or technological affordances, leaving a gap in understanding how students themselves experience the ethical dimensions of AI use.

This study seeks to address that gap by examining students' perceptions and expectations in depth, with a particular focus on the Israeli higher education system. It explores how students reconcile institutional norms with personal and professional aspirations, and how they position faculty members within that ethical landscape.

The study contributes to the literature by proposing a pedagogical reorientation—from enforcement to guidance, from regulation to reflection. Rather than treating the gap between policy and practice as a failure, the study reframes it as a learning opportunity: a chance to support students in developing a personal ethical compass that bridges academic integrity with real-world adaptability in the age of AI.

2.7. Research Hypotheses

Based on the literature review, the study proposes two central hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: There is a positive correlation between unethical behavior in the use of AI and students' perception of improved academic performance.

This hypothesis is grounded in research suggesting that students often use AI despite academic prohibitions, driven by the belief that such tools enhance their performance (Fan et al., 2022; McKee, 2023).

Hypothesis 2: Students express a need for ethical guidance from instructors regarding AI use. This hypothesis is supported by studies showing that even students who engage in prohibited AI use still expect instructional support and ethical mentoring from faculty (Wang et al., 2022; Levinson & Sharon, 2023).

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design and Approach

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional, survey-based design aimed at examining students' ethical perceptions regarding the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in academic contexts. The goal was to explore the relationship between students' engagement in unethical behaviors involving AI tools, their perceived academic benefit from such tools, and their expectations for ethical guidance from instructors.

The research focused on self-reported behaviors and attitudes, as these are key indicators for understanding ethical perceptions and tensions experienced by students in real academic environments. The study was designed to be replicable, with clear definitions of constructs, procedures, and data analysis techniques.

3.2. Participants and Sampling

The questionnaire was distributed via Google Forms across six academic institutions in Israel, yielding a total of 399 valid responses. The largest groups of participants came from Ariel University (162 students) and Ono Academic College (171 students). The remaining responses were distributed among four additional institutions, contributing to the diversity of the sample in terms of academic fields and geographic locations.

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The age distribution of participants was as follows: 18–28 (59%), 29–40 (20.3%), and 41–72 (20.8%). Gender distribution was 51.9% female and 41.8% male. The remainder did not specify or identified differently.

Participants were recruited via institutional announcements and voluntary course participation. All responses were anonymous, and informed consent was obtained digitally prior to completing the questionnaire.

3.3. Research Instrument

The data collection instrument was a structured questionnaire designed by the researchers and administered online. The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 5 ("Strongly Agree"), and consisted of items addressing three key constructs:

1. Unethical Behavior – The degree to which students reported using AI tools in academic contexts where such use is explicitly prohibited by instructors or institutions.
2. AI as a Tool to Improve Academic Performance (AI_improve) – Students' perceptions of the extent to which AI tools support and enhance their academic learning and outcomes.
3. Expectations for Ethical Guidance (Q59**)** – Students' beliefs about the role instructors should play in providing ethical instruction about AI use. A representative item stated: *"Instructors should guide students on how to use AI ethically."*

All items were developed based on prior literature and refined through a small-scale pilot test to ensure clarity and internal consistency.

4. Data Analysis

An Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted, followed by Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to examine the model's goodness of fit (Eckhaus, 2019).

Model fit was assessed using the following indices: CFI, TLI, NFI, RMSEA, SRMR, and the chi-square ratio (CMIN/DF). Values of CFI, NFI, and TLI above .95 and RMSEA below 0.06 are considered indicative of good model fit (Ainur et al., 2017); CMIN/DF < 3.00 (Liu et al., 2021); and SRMR < 0.08 (Le Moine et al., 2016).

4.1. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

A factor model was analyzed using the Principal Components Analysis (PCA) method with Varimax rotation. After removing items with low loadings (Truszczynski et al., 2020), the data showed good suitability for factor analysis: the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure was 0.87, indicating adequate sampling adequacy. In addition, Bartlett's test of sphericity was statistically significant ($\chi^2(45) = 2818.89$, $p < .001$), supporting the appropriateness of the data for factor analysis.

All remaining items showed high loadings (≥ 0.6; see Table 1), and the factor analysis was found to be appropriate for a 10-item scale. Eigenvalues indicated that the items loaded onto two main factors, which together explained 69.47% of the total variance.

