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An Environmental Review of the Generative Artificial Intelligence Policies and Guidelines of South African Higher Education Institutions: A Content Analysis

Chaka Chaka*, Thembeka Shange, Tlatso Nkhobo and Vivienne Hlatshwayo
University of South Africa
Pretoria, South Africa

Abstract. As a result of the inroads generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) models such as ChatGPT have made into the higher education sector, there is an urgent need has arisen to investigate the types of GenAI policies South African higher education institutions (HEIs) have developed in response to GenAI. To date, no study has explored this aspect of South African higher education. With this in mind, this paper reports on an online rapid environmental review of the GenAI policies of 26 South African HEIs that were freely available on the websites of these HEIs or otherwise online. The main purpose of the paper is to establish whether these HEIs have institution-wide GenAI policies and, if so, what types of policies they are and what the contents of these policies comprise. The study employed a critical-ethics-based framing comprising six dimensions: the *Siyavuma*, semi-*Siyavuma*, critical, semi-critical, *uBuntu* and semi-*uBuntu* dimensions. It analyzed data through content and thematic analyses. Some of its findings are worth mentioning. Firstly, it discovered that five of the 26 South HEIs have their institution-wide GenAI policy documents freely available on their websites or online; one HEI has four such policy documents. The retrieved GenAI policy documents are mainly guides or guidelines. Secondly, academic staff and students are the main target audiences of the GenAI policy documents. Thirdly, ChatGPT is the most mentioned and the most cited GenAI tool in the reviewed policy documents. Fourthly, the responsible use of AI tools, GenAI and academic integrity, and risks and concerns of using GenAI tools feature as one instance of the main convergence points for the GenAI policy documents that spelled out their aims and their main foci. Lastly, six of the GenAI policy documents manifest elements of the critical dimension, whereas one GenAI policy document has features of the *uBuntu* dimension. The paper also makes relevant recommendations.

*Corresponding author: *Chaka Chaka, chakachaka8@gmail.com*

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1. Introduction

The sudden and continuing use of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) tools in the global higher education sector is now an accepted fact. And, by the look of things, their seismic effects seem to be unstoppable. When GenAI tools made their first appearance, especially as heralded by OpenAI's ChatGTP, and were later released *en masse* by different tech companies (big and small), many higher education institutions (HEIs) in South Africa and across the globe were caught unawares. Then, suddenly and temporarily, ChatGPT, in particular, was banned by some schools (Ceres, 2023; Chaka, 2023a), by some HEIs (Furze et al., 2024; University World News, 2023; also see El Khoury, 2024), and by some scientific journals (Sample, 2023). These initial, knee-jerk reactions seem to have subsided now, c xdalmost two years into the era of GenAI. Studies have been conducted with a view to establishing the GenAI policies of HEIs, particularly in the wake of GenAI tools such as ChatGPT. The studies that are relevant to our paper are those by Moorhouse et al. (2023), El Khoury (2024), Luo (2024), McDonald et al. (2024), and Niraula (2024).

Three of these studies (Luo, 2024; Moorhouse et al., 2023; Niraula, 2024) will be discussed briefly. Moorhouse et al. (2023) set out to review the types of guidelines the global 50 top-ranking HEIs formulated when GenAI started affecting higher education; the 50 HEIs was were selected from the Times Higher Education's 2023 *World University Rankings*. The study applied inclusion/exclusion criteria and collected its data (GenAI guidelines) via an online search of the official websites of the selected HEIs. Data extraction was conducted at the two levels of the retrieved GenAI guideline documents: the context level (e.g., the issuer of the guidelines, the issue date, and GenAI tools); and the content level (e.g., academic integrity, advice on assessment design, and communication with students). Each of the three themes under the content level was subdivided into subthemes. The study found that fewer than half of the reviewed HEIs had developed GenAI guidelines on academic integrity, assessment design advice, and communication with students. Regarding academic integrity, three subthemes stood out: plagiarism (e.g., forms of GenAI-related plagiarism), acknowledging GenAI (e.g., acknowledging GenAI use and citing AI-generated content), and detecting GenAI use (e.g., discouraging the use of GenAI detection tools). The guidelines for student assessment had to do, mainly, with GenAI-proofing assessment tasks/activities and with allowing students to use GenAI as an integral part of the assessment process. All the guidelines of the reviewed HEIs were publicly available online (Moorhouse et al., 2023).

In turn, Luo (2024), in response to challenges posed by GenAI to higher education assessment, critically examined the policies developed by the top 20 HEIs of the 2024 *QS World University Rankings*. This study employed a "what's the problem represented to be" framing and collected its data by searching the official websites of these HEIs. Luo found that 19 of these HEIs had GenAI policies on assessment publicly available on their websites, and that these HEIs represented their

problems in relation to GenAI policies on assessment in various ways. These ways included challenges posed by GenAI regarding the originality of students' work, the necessity to redesign assessment, and user data safety and GenAI fairness issues. Of these challenges, the originality of students' work in the midst of GenAI was the key problem represented in the policies, and related mainly to academic misconduct. On this score, one of the recommendations of the study is broadening the view on the originality of students' work, to one that transcends a narrow view driven by education surveillance. This holistic view of student originality embraces and recognizes the presence of and the role GenAI can play in student learning (Luo, 2024).

Niraula's (2024) study investigated the AI policies of nine HEIs in the United States that fell under the University of Texas system, with a view to establishing how these HEIs responded to the opportunities offered and the challenges posed by ChatGPT. The data used in the study comprised official policies, guidelines, and statements these institutions had developed after the development of GenAI. The study analyzed its data using thematic analysis and formulated eight themes and related subthemes. Two of the themes were AI as an opportunity and AI as a challenge. Some of the findings of this study are worth mentioning. Firstly, three HEIs were still to publish their GenAI policies or statements on their websites. Secondly, some of the HEIs had comprehensive GenAI policies or statements, while others did not. Thirdly, these HEIs displayed differing views of GenAI usage. They variously regarded GenAI as a++++n opportunity, as a challenge, and as a neutral tool (Niraula, 2024).

Against this background, the current study set out to conduct an online rapid environmental review of 26 South African universities—henceforth HEIs—with a view to establishing whether they have institution-wide GenAI policies and, if so, in what form, and what their contents constitute. In this context, one of the aims of the study was to find out if these HEIs' GenAI policies manifest elements of the *Siyavuma*, semi-*Siyavuma*, critical, semi-critical, *uBuntu*, and semi-*uBuntu* dimensions, as explained in the next section. The online rapid environmental review of the GenAI policies of these HEIs is necessitated by the effects GenAI tend to have for core areas of HEIs, such as teaching, learning, assessment, research, and innovation. Therefore, there is a need for robust GenAI policies that can provide guidelines for robust, fair, transparent, equitable, responsible, and ethical uses of GenAI tools in academia.

