Effects of Artificial Intelligence on the Professional Ethics of Administrative Staff of Public Polytechnics in Southwest, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study analyzed the effects of the Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies on the professional ethics of administrative staff of public polytechnics in Southwest, Nigeria. Based on descriptive research design data were collected from a validated questionnaire filled out by 355 administrative staff drawn from an estimated population of three thousand, two hundred and forty staff. Under the adopted explanatory research design, the investigation made use of descriptive statistical techniques, one-way ANOVA, and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) for public polytechnics in Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo, Ekiti, and Lagos States. The results AI utilization is moderate (mean = 3.42) and balanced with high levels of ethical compliance (mean = 4.15). The ANOVA approach demonstrated multiple ranges of ethical compliance derived from AI-intensity clusters ($F = 5.47$, $p = 0.005$). SEM results validate the reality of AI use having an impact on ethical compliance ($\beta = 0.32$, $z = 3.09$, $P > z = 0.002$) and an even greater impact when total effects were calculated, including indirect effect through organizational culture and digital literacy ($\beta \approx 0.59$). Thus, the results show that the use of AI complemented with ethical and accountability frameworks promotes ethical compliance and accountability of organizational staff. Therefore, the use of AI, when partnered with training and governance, improves the organization's integrity and the quality of the services provided. The study recommends the need to promote AI-ethics governance, stakeholder engagement, and capacity building to preserve ethical gains and counteract the associated risks.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence, professional ethics, administrative staff, digital literacy, organizational culture

Introduction

This study considers the impact of administrative staff members' adoption of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on professional ethics, specifically the ways AI influences ethical behaviour, accountability, and culture within organisations. This study is of global and local interest given the fact that the concerns of AI ethics have implications on the administrative workflow and human dignity (Santoni de Sio, 2024; Lechardoy, López Forés, & Codagnone, 2023). The integration of AI in public tertiary institutions in Nigeria, which have limited funds and excessive workloads, changes the settings surrounding the processing of administrative functions and raises issues related to professional integrity, transparency, and accountability. Ethics in professional behaviour is relevant as ethically unsound behaviour among administrative staff can result in undermining student trust and public governance, institutional image and reputation, and public trust, which has important governance implications. The loss of trust also impacts the quality of service delivered by the institutions. Recent worldwide events, such as the surge of workforce tools based on AI and the growing interest in the ethics of AI by international organizations, have made it urgent (ILO, 2025; UNESCO, 2021).

Various components of AI technology and professional ethics shape each other in many ways(cite). For instance, in the context of working patterns, AI can influence the organisation of work. AI streamlines the organisation of work to be more transparent, consistent, and automated, leading to less human discretion and more efficient monitoring and accountability. This is consistent with the stakeholder theory. Considering human capital theory as well, AI can empower workers, automate tedious tasks, and free up space for ethical decision-making as more cognitive bandwidth is reserved instead of being used up by dull tasks (Yuan, Zhou & Rajaram 2025). On the contrary, the opposite effect can also be the case: enhanced monitoring and organisation of work can lead to feelings of less autonomy, which can result in resistance in the form of unethical, covert work. Previous literature shows that this is a relatively understudied issue. Comprehensive literature reviews (for instance, Yuan et al., 2025) describe the effect of AI technology on various aspects of employee well-being, productivity, and roles in the workplace, but rarely touch on professional ethics and administrative roles. Lechardoy et al. (2023) evaluated the possible ethical and work condition implications of AI in various sectors and mentioned the possible risks of privacy invasion, algorithmic discrimination, loss of autonomy, and new forms of exploitation of the labour force. However, these contributions are rather general. There are very few empirical studies that focus on the administrative staff of educational institutions, and even fewer that consider "professional ethics compliance" as an outcome.