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Table 1. Factor Loadings on Two Components Identified in the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA): "AI Improves Performance" and "Unethical Use"

Item Number	Item Wording	AI Improves Performance	Unethical Use
Q34	Using AI makes it much easier for me to follow the lesson	0.92	
Q35	Using AI makes the lesson clearer	0.92	
Q31	Using AI makes the lesson more focused	0.91	
Q32	Using AI makes the lesson more organized	0.90	
Q33	I wish instructors on campus would use AI more	0.77	
Q55	I will use AI in my studies even when we are told not to		0.80
Q54	It is acceptable to use AI even in assignments where instructors prohibit it		0.78
Q56	I don't understand why AI shouldn't be used wherever possible in studies		0.72
Q58	Using AI to add content to a paper is not considered cheating		0.70
Q57	Instructors prohibit AI use because they resist change	0.32	0.62

4.2. Reliability Measures and Variable Correlations

Internal consistency of the scales was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The AI_improve scale demonstrated very high reliability ($\alpha = 0.95$), while the Unethical scale showed good reliability ($\alpha = 0.80$). In accordance with the recommendations of Hevey et al. (2010), correlations were specified between error terms of items belonging to the same conceptual domain, in order to improve the model's fit to the theoretical structure.

4.3. Findings

This section presents the main findings of the study, based on the quantitative analysis of data collected from 399 students across six academic institutions in Israel. The analysis focused on the relationships between three constructs: 1. Unethical Use of AI 2. Perceived Improvement in Academic Performance through AI (AI_improve), and 3. Expectations for Ethical Guidance from Instructors. Data were analyzed using exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and structural equation modeling (SEM).

4.4. Structural Model and Path Estimates

Figure 1 presents the structural equation model with standardized path estimates. The model includes two latent variables—AI_improve and Unethical Use—and a single-item variable representing students' expectations for ethical guidance. All path coefficients in the model were statistically significant at the $p < .001$ level, indicating robust relationships among the constructs.

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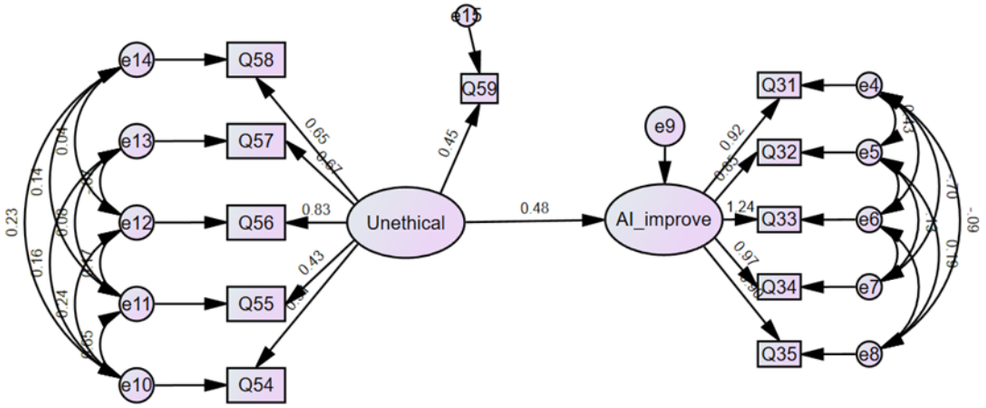

Figure 1. The Model and Standardized Estimates.

The model reveals that students who reported higher levels of unethical AI use also tended to report greater perceived benefits from AI in their academic performance. Moreover, these same students expressed stronger expectations for instructors to provide ethical guidance on AI use. This pattern highlights the paradox at the heart of the study: students who violate academic rules simultaneously desire moral structure and clarity from the educational system.

4.5. Distribution of Ethical Attitudes

Figure 2 displays the distribution of students' agreement with statements reflecting unethical AI use in academic contexts. This distribution is based on mean scores calculated for the “Unethical” construct.

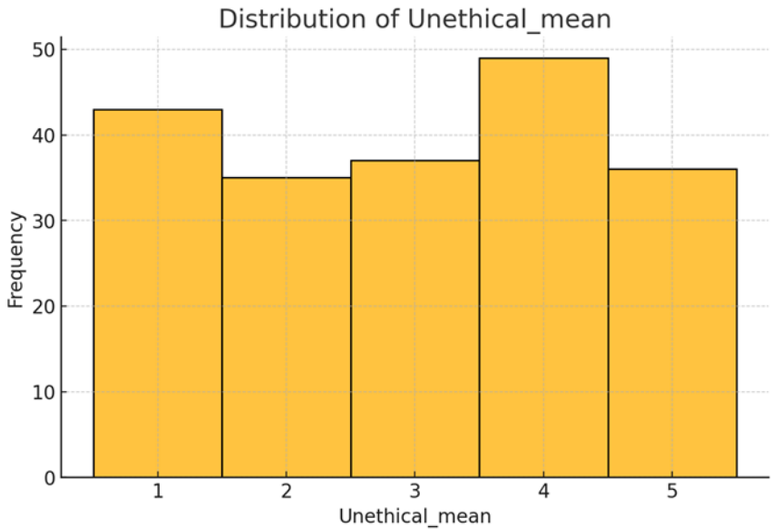

Figure 2. Distribution of Students’ Agreement with Unethical AI Use in Academia.