2. Critical Approach to Generative AI Ethics in Higher Education

The use of GenAI in different human contexts leads to questions relating to ethics, especially when it comes to the applications of GenAI in higher education. Some of the fear-triggering ethics concerns about the use of GenAI have been highlighted by reports of goings-on at some of the companies that own and deploy GenAI technologies. For example, the GenAI flagship company, OpenAI, which is the owner of ChatGPT, a chatbot that heralded the era of GenAI, is reported to have reneged on its commitment to preserve 20% of its computing power for controlling and mitigating the risks posed by AI. Its team of experts, called a superalignment team, that had been established in 2023 and that was

specifically tasked with monitoring and managing long-term, futuristic, and hypothetical AI safety, risks, and harms, has since collapsed because the team believed that the company prized its products over AI safety concerns (Kahn, 2024; Nolan & Mann, 2024; also see Booth & Pillay, 2024). Nolan and Mann (2024) refer to the team collapse as an OpenAI "safety team implosion" that could have put OpenAI on the back foot after its high-profile launch of ChatGPT on November 30, 2022. Hardly had the news of the team's collapse subsided than the company was dealt a humiliating blow. The company was accused of having plagiarized, cloned, or imitated the voice of a certain female actress for its Sky voice or for its GPT-4o's AI voice assistant tool without having secured the consent of the actress in question (Booth & Pillay, 2024; Kahn, 2024).

In light of the above, this paper employs an approach based on critical ethics in relation to GenAI use in higher education in South Africa to frame the paper and critique GenAI. This approach takes into account GenAI ethics, safety measures, accountability, transparency, fairness, equity, and democratization in relation to the architectures, infrastructures, algorithms, designs, and training data of GenAI (Conference on Fairness, Accountability, and Transparency, 2023; also see Murphy & Kinder, 2024; PYMNTS, 2024). The paper also considers inclusivity, representativeness, and diversity of training data, which needs to be devoid of tendencies to data colonialism and data extractivism (see Chaka, 2022). This approach argues that plagiarizing factual information and knowledge snippets and making up facts (hallucinating)—which are two of the key types of academic and scholarly dishonesty that HEIs frown upon—appear not to matter much for GenAI models or for the tech companies that own them. If they did care, these companies would not allow their GenAI products to continue plagiarizing and hallucinating information, as they are currently doing (Kalai & Vempala, 2024; Leffer, 2024).

A critical-ethics-based approach to GenAI calls for responsible use of GenAI by higher education in South Africa. Its view is that HEIs should be cautious and critical of how they embrace and encourage the use of GenAI, especially for research and for teaching and learning purposes. Above all, the critical-ethics-based approach to GenAI employed in this paper involves a critical-skeptical posture as articulated by Chaka (2024a). We extend Chaka's (2024a) posture, to embrace GenAI technologies while adopting an element of criticism and a degree of skepticism, so as to avoid falling into the trap of blind technologism. With this in mind, the critical ethics approach has six dimensions: the *Siyavuma*, semi-*Siyavuma*, critical, semi-critical, *uBuntu* and semi-*uBuntu* dimensions.

Siyavuma is an isiZulu phrase, which, loosely translated, means *we agree.* It resonates with a political term, *Viva*, which sometimes elicits blind chants from political followers as in *Viva! Viva! Viva!* (see Chaka et al., 2024); *Siyavuma* can also be chanted repetitively in this way. In this context, this term is used to refer to a user or an entity (e.g., an HEI) that has formulated a GenAI† policy that blindly

† Some HEIs in South Africa refer to such policies as AI policies as opposed to GenAI policies. Our paper prefers GenAI to AI as we believe that AI is too broad and that not all AI is generative in the sense of the currently available GenAI models, especially large

accepts the use of GenAI models, such as ChatGPT, or that is blindly framed to accept the use of GenAI models without questioning them. An extended use of *Siyavuma* is *Siyavuma* scholarship is a form of uncritical or *Viva* (unquestioning) scholarship. The semi-*Siyavuma* dimension refers to a GenAI policy that has partial *Siyavuma* elements or that displays a partial acceptance of the use of GenAI models. In contrast, the critical dimension refers to an HEI GenAI policy that questions or critiques some aspects of the content (e.g., text, image, audio clips, and video clips) generated by GenAI models, while the semi-critical dimension relates to a GenAI policy that partially questions some aspects of the use of GenAI models. The critical dimension is not about rejecting or resisting the use of GenAI models; rather, it means being situationally and commonsensically aware of the nuances related to using GenAI models beyond the utilitarian value they purport to offer (see Aschenbrenner, 2024).

Finally, the *uBuntu* dimension entails a GenAI policy that recognizes the human face (based on the humanness as embodied by the isiZulu word, *uBuntu*) that GenAI models should have. It acknowledges that GenAI models need to be people or user-oriented, as opposed to people or users being configured to be helplessly and fatalistically beholden to GenAI models. In this sense, it is about *putting people first* over machines, and not the other way round. Moreover, it privileges user data, privacy and protection concerns about the benefits of GenAI models, and foregrounds the safety risks and harms GenAI models may hold for users. This dimension invokes the caring elements of GenAI models and technology. Its equivalent is Shange's (2023) care pedagogy in an online learning environment. To this end, the semi-*uBuntu* dimension involves a GenAI policy that has partial elements of the *uBuntu* dimension.

3. Method

Currently, South Africa has 26 HEIs, of which 20 are traditional or comprehensive universities, and six are universities of technology (see BusinessTech, 2022; Department of Higher Education and Training, n.d.). When ChatGPT was launched late in 2022, South African HEIs were, as they are are still, grappling with the ever-evolving GenAI landscape, whose characteristic feature has been the incessant release of one GenAI tool after another. In view of this situation, the current study set out to conduct an online rapid environmental review of all 26 South African HEIs with a view to establishing whether they have institution-wide GenAI policies and, if so, what form they take and what constitutes the contents of these policies. One of its aims was to discover whether these HEIs' GenAI policies manifested elements of the *Siyavuma*, semi-*Siyavuma*, critical, semi-critical, *uBuntu*, and semi-*uBuntu* dimensions. An online rapid environmental review involves rapidly exploring, determining, and analyzing an environmental situation of a given landscape or of given entities while there is something urgent happing or evolving (see Environmental Emergency Center, 2019; Goode et al., 2012). In the case of South African HEIs, a rapidly evolving phenomenon is GenAI and the way HEIs are responding to GenAI's rapid evolution through formulating policies. The review was conducted online by searching for GenAI policies of the

language models (LLMs) as exemplified by ChatGPT (and its newest iterations), Copilot, Gemini, LLaMA, and Claude.

26 HEIs on their official websites and by searching for GenAI policies of these HEIs via Google and Bing.

An ethics clearance certificate was granted for this study by the College Research Ethics Committee, with registration and reference numbers NHREC Registration #: Rec-240816-052 and CREC Reference #: 35288353_CREC_CHS_2023, respectively.

The study pursued the following research questions (RQs):

- RQ1: What types of GenAI policies have South Africa's HEIs developed in response to GenAI tools?
- RQ2: What are the issue dates of these policies and which structures issued them?
- RQ3: What are the aims of these policies and what are their target audiences?
- RQ4: What are the main foci and themes of these policies?
- RQ5: What are the names of the GenAI tools mentioned in these policies and what are the views of the AI policies on GenAI in general?
- RQ6: What elements of the *Siyavuma*, semi-*Siyavuma*, critical, semi-critical, *uBuntu* and semi-*uBuntu* dimensions do these policies manifest?