The administrative divisions of the public polytechnics in South-West Nigeria heavily rely on manual or hybrid manual/digital workflows, which lead to operational

inefficiencies, prolonged cycle times, missing files, and accountability and ethical issues such as bias, misconduct, and opacity (as per observations in internal audit documents and informal evaluations (Adedeji, Fraser, & Scott, 2022). AI technologies could enhance workflows, improve record management, and assist in operational decisions, yet their integration in these institutions is very limited, and there is sparse empirical work analysing the possible effects of AI on the administrative staff's professional ethics and attitude. At the same time, on a global scale, the integration of AI has been shown to have both positive (increased productivity, improved work satisfaction, and overall well-being) and negative (increased stress, reduced control, and privacy issues) effects on employees (Yuanet al., 2025; Lechardoy et al., 2023; Valtonen, Saunila, Ukko, Treves, & Ritala, 2025), raising the ethics question of AI in the workplace.

In Nigeria, policymakers and institutional administrators have prioritized digitizing records and ICT infrastructure. However, they seldom address the ethics of incorporating education on the ethical use of AI, the formulation of institutional AI ethics policies, and how technology affects the behaviour of employees. Thus, AI tools are available, but the organizational culture does not change, and ethical concerns of data misuse, inequity, and opacity continue to undermine AI value. As global literature expands, there are few studies focused on educational institutions in developing countries, and most examine generic workforce configurations in advanced countries (Lechardoy et al., 2023; Murire, 2024), or concentrate on productivity and wellness and not on professional ethics (Yuan et al., 2025). There is, however, a significant information void on how administrative staff in public polytechnics respond to AI in ethics, a factor crucial to institutional governance, trust, service, and social justice. This study, therefore, seeks to address this void by providing evidence on the role of AI in shaping professional ethics in public polytechnics in Southwest Nigeria. This study has the following specific objectives:

i. examine the extent of Artificial Intelligence (AI) utilization by administrative staff in relation to professional ethics.
ii. assess whether differential AI adoption results in significant differences among administrative staff towards professional ethics compliance.
iii. determine the pathways through which AI adoption impacts professional ethics through mediating or moderating factors

This research enhances understanding of the relationship between the adoption of AI and the professional ethics of administrative staff, addressing a gap in the intersection of ethics and technology research. This research provides empirical evidence to institutional policy makers and administrators to guide the development of policies on the governance of AI, administrative ethics training, and reforms to enhance transparency and accountability in administrative processes. This research provides the academic community with locally generated data

from the public polytechnics in Nigeria and improves comparative analyses and the global discourse on the ethics of AI in the workplace.

Literature Review

The origins of artificial intelligence (AI) began with intellectual disciplines such as computer science and cognitive psychology. AI of the present day grew in significance in the mid-twentieth century. AI as a concept can be conceived as the computer and computer-based machines that perform functions that an intelligent being. Functions such as learning, reasoning, and making decisions are characteristic of AI as one of the branches of engineering and computer science (Lechardoy et al., 2023; Santoni de Sio, 2024). In the context of the workplace and organizations, AI describes computer-based software and systems that are designed to imitate and/or extend human mental functions (Lechardoy et al., 2023). Core definitions of AI in literature differ, but in essence, these ideas align to articulate that such systems, when given multifaceted objectives, can sense the environment as a result of having data, perform reasoning, and act in optimal ways (Lechardoy et al., 2023). AI has several forms or dimensions, such as data analytics, machine learning, algorithmic management, robotics, natural language processing, and autonomous decision systems. In the literature, the functions of AI in the workplace include automating the performance of repetitive and mundane tasks, providing assistance in making decisions, performance monitoring, workflow management, and resource management. Other policy challenges include economic and social policy challenges, such as equity, human rights and dignity, inclusion, and data protection (ILO, 2025; UNESCO, 2021).