The data demonstrate a wide range of attitudes. While a substantial group of students strongly disagreed with using AI in ways that breach institutional policy, a notable proportion expressed moderate to high levels of agreement with such behaviors. This variability underscores the ethical tension many students experience between adherence to academic norms and the pragmatic appeal of AI-based efficiency. It also suggests that ethical views regarding AI use are far from uniform and may be influenced by contextual and individual factors.

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4.6. Differences by Gender and Age

To explore potential demographic influences, the study examined whether responses on the three constructs varied by gender or age group.

Gender: No statistically significant differences were found between male and female students in their levels of Unethical Use or AI_improve. This suggests that gender does not play a major role in shaping ethical perceptions or perceived academic benefit regarding AI use.

Age: No significant age-related differences were found for the Unethical Use construct. However, a statistically significant negative correlation was observed between age and AI_improve ($r = –.09$, $p < .05$). This indicates that younger students tend to perceive AI tools as more beneficial to their academic performance than older students do. While this correlation is modest in strength, it may reflect generational differences in digital fluency and openness to technological adoption.

Table 2. Summary of Key Statistical Results.

Relationship Tested	Statistical Outcome	Significance Level
Unethical Use → AI_improve	Positive correlation	$p < .001$
Unethical Use → Ethical Guidance Expectations	Positive correlation	$p < .001$
AI_improve → Ethical Guidance Expectations	Positive correlation	$p < .001$
Age → AI_improve	Negative correlation ($r = –.09$)	$p < .05$
Gender differences (all constructs)	Not significant	—

4.7. Summary of Key Findings

Table 2 summarizes the main relationships and statistical results derived from the analysis. As shown, all hypothesized relationships were supported by the data.

These results support both research hypotheses:

a. Students who use AI unethically tend to perceive it as academically beneficial.

b. These same students also seek ethical guidance from faculty, suggesting a complex but not contradictory ethical stance.

5. Conclusion

This study explored students' ethical perceptions regarding the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in academic contexts. It examined whether unethical behavior related to AI use is associated with perceived improvements in academic performance and whether these behaviors correlate with students' expectations for ethical guidance from instructors.

The findings support both research hypotheses. In line with the first hypothesis, students who reported engaging in unethical uses of AI—such as using it despite explicit prohibitions—also perceived these tools as improving their academic performance. This suggests that many students adopt a pragmatic approach, prioritizing academic success and efficiency over institutional rules. These results align with concerns in the literature that highlight the lag of institutional policy behind technological adoption (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019).

In support of the second hypothesis, the same students also expressed a desire for ethical guidance from instructors. This duality reflects the complexity of the current educational moment, where traditional norms are challenged by technological change. Students recognize both the potential benefits and the ethical ambiguities of AI use, and they seek mentorship in navigating this evolving terrain.

Strong psychometric indicators (KMO = .87; Cronbach's $\alpha = .95$ for AI_Improve, $\alpha = .80$ for Unethical) support the validity of the constructs. The model showed excellent fit indices, indicating the robustness of the theoretical framework. No significant gender differences were found. However, a negative correlation between age and the perception of AI's effectiveness suggests generational differences in digital literacy and openness to innovation.

5.1. Ethical Discourse and the Role of Instructors

The correlation between unethical behavior and expectations for ethical guidance highlights that students are not rejecting academic ethics; rather, they are asking to be part of the ethical conversation. As Cohen and Rivera (2022) argue, AI ethics in academia must move beyond binary categories of "ethical" versus

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"unethical." Students increasingly view ethics not as mere rule-following, but as a process of moral reflection, requiring support and mentorship.

These findings underscore the urgent need for institutions to promote ethical discourse—not merely through enforcement, but via engagement. Clear rules are necessary but insufficient; what is also needed is space for discussion, critical reflection, and value-based decision-making.

Friedman and Dror (2024) reinforce this perspective by showing that 73% of Israeli students believe instructors carry a dual ethical responsibility: to preserve academic values while preparing students for professional challenges. This points to the need for a holistic pedagogical approach that balances institutional norms with real-world relevance.

This gap between academia and the labor market has led many students to seek external platforms to acquire technological skills. Importantly, this is not merely a technical or professional choice, it is also an ethical one. Students who choose transparent and legitimate training methods demonstrate personal responsibility, even in the absence of formal institutional support.

One such platform is Verita.co.il, which offers practical training in Excel, SQL, and other data-driven tools (Eckhaus, 2024). Although it does not explicitly teach ethics, it enables students to develop their professional competencies without violating academic norms, offering an ethical alternative to unauthorized AI use.