3.1 Retrieving GenAI Policies

To retrieve and locate the GenAI policy documents of 26 South African HEIs, the internet website of each HEI was visited and searched by clicking on the items featured on its toolbar to find a GenAI or an AI policy, guidelines, statement, or announcement. If no GenAI information was retrievable from the toolbar menu items, search strings—GenAI policy, GenAI guidelines, GenAI statement, and GenAI announcement (see also Moorhouse et al., 2023; Niraula, 2024)—were entered into a website's search tab. The term GenAI was alternated with AI to ensure all policy information was found. When an HEI's website did not yield any result, both Google and Bing search engines were used to search for the same alternate search strings together with an HEI name. The GenAI retrieval process was conducted from June 10 to 21, 2024 by four of the co-authors of the current paper. All four co-authors (hereafter raters) were assigned to work on specific HEIs from the 26 HEIs as follows: 6 HEIs each for two raters, and 7 HEIs each for the other two raters. All of the raters hold doctoral degrees in English language studies and were regarded as suitably qualified to serve as raters. They retrieved GenAI policy documents of their designated HEIs on the websites of these HEIs or online. One of the four raters also acted as an overall overseer of the retrieval process. Where necessary, he also helped locate GenAI policy information that was not easily retrievable, in order to ascertain the online availability of such information. The four raters individually compiled and saved the retrieved policy documents in MS Word files, and archived them in folders. They used a scoring rubric with aspects relating to the six RQs of this study. They shared their folders with one another to cross-check each other's scoring.

3.2 Inclusion Criteria

All 26 HEIs in South Africa were included in the study. Similarly, every GenAI policy document that was retrievable from each HEI's website or through an online search strategy, was considered for inclusion. This was done to ensure inclusivity for all 26 HEIs based on the online presence of their institution-wide GenAI policy documents. Therefore, this online rapid environmental review study differs from conventional rapid review studies that have watertight, inflexible inclusion and exclusion criteria. To be considered for inclusion, GenAI policy documents had to have been written and published in English. Such policy documents also had to be university-wide in their orientation, and not focused narrowly or on faculty or on a single university structure. In addition, they had to be publicly available on HEIs' websites or retrievable online (see Luo, 2024). If any GenAI policy of the 26 HEIs does not feature in the current study, it is not because such a policy was excluded, but rather that, at the time of conducting this study, the policy in question or the information related to such policy was not available or retrievable, either on an HEI's website or online. There was no need to look for hard copies of such GenAI policies, because electronic copies posted online are the most easily accessible. Besides, in the age of GenAI, in which digital information is the order of the day, it is inconceivable that HEIs would have hard copies of their GenAI policy and, yet, fail to make the policy available online for their students and the general public to locate them easily.

3.3 Data Extraction

In all, eight GenAI policy documents were retrieved from a pool of 26 HEIs. The following served as the units of data extracted from these documents: types of GenAI polices; issue dates; issuers; aims of GenAI policies; target audiences; main foci; GenAI ethics; GenAI policy themes; names of GenAI tools; and elements of the *Siyavuma*, semi-*Siyavuma*, critical, semi-critical, uBuntu and semi-uBuntu dimensions. These types of data units are sometimes referred to as characteristics (see Bond et al., 2024; Chaka, 2024b). As the different data files existed in MS Word files, each of the four raters manually extracted the data units they identified from the GenAI policy documents they had retrieved. To ensure the quality and relevance of the GenAI policy documents from which data sets were extracted, the following three questions were posed:

(a) Does a retrieved document have anything to say about an HEI's GenAI policy?
(b) If so, is it a university-wide GenAI policy?
(c) Is the structure that issued a GenAI policy an official university structure?

3.4 Data Analysis

Owing to the nature of the data types collected for this study, which were in the form of documents (e.g., policies, guidelines, or statements), the ideal forms of data analysis were content analysis and thematic analysis. The nuances of these two forms of data analysis are not the focus of the current study—these nuances are explained by, for example, Vaismoradi et al. (2013, 2016; also see Chaka et al., 2020; Enago Academy, 2024).

Firstly, a bespoke, step-wise, blended coding scheme comprising elements of both content and thematic analyses was designed (see Figure 1). As depicted in Figure 1, each form of analysis had six steps. For content analysis, the first two steps dealt with developing a coding scheme and identifying units of analysis based on the RQs and on the retrieved GenAI policy documents. The next two steps, Steps 3 and 4, involved calculating the occurrence frequencies of the identified units of analysis and contextually analyzing these units of analysis. The coding for the first step was carried out collectively by four raters, while the coding processes for Steps 2, 3, and 4 were conducted individually by the four raters. The last two steps entailed calculating the inter-rater reliability of and the agreement on the coding processes of the four raters, and collectively sharing and harmonizing the coding processes. To calculate the inter-rater reliability and agreement, Cohen's kappa (κ) was used (see Cohen, 1960; McHugh, 2012). The inter-rater reliability between the four raters is 0.85, which was considered to be sufficient and satisfactory.

Content Analysis

Step 1: Developing a Coding Scheme (Collectively)
Developing a coding scheme based on units of analysis from the study's research questions and from retrieved GenAI policy documents.

Step 2: Identification of Key Words/Phrases (Individually)
Identifying units of analysis contained in GenAI policy documents.

Step 3: Frequency of Key Words/Phrases (Individually)
Calculating occurrence frequencies of units of analysis in GenAI policy documents.

Step 4: Analysis of Key Words/Phrases in Context (Individually)
Analysing units of analysis contained in GenAI policy documents in context.

Step 5: Calculating Inter-Rater Reliability and Agreement (Independent Rater)
Calculating the inter-rater reliability of and the agreement about the coding process by the four raters using Cohen's kappa (κ) (Cohen, 1960; McHugh, 2012).

Step 6: Sharing and harmonising content coding results (Collectively)
Raters shared and harmonise their content coding scores.

Thematic Analysis

Step 1: Developing a Coding Scheme (Collectively)
Developing a coding scheme based on themes contained in the content of GenAI policy documents as informed by the study's research questions.

Step 2: Identifying Initial Themes (Individually)
(a) Identifying themes related to types of GenAI tools mentioned in the retrieved GenAI policy documents.
(b) Identifying themes emerging from the focus of the content of the GenAI policy documents, including the intended target audience for such policy documents.
(c) Identifying elements of the *Siyavuma*, semi-*Siyavuma*, critical, semi-critical, *uBuntu*, and semi-*uBuntu* dimensions in the GenAI policy documents.

Step 3: Refining Initial Themes and Formulating Final Themes (Individually)
Where necessary, initial themes were refined and final themes were formulated.

Step 4: Formulating theoretical constructs (Individually)
(a) Theoretical constructs based on final themes were formulated.
(b) Linking theoretical constructs to the study's theoretical framework.

Step 5: Calculating Inter-Rater Reliability and Agreement (Independent Rater)
Calculating the inter-rater reliability of and the agreement about the coding process by the four raters using Cohen's kappa (κ) (Cohen, 1960; McHugh, 2012).

Step 6: Sharing and harmonising thematic coding results (Collectively)
Raters shared and harmonise their thematic coding process.

Synthesising the Two Methods of Analysis (Collectively)
Aspects of the two methods of analysis were synthesised in the discussion of the findings.

