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Responsible Governance of Generative Artificial Intelligence in University Research: A Qualitative Study from AIOU

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Abstract

The novel proliferation of GenAI technologies such as Chat GPT, Google Gemini, Microsoft Copilot, and Claude, among others, has completely transformed the epistemological space of university research around the globe. With capabilities to generate academic writing, synthesize science literature, create citations and bibliographies, code data, and even draft a manuscript, such tools have been adopted very rapidly and without regulation by researchers in developed as well as developing nations. While the democratization of such technologies offers great promise for researchers who lack resources and opportunities for the same, their deployment at universities creates serious and intertwined issues regarding academic integrity, authenticity of research, epistemic autonomy, intellectual property rights, and institutional responsibility. This qualitative study examines the governance of the responsibilityofGenerative AI in research in a university setting atAllama Iqbal Open University (AIOU), which is not only the leading open and distance learning institution in Pakistan but also one ofthe largest universities in Asia on the basis of its enrolment figures. This qualitative study is driven by two main research objectives, which are: (1) to examine the level of apprehension on the part of stakeholders concerning the role of research in achieving quality education in the context of AI integration; and (2) to assess the awareness and preparedness of the researcher in regard to the usage of Generative AI in research. Five major themes emerged from the thematic analysis of the data, which include (a) prevalent and multi-dimensional concern of stakeholders towards the negative effects of Gen Al on research and education; (b) duality of views regarding the educational effects of Gen AI swinging between democratizing access and intellectual dependence; (c) varied and superficial

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awareness among researchers regarding the use of GenAI tools, whereby awareness is at the level of surface knowledge without any deep understanding; (d) lack of preparedness on the part of institutions reflected in the absence of policies, detection systems, and accountability mechanisms; and (e) urgent need for training and capacity-building measures. The paper concludes with recommendations for AIOU and national level governance bodies, embedded in the context of responsible innovation in open and distance learning.

Keywords: Generative Artificial Intelligence, Al Governance, University Research, AIOU, Academic Integrity, Qualitative Study, Higher Education, Pakistan, Open and Distance Learning, Responsible Innovation, Digital Literacy

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

The development of GenAI as an emergent technology in higher education is one of the most momentous changes in the annals of academic scholarship. The introduction of Chat GPT, which was released to the general public by Open AI in November 2022, followed swiftly by Google Bard (later Gemmi), Microsoft Copilot, Claude from Anthropic, as well as various other domain-specific AI research platforms, have presented universities worldwide with some profoundly challenging questions about authorship, scholarly originality, intellectual work, and institutional responsibility (Baidoo, Anu & Ansah, 2023; Lo, 2023). These are not just technical challenges but rather profound ethical and pedagogical challenges that get to the heart of the purpose of university education and of knowledge creation (Cope & Kalantzis, 2023).

This technology functions using large language models (LLMs), which are based on the training of such models on enormous amounts of text data. (Weidinger et al., 2021). The ability to support literature reviews, hypothesis development, methodological design, statistical analysis, scholarly writing, and bibliographic referencing has made these tools exceedingly popular among researchers facing constraints of time, resources, or language barriers (Zhai, 2022). Yet these tools come with a set of well-known limitations that cannot be separated: the tendency of LLMs to generate plausible but inaccurate information called "hallucinations," the inability to perform reasoning or causal inference, the potential to plagiarize copyright protected materials, perpetrate biases present in the training data, and contribute to academic misconduct when not used openly (Bender et al., 2021; Marcus & Davis, 2019).

When it comes to the GenAI governance issues in the Pakistani higher education system, they become structurally unique and extremely urgent. The Pakistani university sector is characterized by substantial disparity in institutional capacity, digital infrastructure, and research culture. Although elite universities in large urban areas may possess necessary capabilities to create and implement

Among AI governance frameworks, most institutions, especially those catering to non-traditional and distant learners, work with significantly reduced resources and unique problems with respect to regulating and overseeing the utilization of AI technology (HEC, 2023). The Higher Education Commission of Pakistan (HEC) has started recognizing the importance of AI technology in educational settings through its Digital Vision 2025 campaign, but there is no binding framework for GenAI governance within national policies (Malik & Hussain, 2022).

1.2 Allama Iqbal Open University: An Institutional Overview

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Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU), founded in 1974 by the AIOU Act, is the first and biggest Open University of Pakistan, enrolling more than 1.3 million students in all levels of education. Being an open and distance learning (ODL) organization, AIOU caters to a very unique and diverse set of students consisting of professionals, rural students, women with mobility difficulties, and economically disadvantaged students via a blend of print-based course materials, online tools, regional learning centers, and face-to-face tutorial classes (AIOU, 2023). AIOU provides postgraduate programs (M.Phil. and Ph.D.) in a wide array of disciplines with research supervision provided via a blend of residential seminars and distance-mediated collaboration between supervisors and researchers.

This structure of the institution presents some specific challenges concerning GenAI governance. The infrequent interaction between the supervisor and the student, the geographic dispersion of the community of researchers, and the emphasis on self-guided learning provide opportunities for informal, opportunistic, and ethically questionable use of GenAI tools (Anderson et al., 2021). Furthermore, linguistic diversity of the student body with many researchers working in English as their second or third language can increase their appeal as writing assistants, making the over-reliance on them and epistemic agency loss (Flowerdew & Wang, 2016).

1.3 The Global Landscape of GenAI Governance in Higher Education

In an international context, universities and other higher education organizations have adopted a wide variety of solutions in addressing GenAI governance challenges. While some have decided to completely ban GenAl technologies in academic works equating their use with contract cheating (Lancaster & Cotarlan, 2021), other more progressive universities such as major research universities in the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia are developing context-sensitive and differentiated guidelines regarding permissible and impermissible GenAl usage in academic works along with Al literacy education and disclosure of Al tool usage in submitted academic work (UNESCO, 2023; Holmes et al., 2022).

UNESCO's Guidance for Generative AI in Education and Research published in 2023 outlines principles of transparency, accountability, human oversight, equity, and privacy protection as key components of responsible AI implementation in the context of education (UNESCO, 2023). Similarly, the OECD Al Principles, the Al Act of the EU, and various other national-level frameworks emphasize the need for a human-centric and rights-respecting approach to Al governance (OECD, 2019; European Commission, 2021). However, as Zawacki, Richter et al. (2019) point out in their systematic review of Al in higher education research literature, voices of educators and institutional administration officials from non-Western environments have remained notably underrepresented in the nascent body of work on this topic.