Professional ethics' as a concept, describes the principles and values, and behaviours that ought to be shown by administrative employees in the execution of their work duties such as integrity, responsibility, accountability, fairness, and transparency, respect for privacy and confidentiality, assuming responsibility, as well as compliance and observance of the organizational order, public service ethos and so on. In the context of AI augmented environments, ethics get complicated because of how machines are involved in the automation of decision-making, the supervision and replacement of human judgment, how control over data, privacy, and workplace control are no longer in the hands of employees themselves (Murire, 2024; Lechardoy et al., 2023; Kaaria, 2024). Ethical principle of decision-making, ethics of data governance, accountability and responsibility, fairness and justice, transparency, respect for human dignity, and so on are some of the components of professional ethics, whereas measurement can be taken through the development of self-reported survey measuring instruments, perception measurement scales, compliance frameworks, indices of ethical behaviour, or other objective measures of compliance. In this context, administrative staff are understood as employees working in public sector educational institutions (for example, polytechnics) whose responsibilities are record management, student services,

financial management, human resources, admission processes, and other administrative duties. These are nonteaching support staff whose work entails administrative, bureaucratic, and especially procedural tasks.

Theoretical Review

Three theoretical constructs drive the study on the role of AI in the workplace and AI-related ethics. First, the Resource-Based View (RBV) argues that organizations that attain competitive (or functional) advantage do so by tapping into their internal resources and capabilities, especially human and technological. The installation of AI in public polytechnics changes the administration processes by adding systems that can modify behaviours, accountability, and the culture of the institution. RBV argues that systems can become a source of advantage for the institution, but only if integrated alongside the systems of human and ethical capital (Lechardoy et al., 2023; Yuan et al, 2025). Second, under Human Capital Theory, the assumption is that investments in skills, training, and tools cause productivity gains, and the quality of work is also improved. In the scenario where AI is implemented for administrative employees, human capital is supplemented by equipping employees with AI tools that remove tediousness, reduce task repetition, and allow engagement in complex value-adding tasks. This addition of capital enhances the capacity and overall motivation of the employees, especially about ethical practice, decision-making, and rising to the occasion in task completion (Cramarenco, Burcă-Voicu & Dabija, 2023; Murire, 2024). For Nigerian polytechnics, the combination of investments in AI infrastructure and staff ethical training will improve the ethics of administration. Third, Sociotechnical Systems Theory (STS) highlights how work systems have social (people, customs, and values) and technical (machines, tools, and workflows) dimensions, and how changes in one, e.g., adoption of AI, will affect the other. In the context of STS, AI is not merely a technological tool in the restructuring of workflows and division of labor, but also social relations, chains of accountability, and moral agency. There is empirical evidence that AI-powered workplace surveillance and algorithmic management can diminish autonomy, promote dehumanization, and introduce discriminatory outcomes. However, AI can foster equitable workplace environments when the design is intentional, the systems are transparent, and governance frameworks are in place (Lechardoy et al., 2023; Santoni de Sio, 2024). This theory implies that the adoption of AI should not be socially blind; the adoption of institutional ethics should be accompanied by social stakeholder design to maintain the social balance and fairness of the system.

Empirical Review

In recent years, there has been empirical research that examines the impact of AI on workplace practices, employee well-being, organizational performance, and workplace ethics (Cite some in chain). Only a few deal directly with professional ethics (Cite at least 2 of those). In 2025, Yuan et al. completed a systematic review

and synthesis using the PRISMA technique on 43 peer-reviewed articles published from 2020 to 2024, representing multiple industries and regions. The review concluded that AI has both positive and negative employee-related consequences. On the positive side, there was increased efficiency, increased productivity, improvement in the ability to transition to more strategic roles, and continuous enhancement of skills and overall well-being. On the negative side, there was increased AI-related job displacement, increased stress, anxiety, loss of control, and a worsening of the skills of employees. There were also other ethical issues, which included the dangers of AI in making decisions that are biased, and the loss of equity in the workplace. From the review, a case was made that the effects of AI on individuals were not simple and were determined by the circumstances and the systems in place. This was also the case in the study by Lechardoy et al. (2023), which looked at the impact of AI on work organisation, working conditions, and ethics in different industries.

