



Artificial Intelligence (AI) and academic integrity in Cyprus: an imperceptibly evolving discussion

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Introduction

To comprehend the current state of AI and academic integrity in Cyprus, we examine the progression of AI public discourse and rhetoric over three periods that encompass

- a) the 20 years preceding the introduction of ChatGPT in 2023,
- b) followed by a transitional period with the first articulated concerns on AI, ethics and academic integrity, and
- c) the subsequent period following the widespread adoption of ChatGPT.

The demarcation among these periods is blurred. However, the post-ChatGPT time is more straightforward to define as it has introduced pressing new discussions and challenges to the forefront, not least regarding academic integrity and AI.

In the pre-ChatGPT period, there was an early and continued academic interest by the University of Cyprus (UCY), the oldest public university on the island, to provide a postgraduate programme of study in AI since early 2000 (<https://bit.ly/3x9hjbI>). This programme includes a semester-long subject on AI and ethics. The private European University of Cyprus (EUS) followed later with the provision of a similar programme of studies that includes an elective subject on the philosophy and ethics of AI (<https://tinyurl.com/ye244c7r>). The publication of scientific articles on aspects of AI parallels this early interest in AI as a programme of study. These publications focus on analyses of the mechanics of AI, case studies and applications within narrow disciplinary areas ranging from the computer sciences to the hard sciences and different medical domains (Perplexity AI, 2024).

Research issues

For the same period, on the research front in AI, the ‘Artificial Intelligence Laboratory’ at the private University of Nicosia (UNIC) became one of the earliest and most prominent in the field, with outputs that focus on the technological dimensions of AI but also healthcare and smart cities and infrastructure (ailab.unic.ac.cy). Indicative of the themes that local academics addressed during the same period was the 2018 international conference organised by UNIC, focusing on conversational AI, expert systems and AI infrastructure.

In response to a 2018 European Union (EU) call for member states to develop national policies on AI, in 2020, the Department of Electronic Communications from the Ministry of Transport Communications and Projects, after consultations with an expert panel comprising academics

* These papers are for internal discussion within CESA on topics related to the CESA Mission.

from local universities, developed a national strategy titled “National Artificial Intelligence Strategy: Actions for Utilization and Development of AI in Cyprus” and soon afterwards the government approved it by law. Among a series of recommendations to address technological and business imperatives as well as a skills gap vis-à-vis AI, this document announced – in 13 lines – the formation of a National Committee for Ethics and Trustworthy AI with the remit to investigate the moral, ethical, social, humanitarian and legal dimensions of AI (Department of Electronic Communications, 2020).

It is characteristic of the pre-ChatGPT period that there is ample evidence of various academic activities on AI and weak consideration of ethical issues. Overall, AI started from the domain of disciplinary silos that have dominated the academic discourse in Cyprus ever since. The issues around AI and academic integrity and ethics remained peripheral at best.

Transition period

During the transition between the pre- and post-ChatGPT periods in Cyprus, approximately three years, AI was increasingly raised in the public domain from different perspectives. For example, a local publication stated online that “Cyprus lags behind in artificial intelligence applications” and is ranked at the bottom of a European list of countries in business applications of AI and below the European Union (EU) average of 7% (Brief, 2021).

A thought-provoking position during this time was expressed by the principal of the private University of Limassol (UoL), Professor Panayotou, who argued in an open forum that the government ought to adopt AI as a tool for targeted social policy to improve citizens’ well-being, reduce the burden on social services and optimize resource allocation by achieving more with less while ensuring privacy and ethics to protect sensitive personal data (StockWatch, 2023). In 2023, AI also interested the local business community at the 8th Innovation and Entrepreneurship Forum held at UCY. The topics addressed at this event included combating misinformation, the need for adjustments in culture and organization, a customized approach, an appropriate funding structure, enhanced digital competencies among staff members and the need for transparent and ethical use of AI (Knews, 2023).