1.4 Statement of the Problem

Despite the fast and mostly uncontrolled usage of GenAI technology among the research community of AIOU, there is no empirical, qualitative information available on the issues related to awareness, fears, and readiness for GenAI governance in this institution. The literature on Al in higher education consists of research carried out at Western institutions (Zawacki, Richter et al., 2019), which means that there is still no information on GenAI governance challenges in the specific context of a big open South Asian university. This lack of information is not only a lack

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of scientific work but also a lack of governance, since policies based on no empirical information may not fit the needs and capabilities of the community (Selwyn, 2019).

1.5 Research Objectives

This study is guided by the following research objectives:

l. To identify the level of stakeholder apprehension regarding the role of research in fostering quality education in the context of Al integration at AIOU.

2. To explore the awareness and preparedness of researchers regarding the use of Generative Al tools for research purposes at AIOU.

1.6 Research Questions

The study addresses the following primary research questions:

l) What is the nature, dimensions, and sources of stakeholder apprehension regarding the implications of GenAI integration for research quality and educational integrity at AIOU?

2) What is the current state of awareness and preparedness among AIOU researchers regarding the responsible use of Generative Al tools, and what factors shape these orientations?

1.7 Significance of the Study

In terms of relevance and importance of this study, one should consider it from several perspectives. First, institutionally speaking, it offers an empirical base for developing GenAI governance framework based on qualitative analysis of a range of policy documents. In terms of its significance on a national level, given the scale of AIOU and its use as an example of other Pakistani institutions, the results of the research can prove influential for shaping up HEC policy on the topic. On the international level, the research introduces a non-Western, ODL, specific perspective into literature which is currently lacking diversity of geographies and institutions (Flavm, 2017; Selwyn, 2019). Finally, on a theoretical level, the research contributes knowledge on implementation of the frameworks of responsible innovation into Al governance in educational research context in developing countries. (Stilgoe et al., 2013).

Literature Review

2.1 Generative Al: Capabilities, Limitations, and Educational Implications.

Generative AI models, especially transformer-based ones and those trained by reinforcement learning from human feedback (RLHF), exhibit an impressive performance in natural language generation, summarization, translation, programming, and multimodal reasoning tasks (Brown et al., 2020). Implications of these achievements for education are significant. Scholars identify not only the possible advantages of LLMs, including personalization of learning, writing assistance, literature discovery, and accessibility for non-native speakers but also their possible negative effects, including the encouragement of academic misconduct, spread of misinformation, and deterioration of critical thinking and independent scholarly work (Kasneci et al., 2023; Baidoo, Anu & Ansah, 2023).

The concept of large language models as 'stochastic parrots', which Bender et al. introduced in their widely discussed critique (2021), remains pertinent in the research governance context. In case if LLMs generate text based on probabilistic pattern recognition and not understanding, research outcomes that they produce could be similar to real scholarship on

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the surface but not contain any epistemological basis to make it reliable and reproducible

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(Bender et al., 2021). This problem is especially critical in disciplines like social sciences and education where interpretive judgment, contextual sensitivity, and researcher reflexivity are essential to research quality.

2.2 Academic Integrity in the Age of GenAI.

Academic Integrity becomes the cornerstone in institutions' attempts to counteract GenAI. In its classical form, as the uncredited repetition of other people's ideas or writings, plagiarism is partially outdated due to a technology that produces apparently new texts based on training sets and therefore cannot be attributed to any particular author (Eaton & Kaur, 2023). Hence, some scholars propose a rethinking of academic integrity in the age of GenAI, focusing on such values as transparency, disclosure, and intellectual honesty, not just on the criterion of textual originality (Perkins, 2023).

Research into students' perception of GenAI use in their academic work indicates that the situation is complicated. On the one hand, many are aware that unrestricted Al can lead to academic integrity issues; on the other hand, some resort to Al and do not disclose their actions, justifying them by the inability of policies to address this problem in its entirety (Chaudhry et al., 2023). Regarding faculty opinions, most of them are concerned about Al and Al-abetted cheating but also note that there is no way for them to recognize Al-abetted texts. (Cotton et al., 2023).

2.3 Al Governance in Higher Education: Frameworks and Approaches.

Several principles have become apparent in the literature discussing Al governance in higher education. First, transparency, the obligation to make Al use and academic research using Al tools publicly available, is seen as the primary principle of Al governance (UNESCO, 2023; OECD, 2019). Accountabilities in the form of review and punishment for Al misuse are acknowledged as necessary components of transparency requirements. Human oversight ensuring that Al systems supplement, but do not replace, human judgment in research is considered an important element in all existing governance systems (European Commission, 2021).

Also, scholars have stressed the importance of considering the issue of equity in GenAl policies. Restrictions on Al use without providing researchers with alternative ways to conduct their studies might affect those researchers who need to use Al for language support or do not have access to any other research means (Flowerdew & Wang, 2016; Flavin, 2017). This point is especially important in the case of AIOU, since its postgraduate students often lack resources, thus compensating this problem with Al tools instead of library or peer resources.

2.4 Technology Adoption in ODL Contexts.

Technology adoption research in open and distance learning contexts provides valuable theoretical background regarding the uptake of GenAI at AIOU. For instance, the Technology Adoption Model (TAM) proposed by Davis (1989) suggests that perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use are main determinants of technology adoption – these elements are obviously visible in the case of GenAI. Some more modern theories include more drivers of technology adoption such as UTAUT2 developed by Venkatesh et al. (2012) – social influence, hedonic motivation, and habit are considered in addition to the former factors; they can have significant power in distance learning environments.

Anderson et al. (2021) investigate patterns of technology adoption in distance education contexts; the lack of face-to-face supervision results not only in a higher degree of dependence

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on digital technologies but also in their unmonitored use. It directly contributes to the problem of GenAI governance in ODL environments, as it implies that the existing governance models designed for campus-based research should be significantly adjusted to work at AIOU.