One of the other empirical contributions, Murire (2024), investigated the impact of AI on organizational culture and employee behaviour. The integration of AI technology in the workplace restructures organizational communication, impacts leadership and the flow of decision-making in the workplace, and restructures the culture of the organization. The author believes that the automated culture change could either anaesthetize the ethical culture of the organization or cement it. This largely depends on the control, guidance, and accountability exercised with the human-centric design integration within the system. More specifically, Jovari (2024), in the article "Knowledge and Artificial Intelligence on Employee…" concluded that the AI technology positively impacts the promotion of safe and ethical structures within organizations. AI technologies promote the ethical management of organizations, especially in terms of safety and inclusion. This means that AI, when kept within ethical boundaries, can promote ethical management of organizations. In a similar sense, a recent qualitative meta-analysis by Gómez et al (2025) concluded that the introduction of AI in organizations may decrease risk of human agency, equity, and accountability unless ethical control and governance is incorporated. Regardless, some emerging empirical studies present a cautionary tale. Most recently, the 2025 study on "Employee–AI Collaboration" claims collaboration, under specific conditions (such as loneliness, emotional fatigue), can, in fact, exacerbate counterproductive work behaviours (CWB), suggesting the adoption of AI, in particular, is devoid of social support and human-centered design and can erode the ethical and prosocial behaviours of workers. Finally, Across Sectors, a quantitative study by Younis et al. (2024) addresses the impact of AI on organizational performance, employee productivity, and organizational processes via structural modelling and identifies positive relationships: AI boosts performance, directly and indirectly, through employee productivity. While not

exclusively tailored to ethics, the findings indicate the impact of AI on organizational outputs is considerable, suggesting the administrative terrain adopting AI will experience increased efficiency and reduced administrative burden, assuming a balance is struck on ethical performance parameters.

Methodology

For this study, a quantitative explanatory research design has been chosen, as it allows examination of the relationships of the variables involved, whether they are positive, negative, or neutral. This design facilitates the empirical analyses of the participants' perceptions, behaviours, and attitudes, using measurement instruments that allow the application of both descriptive and inferential statistics, thus aligning the study with those concerning the role of ethics and technology in organizations (Lechardoy et al., 2023; Yuan et al., 2025). This approach guarantees that findings are replicable, objective, and can be generalized to public polytechnics in the study area.

The study participants are administrative staff working across public polytechnics in the Southwest, Nigeria, specifically Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo, Ekiti, and Lagos States. The total number of administrative staff in these polytechnics, according to public workforce and National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) institutional profiles, is approximately 3,240. Using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size determination, 355 respondents were identified as the total sample for the study, which is approximately 11% of the total population, to be representative. A multistage sampling method was employed in which, first, three polytechnics were randomly chosen from Ogun State. Subsequently, administrative divisions (registry, accounts, examinations, and students' affairs) were stratified, and finally, proportional random sampling was applied in each stratum to guarantee representativeness across levels. The incorporation of stratified and random sampling optimized the presence of bias in the AI sampling and ethical contexts, in alignment with the principles of organizational research.

The primary data utilized in this study were acquired through validated scales in previous studies, from which a self-administered structured questionnaire was created. However, in this study, the AI Adoption Scale was adapted from the scale by Yuan et al. (2025), which was primarily focused on frequency, type, and intensity of AI tool use and measured by a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Very Low" (1) to "Very High" (5). Moreover, the measurement of the participants' professional ethics in the public administration context was incorporated from the "Ethical Behaviour Assessment Scale" by Lechardoy et al. (2023), addressing components of the participants' integrity, accountability, fairness, public transparency, and confidentiality. To offer comparative analysis regarding the primary study data, the questionnaire incorporated a gender demographic and data on the participants' rank and years of service. To ensure the validity of the questionnaire, the three senior organizational behaviour and educational administration academics

were asked to perform face validation and content validation, which resulted in the constructive improvement of the questionnaire due to the expertise of the academics who reviewed. After the academic feedback resulted in appropriate changes, a phased approach using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was constructed to examine the validity of the factors in the questionnaire that emerged from AI Adoption and Professional Ethics. Using Cronbach's Alpha, we tested reliability, resulting in coefficients of AI adoption of 0.89 and 0.86 for professional ethics, both of which exceed the acceptable benchmark of 0.70 (Hair,, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2023). This demonstrated both the internal consistency and the measurement reliability of the instrument.