Figure 1. A blended coding scheme for content analysis and thematic analysis(Collated from Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 391; Chaka et al., 2020, p. 502, Enago Academy, 2024; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006, p. 5; Saunders et al., 2023, pp. 2, 3)

Secondly, and as evident in Figure 1, for thematic analysis, the first two steps comprised developing a coding scheme and identifying initial themes. The first step encompassed developing this coding scheme according to the themes emerging from the contents of GenAI policy documents in line with the study's RQs. The second step involved locating and establishing initial themes, of which the following were examples: initial themes concerning the types of GenAI tools mentioned in the retrieved GenAI policy documents; initial themes emerging from the foci of the content of these policy documents, together with the intended target audiences; and the elements of the *Siyavuma*, semi-*Siyavuma*, critical, semi-critical, *uBuntu*, and semi-*uBuntu* dimensions manifested by the GenAI policy documents. The coding in these two steps was carried out collectively and individually. The coding of the next two steps, Steps 3 and 4, was conducted individually, and had to do, respectively, with refining initial themes and formulating final themes (where necessary), and formulating theoretical constructs. With regard to the latter, theoretical constructs were formulated based on the final themes, and were, then, linked to the study's theoretical framework. Finally, the last two steps entailed, as was the case with the last two steps of the content analysis coding, calculating the inter-rater reliability of and the agreement about the coding process of the four raters and collectively sharing and harmonizing the coding process. The calculation of the inter-rater reliability was, again, conducted using Cohen's kappa (κ) (see Cohen, 1960; McHugh, 2012); the reliability is 0.80.

4. Findings

For ease of reference and for synergy purposes, the findings of this study are presented according to the six RQs.

4.1 Types, Issue Dates, Issuers, and Aims of GenAI Policies Developed by South African HEIs in Response to GenAI Tools

Out of 26 South African HEIs, eight institution-wide GenAI policy documents from five HEIs were located and retrieved from the respective HEIs' websites or online. For the other 21 HEIs, their GenAI policy documents were not available on either their websites or online at the time the study was conducted. If there were policy documents, they were not institution-wide policies, but rather GenAI polices for given structures of these HEIs. One of the 21 HEIs had its set of GenAI policy documents locked in its intranet, which could not be accessed by raters. Of the eight retrieved GenAI policy documents, four belong to one HEI – three of them are guides and the fourth one comprises guidelines and recommendations. Of the remaining four institution-wide GenAI policy documents, two were guidelines, while the other two policy documents were a (quick) guide and a position statement (see Table 1). One of the two policy guidelines is an interim policy guidelines document. The seven GenAI policy documents had the following issue dates (with HEIs apportioned numbers to protect their names): HEI 1 = August 2023; HEI 2 = GenAI policy document 2a (September 18, 2023), GenAI policy document 2b (September 18, 2023[‡]), GenAI policy document 2c (September 18, 2023), and GenAI policy document 2d (October 2023); HEI 3 =

[‡] Even though the issue date of this GenAI policy document is 18 September 2023, the document states that the policy itself was written in May 2023.

March 2024; and HEI 4 = May 2024. The eighth document (HEI 5) was undated or its issue date was not indicated. Six of the institutional GenAI policy documents for HEI 1, HEI 2 (n = 4), and HEI 5 had clearly identifiable issuers. One GenAI policy (HEI 4) had an issuer whose identity could only be surmised. The last one (HEI 3) had no identifiable issuer. In total five of these policy documents (HEI 2 (n= 4) and HEI 5 (n = 1) had their GenAI aims clearly spelled out, while the other three did not. The stated aims of these five GenAI policies related to the responsible use of AI tools by their respective audiences and suggestions to mitigate the threats to academic integrity posed by GenAI.

Table 1: Information about GenAI policies of South African HEIs as at the time of conducting the current study

South African HEIs[i]	GenAI Policies	GenAI Policy Types	Issue Dates	Number of GenAI Tools Mentioned
HEI 1	1 (n = 1)	Quick guide	August 2023	7[ii]
HEI 2	2a, 2b, 2c and 2d (n = 4)	2a = Staff guide 2b = Staff guide 2c = Student guide 2d = Guidelines and recommendations	2a = 18 September 2023 2b = 18 September 2023 2c = 18 September 2023 2d = October 2023	2a = 7 2b = 17 2c = 16 2d = 1
HEI 3	1 (n = 1)	Guidelines	13 March 2024	None
HEI 4	1 (n = 1)	Position statement	9 May 2024	11
HEI 5	1 (n = 1)	Interim guidelines	Not available	5
HEI 6[iii]	N/A			
HEI 7	N/A[iv]			
HEI 8	N/A[iv]			
HEI 9	N/A[iv]			
HEI 10	N/A[iv]			
HEI 11	N/A[iv]			
HEI 12	N/A[iv]			
HEI 13	N/A[iv]			
HEI 14	N/A[iv]			
HEI 15	N/A[iv]			
HEI 16	N/A[iv]			
HEI 17	N/A[iv]			
HEI 18	N/A[iv]			
HEI 19	N/A[iv]			
HEI 20	N/A[iv]			
HEI 21	N/A[iv]			
HEI 22	N/A[iv]			
HEI 23	N/A[iv]			
HEI 24	N/A[iv]			
HEI 25	N/A[iv]			
HEI 26	N/A[iv]			

Notes. [i] = Numbers were assigned to the HEIs not according to the alphabetical order usually followed in listing South African HIEs in their collective database or whenever they are listed together; [ii] = six of these GenAI tools are mentioned in Footnote 2; [iii] = the GenAI policy documents of this HEI were locked in its intranet, [iv] = GenAI policy documents for HEI 7 to HEI 26 were not available when the study was conducted.

4.2 Target Audiences, Main Focus of the Contents of the Policies, and Whether These Contents Include GenAI Ethics

In total six of the eight retrieved institutional GenAI policy documents explicitly specified their target audiences by group names such as staff (HEI 2's GenAI policy documents 2a and 2b), students (HEI 2's GenAI policy document 2c), staff and students (HEI 4), lecturers and students (HEI 5), and researchers (HEI 2's

GenAI policy document 2d). The remaining two GenAI policy documents did not specify their target audiences, even though, for one of them (HEI 3), one could read between the lines that its policy document is intended for students. The same six GenAI policy documents issued by the same three institutions that clearly mentioned their target audiences spelled out the main foci of their policy documents. These main foci ranged from teaching, learning, assessment, research, innovation, and engagement (HEI 4) to the ethical and responsible use of GenAI tools for producing outputs to be presented as one's own work (HEI 5). The documents also discussed the impact of GenAI tools and minimizing threats posed by GenAI to academic integrity (HEI 2, GenAI policy document 2a), the potential uses of GenAI tools for teaching and learning, and exploring risks and ethics concerns relating to GenAI (HEI 2, GenAI policy document 2a). Additionally, GenAI policy document 2a of HEI 2 advises students about ethical approaches to using GenAI tools. The main content focus of the last GenAI policy document is on the guidelines and recommendations for using GenAI systems in research (HEI 2, GenAI policy document 2d).