2.5 Digital Literacy and Critical Al Competence.

GenAI governance not only involves policies at the institutional level but also demands competence from individuals, which can be understood from the literature on critical Al literacy/Al competence. As defined by Ng et al. (2021), Al literacy consists of four dimensions: knowledge and understand of Al, use and appli- cation of Al, evaluation and creation of Al, and engagement With Al ethically. While studies indicate that most students in universities already have knowledge and use of AI, the evaluative and ethical dimension is missing (Long & Magerko, 2020; Ng et al., 2021).

Within the developmg country scenario, existing digital literacy gaps are exacerbated by the presence of infrastructural disparities, inadequate provision of professional development opportunities, and Al still being a novel concept within the field of educational policies (Malik & Hussain, 2022). Pakistani HEIs have been quite successful in terms of extending digital access through 1--IEC, but the development of critical Al literacy as a separate educational competence is still at an initial stage at both curricular and professional development levels.

1. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework.

Every well-structured qualitative study of governance concepts requires theoretical underpinnings that inform the entire study and provide a platform through which the results can be evaluated against existing literature (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study utilizes the theoretical underpinnings of Responsible Innovation Theory, Critical AL Literacy Theory and Technology Acceptance in Distance Education, all of which form the theoretical basis from which the Contextual Conceptual Framework of this study is formed.

1. Theoretical Framework.

3.1.1 Responsible Innovation Theory:

The dominant theoretical perspective underpinning the current study is the framework of Responsible Innovation (RI), formulated and further developed by Stilgoe, Owen, and Macnaghten (2013) for the purposes of science and technology governance. According to Stilgoe et al. (2013), RI is 'taking care of the future through collective stewardship of science and innovation in the present' (p. 1570). The RI framework defines four interrelated and synergistic aspects of responsible involvement in emerging technologies, all of which are directly pertinent to the governance of GenAI within university research.

Anticipation, as the first of these aspects, is the prospective assessment of implications, risks, and opportunities of the technology in question before these become issues requiring a reaction to a crisis. Anticipation, in terms of GenAI governance, implies that universities need to identify in advance how the use of Al will affect research integrity, processes of knowledge creation, researcher training, and institutional responsibility in general instead of waiting for Al governance-related issues to materialize. The current research shows that anticipation has been lacking in Aliou’s reaction to GenAI – a statement constituting a governance diagnosis.

The second dimension is called Reflexivity, which focuses on the ability of the institutions, policymakers, and researchers of the governance actors to critically evaluate and interrogate the assumptions, interests, values, and blind spots of the same actors about an

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emerging technology. Reflexive governance of GenAI in university research requires institutions to evaluate the way existing structures of power, hierarchy, and vested interests can influence their reaction to Al technologies, and not to fall into the trap of trying to present governance issues in terms that are convenient for institutional purposes.

The third dimension is the dimension of Inclusion, which stresses the importance of genuine participation of stakeholders in governance processes. Governance of Al technology cannot be undertaken solely by administrators or specialists but should include the experience, knowledge, and interests of all the affected parties. This principle of inclusion directly translates into the methodology of qualitative, participatory research chosen for this study.

Fourthly, the dimension of Responsiveness acknowledges that governance architectures need to be adaptable, able to evolve in response to added information, emerging technology, feedback from stakeholders, and changing institutional environments. In the fast-changing world of GenAI, any static approach runs the danger of becoming irrelevant almost immediately after it is developed. Responsive governance involves mechanisms of iterative assessment and review, continuous stakeholder dialogue, and revision of policy based on new evidence, where policy is viewed not as a fixed regulation, but as an institutional process (Owen et al., 2013).

All these four dimensions – Anticipation, Reflexivity, Inclusion, and Responsiveness – give a powerful framework for identifying governance deficiencies and institutional shortcomings, assessing institutional response and developing forward-looking recommendations based on values (Von Schomberg, 2013).

3.1.2 Critical Al Literacy Theory:

The other theoretical foundation for this research paper is the model of Critical Al Literacy which deals with the personal and collective skills necessary for one to be engaged with Al tools in an accountable, reflective, and ethical manner. According to Ng et al. (2021), "Al literacy is a multidimensional competence which can be classified into four increasingly sophisticated stages: (1) Knowing and Understanding AI, having conceptual knowledge about what Al is, how it functions and its properties; (2) Using and Applying Al – the ability to use Al tools effectively; (3) Evaluating and Creating with Al, the skill to evaluate Al products in terms of their accuracy, reliability, and ethical justification; and (4) Engaging with Al Ethically". (Ng et al., 2021).

The framework is rooted in theoretical considerations of Freire (1970), who introduced the notion of critical consciousness, which refers to the ability to see, think about, and act upon social and power structures underlying the environment. Similarly, critical Al literacy is more than just the ability to use Al tools, and it is about developing sustained values-based reflection about how these tools influence the way knowledge, power, and agency are shaped (Long & Magerko, 2020). In terms of the research context, critical Al literacy implies the researcher's ability to see what GenAI tools are capable of doing and cannot be used for; to analyze AI-generated content critically and not to accept it blindly; to use Al tools openly and in accordance with the community standards of academic integrity; and to reflect on the impact of Al use on the epistemic values of research.

Findings of this study show that at present AIOU researchers are clustering around the bottom end of the proposed theoretical framework of Ng et al. (2021) with regard to their

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operational familiarity (Level 2) with GenAI tools but lack critical evaluative ability (Level 3) and ethical engagement (Level 4).

3.1.3 Technology Acceptance in Distance Education

This third theoretical strand is based on the models related to technology acceptance and adoption in general which have been modified according to the unique context of open and distance education environment. TAM, which was proposed by Davis (1989), indicates that the two beliefs namely perceived usefulness and perceived ease ofuse are the main antecedents which affect the behavioral intention of adoption of a new technology. As far as the GenAI context is concerned both the antecedents can be noticed here because the GenAI tools are perceived to be useful and easy to use.

This is why TAM can account for the fast and unstructured adoption of GenAI tools in the case of AIOU's researchers despite the lack of institutional support and governance in this area. The extended model put forward by Venkatesh et al. (2012) called UTAUT2 also includes additional dnvers of adoption, such as social influence (peer and supervisor norms), hedonic motivation (the enjoyment of the use of AI tools) and habit (habituation of GenAI use through repeated action).

These dnvers are especially pertinent to ODL as the ODL context makes peer networks with the normative influence on research, even in their mediated form, very strong, and at the same time makes the use of AI tools rather convenient and prone to habitual use in the absence of institutional norms. This idea is further confirmed by Anderson et al.'s (2021) study of technology adoption in distance education, which proves that low levels of supervision typical of ODL make technology adoption more appealing and risky.