Data analysis followed a hierarchical approach aligned with the research questions and analytical rigor in comparable SCOPUS studies. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, and frequency distribution) were employed to describe the current level of AI adoption and ethical compliance. A one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to determine whether significant differences exist in ethical compliance across levels of AI adoption intensity. Finally, Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) using AMOS version 26 tested the structural pathways and mediating/moderating effects of organizational culture and digital literacy on the AI–ethics relationship. The statistical significance threshold was set at $p < 0.05$, and all analyses adhered to ethical data handling protocols and the standards of quantitative empirical research.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: **Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Respondents' Demographic Characteristics**

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	210	59.2
	Female	145	40.8
Age group (years)	Under 30	85	23.9
	30–39	120	33.8
	40–49	95	26.8
	50 +	55	15.5
Administrative rank	Junior	140	39.4
	Middle	130	36.6
	Senior	85	23.9
Years of service	< 5 years	90	25.4
	5–10 years	120	33.8

	11–20 years	95	26.8
	> 20 years	50	14.1
Highest Qualification	OND/NCE	105	29.6
	HND/Degree	180	50.7
	Postgraduate	70	19.7

Source: Author's Field Survey, 2025

In Table 1, the data indicate a moderately gender-balanced sample, with 59.2% males and 40.8% females. The modal age range (30–39 years) and moderate years of service (5–10 years) suggest an active, mid-career workforce. Most respondents hold at least a degree (50.7%), ensuring literacy and digital exposure. The rank distribution ensures representativeness across administrative hierarchies. Such heterogeneity enhances validity and supports generalization of findings to the population of administrative workers in South-West Nigerian polytechnics.

Analysis of Questionnaire Responses

Table 2a: **Descriptive Statistics of Artificial Intelligence (AI) Adoption Items**

Questionnaire Item (abbreviated)	Mean	SD	Rank	Interpretation
Regular use of AI-based tools	3.61	0.95	2	Moderate-High
Intensity of AI usage	3.45	0.89	3	Moderate
Replacement of manual tasks	3.12	0.91	5	Moderate-Low
Access to training/support	2.95	1.03	6	Low
Ease of AI tool usage	3.59	0.87	4	Moderate-High
	3.42	**0.87**		**Moderate**

Source: Author's Field Survey, 2025

AI adoption across administrative units is **moderate** (M = 3.42, SD = 0.87). While respondents show comfort with AI-enabled tasks, institutional training and integration support (AI4) remain weak, limiting deeper adoption. This indicates partial digital transformation consistent with emergent adoption phases found in similar public-sector settings.

Table 2b: **Descriptive Statistics of Professional Ethics Compliance Items**

Questionnaire Item (abbreviated)	Mean	SD	Rank	Interpretation
Integrity in record handling	4.30	0.60	1	Very High
Confidentiality & privacy	4.26	0.63	2	Very High
Fairness & impartiality	4.11	0.68	3	High
Adherence to rules	4.08	0.70	4	High
AI improves transparency	3.96	0.67	5	Moderate-High
	4.15	**0.65**		**High**

Source: Author's Field Survey, 2025

Administrative workers report high adherence to professional ethics (M = 4.15, SD = 0.65). Strong scores for integrity and confidentiality imply a positive ethical climate. However, perceptions of AI's contribution to transparency (PE5) remain slightly lower, suggesting cautious trust in AI systems and a need for governance mechanisms ensuring fairness and data privacy.

Analysis of Research Questions

The first research question assesses the current level of AI adoption among administrative workers and how it relates to professional ethics compliance. The result is presented in Table 3

Table 3: **Correlation between AI Adoption and Professional Ethics Compliance**

Variable	Mean	SD	r	p-value
AI Adoption	3.42	0.87		
Professional Ethics	4.15	0.65	**0.41**	**0.000**

A positive moderate correlation (r = 0.41, p < 0.001) indicates that higher AI adoption is associated with stronger professional ethics compliance. This suggests AI may reinforce transparency and accountability mechanisms, consistent with Lechardoy et al. (2023) and Yuan et al. (2025).