The eight GenAI policy documents address different aspects of GenAI ethics. The policy documents of HEI 5, HEI 1 and HEI 3 address wide-ranging areas of GenAI ethics. For instance, HEI 5's GenAI document refers to accountability, authenticity, transparency, and fairness in relation to lecturers' and students' use of GenAI tools for teaching, learning and assessment. In this context, accountability entails the responsible use of GenAI by authors; ascertaining the accuracy of one's work, and evaluating and verifying AI-generated content; warnings about false information, misappropriation, or the sharing personal data; and being aware of both the harm GenAI can cause and its potential bias. Authenticity involves declaring that GenAI tools were used (if they were); knowing whether GenAI use is permitted in student tasks; avoiding outsourcing learning to GenAI machines; and critically engaging with AI-generated content. Transparency relates to disclosing and describing how GenAI tools were used in one's work and the rationale for their use, with a view to avoiding GenAI-aided plagiarism; understanding the potential limitations of GenAI; reviewing privacy settings and being aware of GenAI tools' terms and conditions. To this end, fairness deals with the ethical and responsible use of GenAI tools; managing and handling suspected GenAI-related irregularities carefully and justly; designing assessment tasks that minimize the temptation to use AI-generated output; and considering issues of equity, fairness, and access that have the potential to perpetuate the digital divide. Most importantly, students are provided with guidance about instances when or stages at which they can use GenAI in their work under allowable GenAI use.

For its part, HEI 1's policy document also frames its GenAI ethics in terms of four dimensions: responsibility, informedness, transparency, and ethicality. Its first dimension deals with the responsibility of students when they use GenAI tools, who should understand how GenAI tools could aid them in the planning stages of their work (e.g., assignments and research), and how GenAI tools could generate information for them. Informedness requires students to learn more about GenAI tools and to understand the limitations and the ethical risks GenAI

tools pose for worker exploitation (during their design and development process of the tools), privacy, data (and data leaks), and copyright and intellectual property infringements. Transparency has to do with declaring that GenAI tools were used and how they were used. Lastly, ethicality is related to differentiating between the student's own work and the content/image generated by GenAI tools by citing and using quotation marks. This dimension emphasizes that presenting AI-generated work as one's own is tantamount to academic misconduct.

In this regard, all the information related to ethics in HEI 3's GenAI policy document is directed at student use concerning assignments. To this effect, it addresses transparency, honesty, integrity, and accountability and ownership. It also speaks to privacy, security, and safety, and referencing and acknowledgment. For transparency and honesty, it requires students to disclose and retain a record of their use of GenAI, to be honest about GenAI usage in their work, and to adhere to the GenAI use guidelines provided by their lecturers or supervisors, to avoid being accused of academic dishonesty. Regarding integrity, students are cautioned against leaving control of their own academic trustworthiness to GenAI machine use. Regarding accountability and ownership, students are reminded that they alone (as human authors) are the sole owners of their work and that they cannot apportion the blame for fictitious, biased, or inaccurate information in their work to GenAI tools. Concerning privacy, security, and safety measures, students are exhorted to protect their personal data and to adhere to user privacy requirements of the various GenAI systems, because the use of these systems pose privacy, security, and safety challenges. For referencing and acknowledgment purposes, students are expected to provide proper citations and to give due acknowledgment/credit when GenAI tools were used; using GenAI without appropriately acknowledging its use amounts to an unethical practice or to plagiarism. Moreover, the ethics part of the policy document urges students to keep pace with ethics and best practices in relation to GenAI and LLMs (large language models).

In terms of GenAI ethics, HEI 4's policy document stresses the need to encourage students to question and verify various sources of information they incorporate in their work. It also suggests that students (undergraduate and postgraduate) and staff must have open discussions related to different types of GenAI tools. GenAI use includes utilizing AI to search for information, elucidate concepts, acquire insight, enrich understanding, and critically assess information. This policy document then spells out unacceptable GenAI uses, such as passing off AI-generated output as one's own; responding to assignments, assessments, and projects through AI-generated information (unless permission has been granted to do so); using GenAI unfairly and using it without duly referencing its output; and copying and pasting AI-generated output that infringes copyrighted material and intellectual property. Additionally, unacceptable GenAI uses involve the failure to adhere to GenAI permissions and prohibitions stipulated in assessment guidelines, a lack of transparency in using GenAI, and unwillingness to disclose use of GenAI in one's work.

HEI 2's GenAI policy documents have their own sets of GenAI ethics, which are directed at staff, students, and researchers. The staff guide on assessment and academic integrity requires staff to inform students about acceptable uses of GenAI tools in assessments. If staff encourage or allow the use of GenAI tools, they should mention those tools, and indicate whether and how they are to be used in a given module or for a given assessment. In addition, staff are expected to provide accompanying conditions in module plagiarism declaration statements, to guide students on the uses of GenAI, and spell out the consequences of misusing GenAI and of academic misconduct. The recommended approach to dealing with GenAI by staff is to espouse and customize it according to their varying circumstances.

Moreover, staff have to indicate if and how any GenAI detection tools are to be used. However, the use of AI or plagiarism detection tools to determine AI-generated text is problematic because of these tools' unreliability and their false positives, and because the student data uploaded onto such tools are controlled by third-party companies, whose personal data usage and privacy policies pose unpredictable legal and ethics risks. Crucially, staff need to note that the risks posed by GenAI include data set irrelevance or outdatedness, biased and unrepresentative data sets, and inaccuracies and hallucinations in data generated. Finally, the guide lists a classification of GenAI risks, ranked in a dimensional scale ranging from the most deliberate to the least deliberate uses/misuses. Two examples of this classification are designated uses and misaligned and power-seeking AI.

The GenAI ethics of HEI 2's staff guide on teaching and learning relates mainly to academic integrity (differentiating between utilizing AI as an assistant/enabler and using it for generating academic content for students), and to privacy issues (student data stored on GenAI tools and how it relates to Protection of Personal Information Act [POPIA] requirements). It also flags inaccuracies in GenAI tools' outputs, the risk of misinformation, and GenAI tools' hallucinations; GenAI tools' inherent biases, which privilege Western-centric knowledge over other/local forms of knowledge, their lack of cultural diversity, GenAI tools' potential to perpetuate racism and sexism; the alleged exploitative labor practices of the owners of GenAI tools; and accessibility concerns, especially for underprivileged communities (in this case, students). The student guide on GenAI flags the same ethics concerns and risks, and also refers to the irrelevance or outdatedness of GenAI's data sets, which is flagged by the staff guide on assessment and academic integrity, and student overreliance on GenAI, which may hinder the development of critical skills by students.

For its part, HEI 2's GenAI policy document 2d advises researchers, when they use GenAI tools for conducting research, to adhere to existing institutional research values and research policies. Some of these values are fairness, honesty, transparency, courtesy, and accountability. It also emphasizes data privacy, the bias inherent in the training data of GenAI tools, and the potential for unscrupulous users engaging in irresponsible or unethical research practices (e.g., falsifying, fabricating, and plagiarizing information). In addition, it urges

researchers to acknowledge their use of GenAI tools in their research. Moreover, the policy document makes a distinction between using GenAI tools to help improve one's writing (which poses minimum risk of plagiarism) and using these tools to generate one's writing (text) or to analyze one's data (which poses a high-level risk). In either case, researchers are required to disclose if they used such AI tools.

4.3 Themes into Which GenAI Policy Documents Are Divided

The eight GenAI policy documents of the five HEIs are divided into various themes. In Figure 2, eight sets of the examples of the themes (with each set having a pair of examples) from each of the GenAI policy documents are provided without disclosing the numbers assigned to the five HEIs.