3.2 Conceptual Framework.

Based on the three theoretical underpinnings identified above, the Conceptual Framework for the current research endeavor incorporates the above paradigms in a holistic analysis framework that is meant to enhance the understanding of the dynamics associated with responsible GenAI governance in the field of ODL. This framework encompasses four domains which are related to the different dimensions of the governance issue being addressed.

3.2.1 Overview of the Conceptual Framework:

The Conceptual Framework considers Responsible Governance of Generative AI in University Research as the main outcome construct, which is defined as the ability of an organization to support positive, transparent, and integrity, preserving uses of GenAI in research while preventing negative, deceptive, and integrity, undermining uses. The central construct is influenced by four interacting domains:

1. Stakeholder Awareness and Al Literacy denoting the individual-level cognitive and evaluative skills that researchers, faculty members, and university administrators possess when interacting with GenAI technologies. The first domain is theoretically framed within the context of the Critical Al Literacy theory (Ng et al., 2021) and measured based on the research on stakeholders' understanding of GenAI capabilities, limitations, and ethical considerations.
1. Stakeholder Apprehension and Perceptions denoting the affective and evaluative attitudes that influence stakeholders' reactions to GenAI implementation, which may include concerns related to the integrity of research, quality of education, intellectual

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development, and professional identity. The second domain is critical for Research Objective I and is theoretically framed through the academic integrity literature (Eaton & Kaur, 2023; Perkins, 2023) and the sociology of professional knowledge.

2. Governance Institutional Structures for the formal and informal policy, procedural, and accountability structures within which AIOU manages (or does not manage) the use of GenAI in research. The theoretical framework behind this domain includes Responsible Innovation theory (Stilgoe et al., 2013), and it is operationalized by conducting an analysis of the existing policy documents, institutional readiness for governance according to the stakeholder perceptions, and detecting gaps in governance.
3. Environment and Contextual Factors that represent ODL, structural features, socioeconomic reality, infrastructural challenges, and culture that influence both the adoption and the governance of GenAI at AIOU. The theoretical framework behind this domain includes the literature on ODL technology adoption (Anderson et al., 2021; Venkatesh et al., 2012) and the equity in education framework (Flavm, 2017; Flowerdew & Wang, 2016).

3.2.2 Relationships and Dynamics within the Framework:

The theoretical framework suggests that the connections among the four domains are dynamic, reciprocal, and mutually reinforcing as opposed to being one-way causal. The notions of stakeholders' awareness and apprehensions are seen as contingent on contextual elements such as institutional culture, IT infrastructure, and supervisory relations and are themselves responsible for determining the nature and extent of the need for governance. Institutional governance mechanisms are seen as both responding to and shaping stakeholder awareness, apprehensions, and behavior. Contextual and environmental elements are seen as intervening in the efficacy of governance measures: what might be an effective measure on a campus-based, high, resource university may be ineffective or even inequitable in the ODL environment of AIOU.

Behind all the four domains lies the fourth set of constructs, those of the principles of Responsible Innovation: Anticipation, Reflexivity, Inclusion, and Responsiveness. (Stilgoe et al., 2013). What is it that plays the role of being the normative standard against which the existing governance mechanisms can be measured, and the action that guides the principles in the design of governance frameworks? It is a framework that is also used as the tool for diagnosis (helping the study to discover where and how the governance mechanisms of AIOU fail to meet the responsible innovation standards), and as the tool for design.

3.2.3 Application of the Framework to Research Objectives:

This conceptual framework's relevance to the two research objectives underpinning this study may be summarized as follows:

Research Objective 1 (stakeholder apprehensions around GenAI and research quality): This objective would largely be covered by the Stakeholder Apprehensions and Perceptions construct, where the contextual factors act as moderating variables influencing the nature, intensity, and sources of stakeholder apprehension in the context of AIOU. The Responsible Innovation principle of Anticipation would serve as the evaluation criterion for this purpose: organizations that have successfully anticipated GenAI governance problems must be expected

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to demonstrate lower levels of unmanaged stakeholder apprehension and higher levels of informed engagement with it.

Research Objective 2 (Awareness and Preparedness of Researchers regarding GenAI Tools): This objective will be covered by the Stakeholder Awareness and AI Literacy construct, based on the four-level framework of Ng et al. (2021). The institutional governance construct acts as the contextual moderator here: stakeholder awareness and preparedness will be viewed as partially determined by the actions or lack thereof of the institution in terms of building Al literacy. Inclusion and Responsiveness, two of the key Responsible Innovation principles of Inclusion and Responsiveness, constitute the normative criteria, namely, governance structures that truly involve researchers in the process of policy formulation and address their training requirements will be likely to result in greater awareness and readiness.

As one can see, the conceptually rigorous framework offers a highly useful tool that can be used for the collection and analysis of qualitative data as well as for the development of governance recommendations appropriate for the context of AIOU institution.

1. Methodology

1. Research Paradigm and Design

The current study has been conducted using the interpretivist research paradigm, in which it is believed that social realities are constituted by subjective experiences of individual people rather than being objecti, vely existing and measurable phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interpretationist approach is suitable for the current study since the concepts of stakeholder apprehension, awareness, and readiness regarding the governance of GenAI are subjective phenomena constructed through the experiences of individuals, the disciplinary cultures, the context in which they are situated, and the meanings which people make of them.

Phenomenology is the type of research design that is used in the study to investigate the phenomenon from the perspective of the interpretivist research paradigm. Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenology has been used as a method for conducting the research. The use of phenomenology for studying the phenomenon is justified by the fact that the design focuses on the experiences of the participants and allows for an in-depth and empathic understanding of how AIUO stakeholders experience the problem of the governance of GenAI in their research context.

2. Research Setting.

The study was conducted in Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU), whose head office is in Islamabad, Pakistan, and in which participants were selected from three faculties, namely the Faculty of Education, Faculty of Social Sciences and Hummanities, and Faculty of Sciences. The selected faculties were those which had the largest number of research scholars studying for their postgraduate studies and which have the widest disciplines covered, thereby making sure that the results of the study are based on varied research practices and environments. Data was collected during the period from January to April 2026.