During the transitional period, the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education (CYQAA) explicitly addressed AI and academic integrity for the first time in Cyprus. The CYQAA is an independent public authority responsible for safeguarding standards and the principles underlying the establishment of the European Higher Education Area. It is tasked by law to promote a quality culture within the HE institutions in Cyprus, and for this purpose, it issues guidelines and validates and evaluates all HE programmes of study.

In October 2023, CYQAA offered participants from local universities a seminar and workshop focusing on academic integrity and AI. Dr Helen Gniel, Director of the Higher Education Integrity Unit at the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency), the national higher education regulator in Australia, was the keynote speaker and workshop coordinator. This event aimed to assist participants in “discover[ing] the challenges posed by generative AI in the realm of assessment and how institutions are responding” and to “delve into guidelines for the appropriate use of AI tools, assess academic staff’s readiness, and explore the ongoing transformation of teaching, learning, and assessment” (CYQAA, 2023).

The extensive, helpful and practical information shared by Dr Gniel during her presentation included a section on ‘The Principles of Assessment in the Age of Artificial Intelligence’, and

the workshop was titled ‘Rethinking assessment for a world of AI - The challenge that generative AI poses for assessment’ (<https://tinyurl.com/5y3rdjcg>; see the bottom of the page is the pdf of the presentation and workshop).

In brief, Dr Gniel

- provided a list of practical actions to enhance academic integrity,
- emphasised the significance of maintaining consistency between assessment strategies and learning outcomes,
- recommended ‘preventative action’ comprising learner guidance on academic misconduct and
- argued for the appropriate professional development of academics.

In addition, Dr Gniel argued that resistance to AI is ‘futile’ and that the different academic disciplines must find meaningful ways to incorporate AI into teaching and learning. Her distinction between high and low paradigmatic disciplines is interesting, with the former at lower risk than the latter from AI-generated academic misconduct.

In the post-ChatGPT period belong the two pages of ‘recommendations’ for using AI in ‘educational processes’, released by UCY for the academic year 2023-2024 as guidance for their academics (UCY, 2023). The main points of this document include encouragement for ‘experimentation’ if ethical principles are not ‘violated’. For teaching and learning purposes, searching and cross-referencing information are legitimate uses; when AI is used, this should be made explicit. Individual courses can determine their use of AI for instructional purposes, and academics are ‘encouraged’ to adapt their assessment methods to maintain the integrity of the evaluation process. For example, one can substitute an essay as homework with an oral examination. Lastly, these brief recommendations refer users to the institution’s existing policy on plagiarism and suggest that the ethical use of AI is the sole responsibility of each user. There are similarities between the UCY positions on AI and what Dr Gniel articulated in 2023 at the CYQAA event.

Concluding comments

The recent ‘EU AI Act’ comprising 458 pages of new legislation regulating the use of AI in the EU (European Parliament, 2024) belongs to the post-ChatGPT period. This lengthy document identifies education and vocational training as ‘high-risk’ areas; thus, there is a need to (re)consider the appropriate evaluation of learning outcomes in the context of wide AI learner use. This EU legislation demands that educational institutions monitor the validity and reliability of assessment methods while discouraging unethical learner behaviour during examinations. Regarding the different issues of AI, the EU member states must address due to this directive, the education sector on all levels was allocated 24 months to implement the stated targets in the Act.

As the clock ticks for EU compliance by 2026, in Cyprus, the formation of the National Committee for Ethics and Trustworthy AI, announced in 2020, has not occurred. Nor has the CYQAA announced any guidelines on academic integrity and AI since the 2023 event it hosted. Beyond the two pages of recommendations that UCY circulated for their academics, one notes the widespread lack of professional development within the sector with an explicit focus on using AI for teaching and learning and academic integrity. As continuous professional development and teaching qualifications are not prerequisites for academic employment and promotion in Cyprus, appropriate learning design vis-à-vis AI remains non-existent or weak. The implication is that even if Cyprus tries to comply with the 2026 deadline, most academics have

neither the instructional training nor the impetus to engage in this imperceptibly evolving discussion.

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