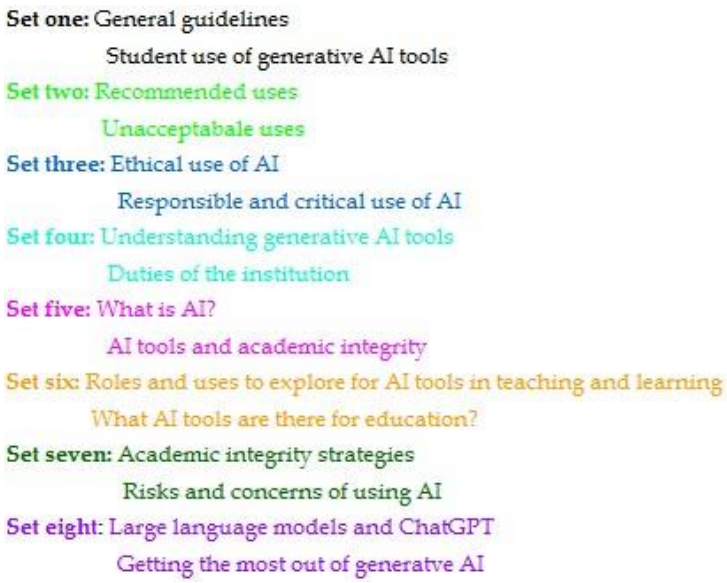

Figure 2: Samples of eight sets of the themes of the reviewed GenAI policies

The two GenAI policy documents with the most themes have 11 and 10 themes, respectively, while the two policies with the fewest themes have three and four themes, respectively. Salient points embodied in the themes of all GenAI policy documents are acceptable and responsible or ethical uses of GenAI tools and the risks to academic integrity posed by GenAI tools.

4.4 Names of GenAI Tools Mentioned in the Policy Documents and the AI Policies' Views on GenAI in General

The names of GenAI tools are mentioned by seven of the eight GenAI policy documents, whereas one policy document does not mention or refer to any GenAI tool by name. One policy document mentions 17 GenAI tools, and one mentions 16 GenAI tools—both of them are from HEI 2's sets of policy documents. One policy document (also of HEI 2) refers to only one GenAI tool, which is ChatGPT). One of the other GenAI policy documents mentions one GenAI tool (ChatGPT) in the main body of its text, and refers to six GenAI tools in a footnote. ChatGPT is

the most mentioned GenAI tool in all seven GenAI policy documents, and is followed by Bing AI/Copilot[§3] (n = 6) and Midjourney (n = 5).

Concerning the eight views of GenAI policies on GenAI in general, three policies regard GenAI as having the potential for both benefits and limitations and risks. Two other policies only encourage the use of GenAI when or if it is allowed, while acknowledging GenAI limitations and risks. Of the three remaining policies, one advocates for the proper use and deliberate integration of GenAI, so that it is aligned with the institution's values, staff and students (graduate attributes), and to advance academic integrity, and minimizes academic dishonesty. Another policy encourages the responsible and ethical use of allowable GenAI tools, while acknowledging their limitations. The remaining policy espouses the view that higher education needs to adapt to and accommodate GenAI while being mindful of ethics-related issues.

4.5 Elements of *Siyavuma*, Semi-*Siyavuma*, Critical, Semi-critical, *uBuntu* and Semi-*uBuntu* Manifested by These GenAI Policies

In total six of the eight GenAI policies that were reviewed had elements of the critical dimension, while the other two policies manifested features of the semi-critical dimension as described in this paper. For example, four of these policies flag the outdatedness of the training data sets of GenAI tools (which may compromise their data relevance), their inherent biases (which privilege Western-centric knowledge over other/local forms of knowledge), their lack of cultural diversity, and their potential to perpetuate racism and sexism. The policies also draw attention to the inaccuracies of GenAI outputs, and to their risk of producing hallucinations and misinformation. One policy refers to alleged exploitative labor practices by tech companies owning GenAI tools, while the other flagged the black-box nature of the training data of GenAI models. Still another policy warns users about the potential of GenAI tools to aggravate colonialism and Global South/North power asymmetries.

Furthermore, of the two remaining GenAI policies that reflect critical dimension elements, one warns about AI essay mills and recommends that users rephrase and critically evaluate AI-generated content. It also refers to the bias, stereotypes, and discriminatory tendencies that could be perpetuated by GenAI, and cautions against being dependent on GenAI at the expense of independent and critical thinking. The policy calls for awareness of the limitations of LLMs, such as generating credible untruths in the form of hallucinations, expressing simulated (fake) authority, or presenting convincing misinformation. Above all, it warns that LLMs and GenAI systems that plagiarize or violate copyright and intellectual property rights should be avoided. The other policy refers to equity, fairness, and access issues related to GenAI that may perpetuate the digital divide. It also flags affordability and accessibility issues, GenAI limitations, and the need for critical engagement with AI-generated output.

[§] Bing AI was replaced by Copilot in December 2023. See Microsoft Copilot is now generally available.

Of the two GenAI policies that manifest elements of the semi-critical dimension, one recommends training and encouraging students to question and verify information from various sources, and requiring students discuss the different types of GenAI. It also cautions students against claiming or presenting AI-generated content (text, image, or audio) as their own work, and encourages them to apply critical thinking skills to such content. The other policy explains that the validity of GenAI content is commensurate with the data and information available to GenAI tools. It points out that GenAI tools are prone to racial and gender bias, and can generate offensive content, fictitious information, and fake citations and references; therefore, recommends that facts are checked and verified. In all, the eight GenAI policies do not seem to manifest elements of the *Siyavuma* and semi-*Siyavuma* dimensions as spelled out in this paper.

Regarding the *uBuntu* dimension, one of the eight reviewed GenAI policies tends to reflect elements of this dimension. It does so under an amalgam of pedagogy and AI. Under this amalgam, the policy encourages inclusiveness and active student participation, and calls for critical thinking, acquiring problem-solving skills, and student-centric learning. It acknowledges unequal student access to GenAI and recommends establishing an agreement between academics and students about using GenAI and maintaining academic integrity. It also advises academics to establish fair mechanisms to determine the impact of GenAI use on students' overall grades, because there is no detector tool available yet that can offer conclusive results about the presence/absence of AI-generated content. Consequently, the policy entrusts academics with the responsibility to fully determine the extent of AI use in student work, and cautions that no academic integrity sanctions can be imposed on either students or academics based on the current AI detection tools.

The other six GenAI policies tend to evince varying degrees of elements of the semi-*uBuntu* dimension. For instance, one of them urges compliance with POPIA requirements for using GenAI systems, as these systems are capable of collecting metadata even when chat history features have been disabled. Additionally, it recommends users (e.g., students) to review privacy settings of their GenAI accounts and to be aware of terms and conditions when they sign up for GenAI tools. The other three policy documents warn users about protecting the privacy of their personal data and about respecting the privacy of the data of other users when utilizing GenAI tools. One of these three policy documents even recommends courtesy and fairness when working with others and using GenAI tools. Of the remaining two GenAI policy documents, one warns that GenAI tools and AI or plagiarism detection tools provide no guarantee of the safety and protection of students' private personal data, and the other one draws attention to privacy issues (student data stored on GenAI tools versus POPIA requirements), and to accessibility concerns, especially for underprivileged communities or students. Only one of the GenAI polices reviewed lacks features of the *uBuntu* dimension.