3. Participants and Sampling.

Sampling methods included purposive and snowball approaches. Initially, purposive sampling method was used to ensure that there was representation from all the three stakeholders and from all the three faculties (Patton, 2015). Further, the snowball sampling approach was used to identify more participants by using referrals of those already interviewed.

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The final sample of participants was 32 people and the distribution of these was as follows;

Faculty Members (n 12): This included 6 senior faculties (Associate Professor and above) and 6 junior faculties (Assistant Professor and Lecturer), each being from one of the three faculties. All had experience in supervision of postgraduate research projects.

Postgraduate Researchers (n 15): This included 8 Ph.D. scholars and 7 M.Phil. Scholars at various stages of their research programs, each representing one of the three faculties.

University Administrators (n 5): This included 2 Deans, 2 Department Heads, and 1 Director of Research and Graduate Studies, because of their oversight role regarding research governance policy.

Collection of data was continued till the point of thematic saturation (Guest et al., 2006). Thematic saturation occurred after 28 individual interviews and last four interviews served to confirm the theme structure.

4. Data Collection Methods.

1. Semi, Structured Individual Interviews:

Semi-Structured interviews were conducted with all 32 respondents, either face-to-face on-site at the mam campus of AIOU in Islamabad or through video conferencing for those respondents located at regional centers. The interviews lasted from 50 to 90 minutes. The interview guide was developed after conducting an extensive literature review on the topic and tested in a pilot phase, comprising three interviews with participants not part of the sample group. Pilot interviews were evaluated in terms of comprehensibility, relevancy, and the quality of the data collected, resulting in minor changes to question order and wording. The final interview guide consisted of three themes: (a) general perceptions and experience with using GenAI in research; (b) awareness of, and usage of, GenAI tools; and (c) governance issues at institutions. All interviews were recorded audio-videlty with consent of participants.

2. Focus Group Discussions:

Three focus group discussions (FGD) were held with each stakeholder group to derive insights that could not be obtained through inter views on their own. Focus groups are highly effective in examining the domains of common knowledge, social norms and group-level sensemaking (Kitzinger, 1995). The number of participants in each FGD varied between six to eight and the duration was around 90 to 120 minutes. The FGDs were conducted following a set protocol related to the interview guide and were audio-recorded and transcribed with the consent of the participants.

5. Data Analysis.

Theme analysis, utilizing the commonly adopted six phase approach introduced by Braun & Clarke (2006), was conducted as the primary form of data analysis. Phase I (familiarization) consisted of thorough reading of all transcripts, supplemented with notetaking. Phase 2 (initial coding) involved the process of creating systematic codes of data extracts related to the research questions, utilizing NVivo 14 program for this purpose. Phase 3 (theme searching) involved compilation of codes into themes through identification of patterns of common meaning. Phase 4 (reviewing themes) entailed critical examination of the created themes against the entire dataset and each other, leading to combination and modification of themes. Phase 5 (defining and naming themes) involved creation of clear definitions of each theme. Phase 6 (writing up) resulted in writing up the themes as presented in the results section.

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Several approaches were used to increase the credibility of the analysis. The investigator triangulation was attained through independent coding of the data by two members of the research team followed by comparative discussions of the coding schemes. The member checking involved sharing theme outlines with some of the participants and receiving their comments on the relevance of emerging themes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Reflexive journaling was done to record any bias held by the researcher.

6. Ethical Considerations.

Permission to conduct this study was granted by the AIOU Research Ethics Committee (Reference No. AIOU, REC, 2026, 047) before beginning the process of data collection. This study strictly followed the principles of voluntary informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity and right to withdraw. All participants were thoroughly explained about the aim and method of this study along with data handling practices before obtaining their consent in writing.

All audio recordings and transcriptions have been kept safe on password-protected computers. Anonymity of all participants has been ensured throughout this report with the help of pseudonyms and absence of any personal context. The data will be kept for a period of five years after publication according to AIOU research data management policies.

Results.

Five main themes emerged through thematic analysis of the data collected through the interviews and focus groups. The themes are discussed further in this section, together with relevant quotes from the participants (pseudonyms, roles and faculty indicated).

4.1 Theme 1: Multidimensional Stakeholder Apprehension.

5.1.1 Apprehension about Academic Integrity:

The most ubiquitous form of stakeholder concern about risks posed by GenAI was its potential threat to the very core principles of academic integrity in the conduct of research. Faculty from all three involved faculties voiced concerns with respect to the consequences of the presence of AI-generated content for the authenticity of academic research. Some of the faculty interviewees talked about how in their experience of examining postgraduate theses and research proposals.

there seemed to have been a considerable use of AI-generated content characterized by characteristic fluency, coherence and academic tone of such texts as well as complete absence of the author's own voice and scholarly position.

The Professor from the Faculty of Education noted that what was most disturbing was not the fact of the use of AI itself, but the fact that some researchers seem to be unable or unwilling to analyze critically AI-generated content and accept it blindly without any verification as an alternative to their analysis of the literature. Such observations were common to several interviews – it was not just a matter of the fact of the use of AI but the way it is used.

A different kind of fear was raised by postgraduate students in terms of the uncertainty about how to operate within an uncertain environment concerning the use of acceptable levels of Al usage. There were several Ph.D. students who said that they had used GenAl to correct grammar, find relevant literature, and paraphrase but there were high levels of uncertainty on their part if their use was acceptable or not, and could be seen as academic misconduct by their

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supervisors. Such uncertainty was stressful for these students and had resulted in their avoiding Al altogether.

5.1.2 Concerns about Research Quality and Reliability

The second important aspect of apprehension was the quality and dependability of the research outputs that were being produced with the help of GenAI. Instructors and administration officials were particularly worried about the issue of Al hallucination, which entailed generating accurate information that was not true at all, including citation, empirical findings, and even organizational data (Bender et al., 2021). Some instructors had observed instances of fabricated references in student work, and this indicated that the researchers were using Al to create their bibliographies without even verifying their existence or content.

5.1.3 Apprehension about Long, Term Intellectual Development

The third dimension of apprehension that was especially articulated strongly by the senior professors had to do with the future impact of GenAI use on the intellectual development of young researchers. Several participants articulated the apprehension about the negative effect of heavy dependence on AI in synthesizing literature, writing and argumentation as it might affect the development of the analytical and reasoning skills needed to become a trained researcher.