In addition, the findings point to a growing interest among students in frameworks that integrate both academic and career development paths. This trend reflects a shift from viewing education as a static transfer of knowledge to seeing it as a dynamic process that adapts to new technological and ethical realities. Educational institutions, therefore, face the challenge of rethinking the boundaries between curriculum, ethics, and student agency.

5.2. Toward a Personal Ethical Compass

In light of the structural gap between institutional ethics and market dynamics, there is a growing need to help students develop a personal ethical compass. The availability of AI sharpens the tension between independence and collaboration, creativity and compliance. Navigating this terrain requires not only policy but also educational strategies that promote critical thinking, personal responsibility, and informed ethical judgment.

Zhang et al. (2023) propose a model for teaching AI ethics that echoes this study's findings. Their framework includes three components: a. clarifying the competing ethical values in AI use; b. developing integrative decision-making skills; and c. providing safe environments for ethical practice. These principles support students' desire for mentorship and their capacity to become ethically autonomous individuals.

Policy implications from this study suggest the need for institutional strategies that reflect students' dual ethical roles: as academic learners and future professionals. Such policies should include not only rules, but also opportunities for dialogue, reflective practice, and ethical deliberation.

Globally, institutions such as those described by Cheng and Wong (2023) are already adopting hybrid models of AI education that combine academic rigor with industry relevance. These models stress that the challenge is not to prevent AI use, but to empower students to use it responsibly and reflectively.

In Israel, the "Digital Ethics" program developed at Tel Aviv University and the Technion (Cohen & Golan, 2023) illustrates how educational frameworks can bridge the academic-professional divide. By combining theory with practical exposure to AI tools, such programs foster ethical discernment, adaptability, and leadership.

In conclusion, students do not face a binary choice between academic values and professional ambitions. They are seeking ways to integrate both, and they look to educators to help them do so. Academic institutions must rise to the challenge - not only by regulating AI use, but by cultivating ethical reasoning, fostering open dialogue, and preparing students to thrive with integrity in a rapidly evolving world.

As a next step, further research should examine how ethical instruction can be embedded across disciplines, as well as the long-term impact of institutional efforts to support students' ethical development. Additionally, comparative studies between different cultural and national contexts could provide further insights into the diversity of students' ethical frameworks. Finally, future models of academic integrity must remain adaptive, recognizing that ethical education in the age of AI is not a destination, but an ongoing process of negotiation, learning, and growth.

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Institutions may also benefit from forming interdisciplinary ethics committees that include students as active participants. These committees could help co-create guidelines and review emerging ethical dilemmas related to AI and other technologies. Involving students in shaping ethical norms reinforces a sense of ownership and responsibility, leading to better adherence and stronger ethical cultures on campus.

The study thus calls on institutions to invest not only in technological infrastructure but also in human and ethical infrastructure. Instructors, policy-makers, and students all have a role in shaping the moral contours of academic life in the digital age. Only through collaborative, reflective, and forward-thinking approaches can we ensure that the integration of AI into academia enhances, rather than undermines, our shared commitment to integrity, learning, and ethical progress.

5.3. Limitations and Study Forward

This study presents several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, although participants were recruited from six academic institutions, approximately 83% of the responses originated from just two institutions: Ariel University and Ono Academic College. This sampling imbalance may reduce the representativeness of the findings and limit their generalizability across the broader population of higher education students in Israel.

Second, the study relied solely on self-reported data, which may be subject to biases such as social desirability or selective memory, especially when addressing ethically sensitive topics like rule-breaking and academic integrity. Future research would benefit from integrating qualitative methodologies, such as semi-structured interviews or focus groups, to obtain richer, more nuanced insights into students' ethical perceptions and decision-making processes regarding AI use.

Third, the variable measuring students' expectations for ethical guidance (Q59) was based on a single-item measure. While it provided valuable initial insight, it does not capture the full complexity of students' expectations. Future research should develop and validate a multi-item scale to examine different facets of ethical mentorship, including clarity of instruction, modeling of ethical behavior, and opportunities for dialogue.

Looking ahead, several promising directions emerge for future studies. Longitudinal research could track how students' ethical perceptions evolve over time, offering insight into how ethical reasoning develops throughout their academic careers in response to institutional messaging and exposure to AI tools. Comparative studies across institutions with divergent AI policies and pedagogical approaches could illuminate the contextual factors that shape students' ethical stances and behaviors. Additionally, intervention-based research could test the efficacy of educational frameworks, such as the holistic model proposed in this study, for teaching AI ethics and fostering the development of a personal ethical compass. Such work would contribute to a deeper understanding of how to support ethical decision-making in technology-enhanced learning environments.

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International Journal of Educational Studies
Vol. 8, No. 4, pp. 75-85
2025
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