5. Discussion

Guided by six RQs, the current study had the following purpose: to conduct an online rapid environmental review of 26 HEIs in South Africa with a view to establishing whether they have institution-wide GenAI policies and, if they do, what forms the policies take and what constitutes their contents. To this end, the study located and retrieved eight institutional GenAI policy documents of five of South Africa's 26 HEIs. All of them were freely available on these HEIs' websites or were freely available online. While the absence of an HEI's GenAI policy document on its website or online does not necessarily translate into an HEI not having any GenAI policy, the pertinent question is, why, in the very age of AI, would any HEI's GenAI policy document not be freely available online? There may be various reasons for this, even though such reasons are a hard nut to crack. Reasons may include prolonged and ongoing stakeholder consultation processes, indecision, and adopting a wait-and-see approach. Wang et al. (2024) attribute indecision (undecidedness) about university GenAI policies and statements to a university having not yet taken a clear-cut stand on GenAI. Niraula's (2024) study on the GenAI policies of nine University of Texas HEIs in the United States found that four of these HEIs had neutral (non-committal) stances on GenAI, which supported neither the pros nor the cons of GenAI usage. Another cause could be that some of South Africa's HEIs are late, and not early, adopters and followers of GenAI policies. What cannot be disputed is the need for GenAI policies, where they exist, to be freely availability on HEIs' websites. Most importantly, as Xiao et al. (2023) argue, a university's GenAI policy (in whatever form) plays a catalytic role in institutional and pedagogical transformation, especially in an era that sees perpetual releases of GenAI tools.

The typology of GenAI policies identified (four guides, three guidelines, and one position statement) resonates with the transitional, fluid, ephemeral, and unpredictable nature of GenAI. A permanent policy document would be unsuitable, because it requires devise-and-adapt-as-you-go planning. This type of planning also translates into perpetual or beta GenAI planning or policy. Therefore, HEIs that still do not have any GenAI policy documents deny themselves the opportunity to be part of this emerging perpetual or beta GenAI planning movement.

The issuers of six GenAI policy documents ranged from centers overseeing teaching and learning and a substructure of senate, to a university as an institution. Moorhouse et al. (2023) report that 15 guidelines for assessment and AI were issued by centers of teaching, learning or innovation and three by offices of the provost. Two policies each were issued by centers for technology and by offices for academic integrity/community standards/ethics, respectively, while three policies did not specify their issuers. Concerning the eight GenAI policies reviewed by the current study, the earliest identifiable date on which a policy was issued is August 2023. In a different context, Chan and Colloton (2024) assert that the University of Hong Kong was the first HEI to have had AI assessment and policy guidelines ready and adopted, even though it is not clear when the guidelines were issued and whether it was the first of only Asian HEIs or of all HEIs globally. However, Moorhouse et al. (2023) mention that the earliest date

one of the world's 50 top-ranked HEIs they investigated issued its AI and assessment guidelines was January 2023. They contend that, between February 2023 and June 2023, other HEIs followed suit.

The target audiences of the six GenAI policy documents that explicitly specified such audiences were staff (n = 2), staff and students (n = 2), students (n = 1), and researchers (n = 1). Wang et al. (2024) studied the GenAI resources and guidelines of the top 100 universities in the United States, and report that 70 of such resources and guidelines were for faculty and instructors, while 19 of them were for students. The ideal situation would be for all relevant stakeholders who want to use GenAI to have GenAI guidelines (including resources) that were designed for them.

The responsible and ethical use of AI tools and the suggestions to extenuate the threats to academic integrity posed by GenAI are two of the core motifs around which the aims of the five GenAI policies that state such aims coalesce. The same core motifs speak to the main foci of the six GenAI policy documents that spelled out the main foci of their respective contents. Common themes of all the reviewed GenAI policy documents are the responsible use of AI tools, GenAI and academic integrity, and risks and concerns of using GenAI tools (see Figure 2). Academic integrity and the responsible and ethical use of AI featured as the most common themes across 40 universities representing six global regions, whose institutional AI policies and guidelines were investigated by Jin et al. (2024). Similarly, academic integrity, and academic integrity and plagiarism, are among the major themes found in the HEIs' GenAI guidelines by Moorhouse et al. (2023) and Niraula (2024), respectively. Likewise, plagiarism prevention, which is an integral part of academic integrity, was the second-most-common purpose and focus of the GenAI polices of the world's 50 top-ranked HEIs (Moorhouse et al., 2023). To this effect, Chan and Colloton (2024) point out that academic integrity is one of the principal concerns when it comes to the use of GenAI tools (also see McDonald et al., 2024).

In this study, in the seven GenAI policy documents that mentioned GenAI tools, ChatGPT featured as the most cited GenAI tool, followed by Bing AI/Copilot and Midjourney. This means that, since its release, ChatGPT is still a preferred GenAI tool. Even in most of the studies focusing on GenAI policies cited in the current paper (see, for example, El Khoury, 2024; Luo, 2024; McDonald et al., 2024, Moorhouse et al., 2023; Niraula, 2024), ChatGPT is the most-referenced GenAI tool. However, Bing AI/Copilot, in the second spot, seems to be knocking hard at the door of recognition of GenAI tools by the GenAI policy documents reviewed by this paper.

As demonstrated earlier, GenAI ethics is addressed in many and varied ways by the reviewed GenAI policy documents, even though there are convergence points. For instance, accountability, authenticity, transparency, and fairness constitute areas of convergence for six of the policy documents. While they are framed differently, GenAI ethics concepts are related to the accountable, authentic, transparent, and fair use of GenAI tools in academic work (see Conference on

Fairness, Accountability, and Transparency, 2023; Imbrie et al., 2023). Such use, which subsumes the responsible and acceptable use of GenAI, entails, among other goals, upholding academic integrity by knowing whether the use of GenAI is permitted, declaring or disclosing the use of GenAI if it was used, knowing that GenAI can falsify or misrepresent information and that it is prone to hallucinating, and verifying the accuracy and validity of AI-generated content. Furthermore, AI content must be cited and referenced if it is used, GenAI's potential for copyright and intellectual property infringements must be understood, and users must be aware that GenAI has inherent biases (see Right to Warn About Advanced Artificial Intelligence, 2024). All of these forms of ethics are related to maintaining and protecting academic integrity and are meant to prevent academic dishonesty that could emanate, to varying degrees, from the use of GenAI.

Six of the reviewed GenAI policy documents refer to data privacy under GenAI ethics. This topic relates mainly to the privacy and protection of student data and how it could be compromised by using GenAI tools. Data privacy and security of students and instructors are among the aspects mentioned by the GenAI policies and guidelines of 28 of the top 100 universities in the United States investigated by Wang et al. (2024; also see Gallent-Torres et al., 2023). It is also one of the characteristic themes for which incompatibility was noted in the GenAI policies and guidelines adopted by 25 of the 60 global HEIs studied by Jin et al. (2024). Two of the GenAI policy documents reviewed in the present study explain how the storage of private student data by GenAI tools is likely to violate the POPIA. These two GenAI policy documents, together with another, flag accessibility or equity challenges for underprivileged students posed by GenAI tools, and how these challenges are likely to perpetuate the digital divide (also see Conference on Fairness, Accountability, and Transparency, 2023; Imbrie et al., 2023; Right to Warn About Advanced Artificial Intelligence, 2024). Apprehension about the potential of the use of GenAI to exacerbate digital inequities cannot be overlooked, given the existence of the *digital haves* and *have nots* in some societies, especially in resource-poor societies (see Aderibigbe et al., 2023; Jin et al., 2924; McDonald et al., 2024; Nyaaba et al., 2024; Chaka, 2022).