One Associate Professor from the Faculty of Social Sciences referred to the example of how calculators may lead to atrophying arithmetic skills in the absence of pedagogical support and how the same thing may happen to the "intellectual muscles" of researchers.

5.2 Theme 2: GenAI and the Quality of University Education Opportunities and Risks

5.2.1 GenAI as a Democratizing Educational Tool

The participants had a divided opinion on the effect of Gen Al on the quality of education. While a notable number among them were junior faculty in the science fields and the postgraduate researchers who had higher digital literacy skills, they gave a genuinely positive outlook on the potential of Gen AI in the educational setting. They noted that the technology could help in reducing the difficulty of doing research for individuals who did not have good command over English and help them access a larger body of literature than available in the university's physical libraries. It will also enable the participantsto conduct literature review faster and give timely feedback on the writing of research papers, something which is not possible otherwise.

A few of the postgraduate students explained that they used ChatGPT and Google Gemini in comprehending complex theoretical concepts from reading and developing a simple explanation based on them to understand the main concept better.

5.2.2 GenAI as a Risk to Educational Quality and Scholarly Rigor

However, the mainstream view was much more restrained. Most of the participants and all the administrators felt that uncontrolled implementation of GenAI technologies would create a major threat to the quality of education that is the goal of AIOU's research programs. At the heart of this view was the idea that the process of struggle of the mind in doing research, including reading, thinking, arguing, and writing, is not just instrumental, i.e. valuable as a means to get research done, but also intrinsic, i.e. valuable as a development process. By

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bypassing this process, GenAI risks creating credentialed researchers who lack competences that they should have according to their credentials.

The administrators were especially worried about the impact on institutional reputation and accreditation. Some pointed out that should the quality of research work of AIOU turn out to be compromised by uncontrolled use of Al, the repercussions for AIOU's relations with HEC, other academic institutions, and potential employers of AIOU graduates would be serious.

5.3 Theme 3: Heterogeneous Awareness and Critical Al Literacy

5.3.1 Student Researchers: Wide but Shallow Awareness

Among the postgraduate researchers, awareness of GenAI technologies was almost universal as far as name recognition and basic operation was concerned. All participating scholars were familiar with Chat G PT, and most of them had used it at least once in their research-related work. The uses that have been most frequently mentioned include grammar correction and paraphrasing (by 13 out of 15 scholars), literature search and summarization (II out of 15), and creating research outlines/drafts (8 out of 15). Specialized research Al technologies (Elicit, Semantic Scholar, Research Rabbit, or Consensus) have been rarely mentioned as a matter of wider use of GenA technologies rather than more specialized ones.

However, awareness of GenAl was uneven as to the depth of knowledge. Upon discussing the limitations of these technologies, most of the scholars were able to recognize the problem of hallucination but not the other, more complex issues, such as bias in training data, knowledge limitation in time, lack of genuine reasoning capabilities, or intellectual property implications of AI-generated content (Kasneci et al., 2023). Such widespread but limited awareness may be referred to as the 'using and applying' aspect of Al literacy, which is characteristic of Ng et al.'s (2021).

5.3.2 Faculty: Variable Awareness and Supervisory Knowledge Gaps

GenAI tool familiarity among the faculty group was even more disparate compared to the students' group. There was also a clear pattern based on generation and discipline. The younger members of the faculty were those below 40 years of age and those from disciplines requiring high levels of digital literacy and demonstrated a higher level of awareness of GenAI tools and their implications for research.

On the other hand, senior members of the faculty were reported to have little direct experience with GenAI tools and were uncertain of their strengths and weaknesses. Several senior members of the faculty pointed out the problematic issue of supervision: they must evaluate students' research work that is likely to use GenAI largely but did not possess adequate knowledge of the GenAI tools themselves. One professor with more than 25 years of supervisory experience described this problem as extremely uncomfortable and professionally disturbing since never in his professional life has, he faced the prospect of his students having knowledge and abilities that he does not know about.

5.3.3 Administrators: Conceptual Awareness without Technical Depth

Conceptual understanding was best exemplified by university administrators; all were knowledgeable about the overall landscape of AI within higher education institutions, even with international discussions on governance for AI, whereas technical knowledge was the least of all in terms of specific GenAI tools and their applications within research contexts. There are important implications regarding the governance role that such a profile carries: those with

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conceptual understanding but no technical understanding of AI may design policies that are directionally correct but technologically ignorant.

5.4 Theme 4: Critical Institutional Unpreparedness

5.4.1 Absence of Formal GenAI Policy

One of the most significant findings from this study and one that has been mentioned by all the stakeholders repeatedly is the complete lack of formal policy at the institutional level regarding GenAI in the academic research done at AIOU. In the time of data collection for this study, there were no formal policy documents that have been produced by the university and made available to the public regarding GenAI and its use in the research process.

The lack of such policy has been felt differently by various stakeholders, but it has been acknowledged as an issue by all of them. The faculty members stated that they feel the need for guidance when making judgments about the integrity of Al usage in research. Researchers used Al in the process of their work in the state of ambiguity regarding their actions' legality.

Administrators acknowledged this problem but found resource availability, fast evolution of technology, and the necessity of national-level guidance from 1--IEC as reasons for this delay.

5.4.2 Absence of Detection and Accountability Infrastructure

Another aspect of institutional unpreparedness was that of the inadequacy in the technical and procedural infrastructure available for detecting GenAI in the submissions made by researchers. Although several tools such as Turnitm's AI writing detection tool, GPT Zero, and Originality.ai have been developed and have already been implemented by some universities across the globe, AIOU did not subscribe to any such tools during the data collection stage. It was especially the concern of faculty members since, without such reliable detection methods, no policy would be enforceable.

Administrators were aware of the detection problem, but they had other concerns regarding the unreliability of currently existing AI detection tools which may produce false positives and cause students to suffer injustice along with the financial costs associated with institution-wide subscription. It is, therefore, a genuine governance dilemma, as the premature implementation of unreliable detection tools may lead to injustice and the absence of any such method may facilitate its misapplication.