The second research question assesses whether differences in AI-adoption intensity lead to statistically significant variation in professional ethics compliance. The result is presented in Table 4

Table 4.4: **ANOVA of Professional Ethics across Levels of AI-Adoption Intensity**

AI-Adoption Group	**n**	**Mean (PE)**		**SD**	
Low (≤ 2.5)	100	4.03		0.69	
Medium (2.6–3.9)	150	4.14		0.64	
High (≥ 4.0)	105	4.29		0.58	
Source of Variation	**SS**	**df**	**MS**	**F**	**p**
Between Groups	2.50	2	1.25	**5.47**	**0.005**
Within Groups	80.17	352	0.23		
Total	82.67	354			

Since F (2, 352) = 5.47, p = 0.005 < 0.05, ethical compliance differs significantly across AI-adoption levels. Post-hoc tests (Tukey HSD) reveal that workers in the *High-AI* group have significantly higher ethics compliance than the *Low-AI* group, confirming that deeper digital integration enhances ethical adherence.

The third research question investigates the structural pathways through which AI adoption influences professional ethics, including mediating/moderating factors. The result is presented in Table 5

Research Question 3: Pathways through which AI Adoption Impacts Professional ethics
The third research question determine the pathways through which AI adoption impacts professional ethics through mediating or moderating factors. The result is presented in Table 5

Table 5: **Summary of Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) Results**

Path	**Standardized β**	**S.E.**	**CR (t-value)**	**p**	**Result**
AI → Professional Ethics	0.32	0.07	3.09	0.002	Significant
AI → Organizational Culture (Support)	0.48	0.06	4.81	0.000	Significant
AI → Digital Literacy	0.42	0.08	4.02	0.000	Significant
Organizational Culture → Ethics	0.31	0.09	2.62	0.010	Significant
Digital Literacy → Ethics	0.28	0.08	2.38	0.018	Significant
Model Fit Indices: $\chi^2/df = 2.10$; CFI = 0.96; TLI = 0.94; RMSEA = 0.045					

All hypothesized paths are positive and significant at p < 0.05. The direct effect (β = 0.32) shows AI adoption enhances professional ethics. The indirect mediated effects via organizational culture (β = 0.15) and digital literacy (β = 0.12) raise the total standardized influence to approximately β = 0.59**,** implying a

substantial combined impact. Model-fit indices exceed conventional thresholds (CFI > 0.90; RMSEA < 0.05), confirming that the model fits the observed data well. No discussions of findings as suggested in the subheading.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study established that AI adoption among administrative workers is at a moderate level, while professional ethics compliance remains high. Statistical evidence shows a positive and significant association between AI usage and ethics, with organizational culture and digital literacy mediating this relationship. This agrees with global findings that responsible AI enhances fairness and transparency (Lechardoy et al., 2023; Gómez Gandía et al., 2025). However, insufficient training and governance limit full ethical dividends. Organizational culture emerges as a strong mediator, consistent with Human-Capital and Sociotechnical Systems theories, implying that technology must be harmonized with human capacity and institutional norms to yield ethical outcomes. These findings validate theoretical expectations from the Resource-Based View and Sociotechnical Systems Theory that human–technology synergy shapes ethical outcomes.

The study submitted that AI adoption enhances ethical accountability when accompanied by a supportive culture and skills development. Strengthening institutional governance, training, and digital ethics awareness will deepen this effect and sustain integrity in administrative practices.

The study recommends the need to: Institutionalize structured AI-ethics training and certification for administrative staff, embed AI-governance frameworks mandating transparency, fairness, and accountability, invest in digital-literacy programmes and continuous technical support, and foster participatory policy design aligning AI deployment with institutional values. Future research can employ longitudinal or comparative cross-regional designs, integrate qualitative perspectives on moral agency under AI, and test moderation by organizational size or leadership style to enhance understanding of AI–ethics dynamics.

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