In addition, the irrelevance or outdatedness of the training data of GenAI tools and the way these tools tend to privilege Western-centric knowledge over other/local forms of knowledge, as flagged by two of the reviewed GenAI policy documents, are among the concerns raised by scholars. For example, Chaka (2023b) discusses the first concern, while Hacker et al. (2024) and Nyaaba et al. (2024) identify the Western bias or the unrepresentative nature of GenAI. Nyaaba et al. (2024) contend that GenAI often tends to mirror Western ideologies and norms, which it then imposes on non-Western parts of the globe. They refer to this practice as digital neo-colonialism.

With regard to the critical and *uBuntu* dimensions and their attendant graded dimensions, six of the reviewed GenAI policy documents evince elements of the critical dimension, while the other two have elements of the semi-critical dimension. Examples of the elements of the former dimension, which is about taking a critical stance on GenAI, include flagging the unreliability and

inaccuracies of both GenAI tools and AI or plagiarism detection tools; the propensity of GenAI tools to hallucinate and of AI detection tools to yield false positives; and the unrepresentative and short-lived nature of GenAI tools' data sets. Also included in these elements are aspects such as GenAI tools' lack of cultural diversity in terms of their training data and their potential to perpetuate racism and sexism and to entrench the digital divide. However, few of these points of criticism are new, and some of them are raised, to varying degrees, by scholars such as Nyaaba et al. (2024) and Hacker et al. (2024).

Concerning the *uBuntu* dimension, one reviewed GenAI policy document had elements of it, whereas the other six policy documents displayed elements of the semi-*uBuntu* dimension. In contrast, one GenAI policy document seemed to lack such elements altogether. A policy document that appeared to have elements of the *uBuntu* dimension covered wide-ranging issues under its amalgam of pedagogy and AI. The *uBuntu* dimension in respect of GenAI relates to people who wield power at HEIs not simply throwing students and academics (users in general) under the GenAI bus by claiming that they have no control over GenAI tools. u*Buntu* involves putting users first, before GenAI machines, and caring (see Shange, 2023) about their privacy, security, and safety in the face of the GenAI juggernaut. Finally, none of the reviewed GenAI policy documents seemed to espouse the *Siyavuma* and semi-*Siyavuma* approaches to dealing with GenAI.

The GenAI policy documents that were reviewed appear to be reactions to the "wonderment phase" (Holmquist, 2024) of GenAI, which entails the hype, excitement, and frenzy initially associated with GenAI. During the wonderment phase, and even more in the post-wonderment phase, the elephant in the room is the lack of clarity about the specific consequences (sanctions) students who generate whole responses or parts of responses to assessment tasks using GenAI, and academics who generate whole academic/research papers (or parts of academic/research papers) using GenAI should face. It is one thing to distrust the currently available GenAI detection tools because of their inaccuracies and unreliability; it is quite another thing for individuals at HEIs to game the system and take advantage of this shortcoming because the current policies of HEIs on Gen AI fail to recommend sanctions for such individuals. This lack of consequences spawns opacity and tends to, ironically, engender inadvertent consequences: condoning and rewarding unethical academic or scholarly practices. One needs to look no further than the reports of Gray (2024), Kobak et al. (2024), and Liang et al. (2024) on the concerning impact LLMs such as ChatGPT are beginning to have on academic paper writing. So, when GenAI policies of HEIs fail to specify consequences for unethical academic practices, it is left to scientific sleuths such as those operating under Retraction Watch (see Byard, 2024; Kron, 2025; Retraction Watch, 2024) to serve as the guardians of scholarly integrity and as the sniffers of academic misconduct.

6. Conclusion

Only five South African HEIs had institution-wide GenAI polices freely and publicly available on their websites or online, while one HEI had its GenAI policy documents locked in its intranet. That the majority of the HEIs (almost 77% of

them) did not have their institution-wide GenAI policy documents available on their websites or online points suggests three possibilities: that the HEIs are subject to prolonged stakeholder consultation processes, indecision, or a wait-and-see approach. Of the five HEIs whose GenAI policy documents were reviewed, four were guides, three were guidelines, and one was a position statement. This particular typology tends to underscore the perpetual nature of GenAI and the impossibility of crafting a permanently fixed GenAI policy.

While academic staff and students (n = 5 GenAI policy documents), and researchers (n = 1 GenAI policy document) were target audiences, other stakeholders outside these three target audience categories but who are an integral part of HEIs (e.g., administration staff, general workers, and individuals who may be affiliated with these HEIs in some form) are conspicuous by their non-inclusion as audiences of the GenAI policy documents—the possibility that these stakeholders could use GenAI is not considered,. This omission serves as a blind spot and gives the impression that GenAI use is confined to three categories of audiences, when that is not necessarily the case.

As explained above, six GenAI policy documents tended to manifest elements of the critical dimension, while the other two tended to show elements of the semi-critical dimension. Only one GenAI policy document appears to evince elements of the *uBuntu* dimension, while the other six did so at the semi-*uBuntu* dimension level. Nonetheless, the reviewed GenAI policy documents mostly come across as reactions to the wonderment phase (see Holmquist, 2024) of GenAI. Consequently, they have no sanctions for misuse, nor do they specifically address some of the emerging, real-world academic practices that characterize the post-wonderment phase of GenAI, such as generating whole responses to assessment tasks or generating whole scholarly papers using GenAI in academia.

In view of the above, the current study has some recommendations. Firstly, all South African HEIs need to issue institution-wide GenAI policies, whether in the form of guides, guidelines or position statements, in order to leverage opportunities offered and to address the challenges posed by GenAI tools in the higher education sector. Such policies should address all stakeholders and not only selected groups, and have to be freely and publicly available on HEIs' websites or online. Secondly, there is a need to frame HEIs' GenAI policies in a critical-ethics-based framework that eschews elements of the *Siyavuma* and semi-*Siyavuma* orientations. Thirdly, HEIs' GenAI policies have to have bespoke institutional academic integrity and research ethics structures dedicated to dealing with GenAI challenges built into them. It is not enough to outsource the new challenges posed by GenAI to traditional institutional academic integrity and research ethics structures (or to leave them under the auspices of these traditional structures) with the hope that these challenges will be adequately resolved. Fourthly, GenAI policies of South African HEIs need to spell out, unequivocally, the specific sanctions individuals who are found to have generated whole responses (or parts of responses) to assessment tasks or individuals found to have generated whole scholarly papers (or parts of scholarly papers) using GenAI, will face.

The present study has limitations. One limitation is that it was conducted online, and it is possible that it failed to locate some of the South African HEIs' GenAI policies. However, to mitigate this shortfall, the official websites of all the 26 South African HEIs were visited and searched to locate their respective GenAI policy documents over a designate period of time. These policy documents were also searched via two open search engines, Google and Bing, as described in the methods section. Despite this limitation, the current study offers a foundation for future research to investigate GenAI policies of South African HEIs further.

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