5.5 Theme 5: Training, Capacity Building, and Cultural Change

5.5.1 Faculty Professional Development Needs

Among all the stakeholders consulted, there was unanimous agreement that the governance of GenAI within AIOU research would be achieved through heavy reliance on capacity building efforts. The faculty participants noted several different areas where professional development was required: structured workshops addressing the strengths and weaknesses of various GenAI tools; guidance on how to develop research assignments and supervisory processes that encourage proper use of Al; training in how to recognize Al-generated content in student work; and training on the evolving international policy environment regarding Al use in academia. Some faculty participants suggested the need for interdisciplinary peer-learning communities where faculty could exchange experiences and learn from one another regarding Al and its supervision. **5.5.2 Researcher Training and Curriculum Integration**

Postgraduate researchers demanded the systematic integration of GenAI literacy training in the research methodology training process. This situation, where researchers are supposed to

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deal with issues in GenAI governance without any guidance or training, was termed unfair and counterproductive from an educational standpoint. The researchers put forward a vision of training that goes beyond merely tool-specific instructions, which includes such things as the ethical considerations in using AI in research, transparent disclosures, critical evaluation of AI outputs, and how to utilize AI as an aid in research.

5.5.3 The Need for Cultural Change

However, many of the people, especially the administrators and senior faculty, mentioned that, although policy and training were essential, there was more needed in order to change the culture of the AIOU research community in terms of their perception of the process of research. As stated by one of the Deans, ―the real challenge lies in creating a research culture where intellectual rigor and honest discourse are valued for themselves as expressions of one's professional self.‖ To achieve such a culture in the era of GenAI, we need much more than just policies and training programs. We need a conversation, storytelling on why it is important for researchers to experience authentic research, as well as role modeling of senior researchers.

1. Discussion

These findings provide insights into the intricate, pressing, and multi-faceted landscape of governance with respect to GenAI research in universities at AIOU. The following discussion contextualizes the findings of this study in relation to the academic discourse in terms of theoretical perspectives on responsible innovation (Stilgoe et al., 2013), critical Al literacy (Ng et al., 2021), and the governance of technology in higher education (Holmes et al., 2022).

1. The Nature and Dimensions of Stakeholder Apprehension

This multidimensional anxiety is echoed in the findings of recent international research on faculty and administrative attitudes towards GenAI in higher education. Cotton et al. (2023) note that British faculty share the same anxieties about the detectability of AI, the quality of AI-generated content, the weakening of research skills training, and the insufficient current academic integrity framework. Likewise, Perkins (2023) identifies the faculty's ambiguity about setting the boundary between AI assisted and AI replaced scholarship, an issue that emerges clearly in the narratives of AIOU participants. The specific characteristic of the AIOU case is the extra level of anxiety related to the specifics of the ODL environment: the low frequency of the interaction between faculty and students, geographical dispersion, and self-directed learning inherent to AIOU's research approach create an environment where AI governance problems become even more urgent and harder to solve (Anderson et al., 2021).

The concern among postgraduate students regarding operating in a confusing policy framework using Al technology amid uncertainties over its permissibility reflects how costly inaction can be on the part of the relevant policy authorities. There are studies which show that uncertainty regarding regulation causes anxiety among students, decreases their academic engagement, and forces them to either take an overly cautious approach of avoiding the tools or engage in the forbidden use of these tools (Chaudhry et al., 2023). In both cases, the outcome constitutes a failure of governance – one in which Al technology's legitimate benefits are foregone, and the other in which academic integrity is compromised.

2. Awareness, Literacy, and the Supervisory Knowledge Gap

The heterogeneity and shallowness of the awareness profiles identified in this study have important implications for designing effective training as well as improving governance

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practices. First, the dominance of level familiarity and surface learning observed among student researchers, as well as lack of critical and evaluative competencies, is in line with findings by Ng et al. (2021), who showed that awareness of Al in educational settings is predominantly represented by the lower-order awareness and operational levels of the four-level framework developed by the authors, while the two higher-order levels (ethical and evaluative) remain considerably underdeveloped.

Such awareness profiles make researchers highly susceptible to the particular challenges posed by GenAI technologies in research practice – researchers feel confident enough to use these tools, yet they lack sufficient critical competence to evaluate the output produced and raise questions regarding limitations of the technology and proper ethics of its use.

The supervisory knowledge gap observed among senior faculty members deserves special attention from both theoretical and practical perspective. In the existing literature on supervision in research, the supervisor's position is not only defined as the position of a content expert but also as a carrier of research culture (Wisker, 2012).

However, when supervisors do not have the requisite understanding or insight to be able to comprehend or direct the use of such GenAl tools by researchers, then the culture-bearing function is impacted in a certain way. It is a risk to the quality of research in an institution for there to be an output of PhDs and M. Phils whose research skills have been honed under conditions of supervisory uncertainty about Al.

6.3 The Policy Vacuum and the Principles of Responsible Innovation

The fundamental lack of GenAI governance policy at AIOU can be examined against the concept of responsible innovation introduced by Stilgoe et al. (2013). This framework consists of four main dimensions of responsible engagement with new technologies: anticipation, reflexivity, inclusion, and responsiveness. In regard to GenAI policy in the context of university research, the principle implies that responsible institutions should be anticipating possible impacts of GenAI adoption before they emerge as governance issues; reflecting upon their own biases, assumptions, values, and interests that affect policy formulation; including all relevant stakeholders in policy making; and remaining responsive to emerging information and developments.

In the current case of AIOU, which is marked by reactive stance to the problem, lack of consultations and development of relevant policy, the institution is failing on all four dimensions mentioned above. The institution is allowing GenAI to adopt much earlier than it develops its policy on that issue.

The trend of technology adoption outpacing regulation, however, is, of course, not unique to AIOU or even Pakistan; it is a trend that can be seen around the world in the sense that the rate of AI innovation has consistently been faster than the ability of governance mechanisms to react (OECD, 2019; European Commission, 2021). The peculiarities of the ODL environment mean that the gap in governance is especially pressing for AIOU.

6.4 Training, Capacity, and the Cultural Dimensions of Al Governance

The very strong agreement between the participants about the urgency of training and capacity building corresponds to the recommendations of international organizations and scholars who have studied the issue of Al governance in higher education. According to UNESCO's (2023) Guidance document, one of the key conditions for responsible Al governance

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is the systematic development of literacy education related to Al, since Al policies alone are not enough for responsible action without necessary competences.

This opinion is shared by Holmes et al. (2022), who note that Al governance also involves not only the establishment of certain norms but the general culture of critical and ethical reflection of the use of Al instruments in the academic environment.

The approach of senior faculty and administration to the problem under consideration is consistent with the critical position of Selwyn (2019) regarding the impact of technology on education, who criticizes both techno-utopianism and techno-dystopianism and proposes to engage in the study of technology's actual effect on education from an evidence-based, values-based, and critical position.

To build a research culture where GenAI tools will be used critically and intentionally, it is not enough just to develop policies and conduct training.

6.5 Equity, Inclusion, and Context, Sensitive Governance

Another aspect that runs through several themes discussed throughout the study and which requires special consideration in any framework for governance of GenAI at AIOU is the equity angle of GenAI governance. There is an evident variety in students' language competence, IT skills, access to library sources, and proximity to the supervisor. For some members of this group, GenAI can be used for compensatory purposes that will allow the researcher to bypass language barriers, find relevant literature and receive necessary feedback and assistance that cannot be given due to lack of supervision (Flowerdew & Wang, 2016; Flavin, 2017).

Such governance framework that will limit the use of AI and fail to provide other means of coping with these inequities' risks being ineffective and unjust.

It can be concluded that any governance of GenAI at AIOU should be sensitive to the context in which it is implemented and should not be built by copying university policies of Western countries into the entirely new situation. In the case of the AIOU's research community, the participation in development of the policies as one of the aspects of responsible innovation (Stilgoe et al., 2013) is more than desirable – it is necessary.

1. Conclusion

This study has been the first empirical study of GenAI governance in university research within the Allama Iqbal Open University, Pakistan. Through in-depth interviews and focus groups conducted with 32 faculty members, postgraduate researchers, and administrators, this study has identified a governance environment that is rife with multidimensional stakeholder apprehension, diverse yet often superficial awareness of GenAI technologies, institutional unpreparedness for governing GenAI use in research due to lack of policy and detection systems in place, and the pressing need for capacity building efforts in the university.

The existence of this gap between the rate of GenAI adoption in AIOU's research community and the university's preparedness to govern its adoption has posed some grave threats. The first threat pertains to the integrity and quality of AIOU's research outputs. Second, it jeopardizes the intellectual growth of postgraduate researchers trained in AIOU. Third, it endangers the professional confidence of the faculty supervisors who feel inadequate to cope with the rapidly evolving research environment. Finally, it also affects the reputation and accreditation of the university institution.

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Theoretically speaking, the study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on Al governance in higher education by offering a non-Western, ODL-specific point of view which uncovers the gaps of governance models created in the campus-based, Western university environment (Zawacki, Richter et al., 2019; Holmes et al., 2022). The study proves the usefulness of implementing responsible innovation models (Stilgoe et al., 2013) into the field of educational Al governance and draws attention to the relevance of equity considerations especially in highly diverse social and linguistic environments. Finally, the study enriches our knowledge of the interrelationships between Al literacy (Ng et al., 2021), supervision, and research quality in the GenAI era.

1. Policy Recommendations

1. Considering the research findings and in accordance with the tenets of responsible innovation, the following recommendations are made for AIOU and respective national agencies:

1) AIOU is urged to constitute a multi, faculty GenAI Governance Task Force consisting of representatives from the faculty, postgraduate research scholars, administrative staff, and students to formulate a GenAI research-specific governance policy in a twelve, month period. Such a policy will delineate the allowed and prohibited uses of GenAI in research; disclosure and attribution requirements; consequences of misuse; and a process for periodic revision of such a policy considering technological advancements and changes in its uses.

2) Compulsory GenAI literacy courses for technical skills and ethics in the use of GenAI in research need to be incorporated in the curriculum of research methodology for all M.Phil. and PhD programs. The following topics need to be covered in these courses: capabilities and limitations of major GenAI tools; disclosure and attribution practices; how to critically analyze the outputs of AI; and ethics in AI use in academic research.

2. An organized, faculty development initiative on GenAI for research purposes needs to be formulated and administered, giving special consideration to senior faculty members that have been less exposed to the technology. The initiative must be practical, disciplinary-specific, where necessary, and updated annually considering the ever-changing technological environment.
3. AIOU must assess and pilot-test Al detection software, including the Turnitin Al detector and dedicated programs such as GPT Zero and Originality.ai, considering their validity, error rate, and potential for inequity prior to their institutional implementation. Al detection technologies should be seen not as a sole integrity assurance mechanism but as an element of an overall framework for the same.
4. HEC needs to establish national-level guidance on GenAI governance in university research based on empirical data drawn from institutional assessments like the present one and other consultations within the higher education community. Such guidance must be proportional, inclusive, and adaptable to the various institutional realities of the higher education system of Pakistan.

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5. AIOU should invest in the development of open, access GenAI literacy resources including guidance documents, case studies, video tutorials, and interactive learning modules tailored to the specific needs and constricts of its research community and make these available through its online learning management system to all registered research scholars and supervisory faculty.
6. 7) A monitoring and evaluation mechanism needs to be put in place which would help monitor the development of the usage of GenAI, awareness among stakeholders and governance effectiveness within AIOU.

2. Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations associated with the present study. First, as mentioned above, the study is confined to only one institution, which means that it does not have high transferability to other aversities of Pakistan or other higher educational institutions around the world. Second, being qualitative, the study cannot produce results that are statistically generalizable. It helps get insight into the experience and perspective of a participant sample. Third, the dynamic nature of GenAI makes it very possible that the technology will change quite soon, making it necessary for researchers to stay on track. Fourth, even though researchers try to make sure that participant sample is diverse, there is a high probability that the perspectives of AIOU researchers from regional campuses are under-represented due to the difficulty of their access to technology.

3. Directions for Future Research

Research in the future should consider these shortcomings and further expand the research in several directions. Mixed-methods research combining the advantages of depth and breadth would allow conducting a more comprehensive study of the use and governance gaps of GenAI technologies in the higher education institutions of Pakistan. Comparative research comparing the governance of GenAI in different types of universities of Pakistan – public/private, traditional/on campus, based/ODL, elite/non-elite – would help determine to what extent the governance problems identified in AIOU are institution-specific or characteristic of the whole sector. Longitudinal research studying the evolution of institutional policies and their effect on researcher behavior and research quality would be extremely helpful for the development of evidence-based governance. Finally, action research projects developed by AIOU faculty and researchers would add another dimension to the descriptive and analytical research conducted here.

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