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Research Paper

Policy vacuum in an ai era: exploring the urgent need for ai policy in higher education in bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

This current study investigated the emergent urgency of implementing artificial intelligence (AI) policy among higher education institutions in Bangladesh through ten university teacher and ten university student interviews. The study comprehensively uncovered the policy shortcomings, ethical struggle and governance issues regarding academic use of AI. Findings showed that while AI adoption in HEIs was growing quickly, the absence of fully developed institutional policies had created governance gaps and raised questions concerning both academic integrity and access equity. The study emphasized the urgent need for policy interventions in order to fill the policy vacuum and ensure responsible AI integration for higher education system of Bangladesh.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The introduction of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies radically changed the environment in higher education in most portions of the world, provoking new possibilities of improving learning experiences as well as new policy-related issues [1]. Bangladesh, where the rate of infection was increasing exponentially, and institutions had already implemented the digital transformation measures in the name

of future tenure, and the top AI tools and applications were added to the list, without an appropriate perspective policy followed to implement and manage this mechanism [2]. This was not ideal, including ethics in the field of AI technology, violations of personal privacy, educational honesty and opportunity to access resources enhanced by AI [3].

Speedy policy response was needed to deal with governance loopholes and create accountable AI uses owing to the expansion and supremacy of AI technologies in schools [4]. UNEC noted the necessity to create specific guidelines concerning the ethical implementation of ARI in education and recognized the experience of some states, such as Bangladesh, which were in immediate need of a national system of AI in education [5]. No institution of higher learning has formulated an institutional policy to regulate the application of AI in academic units, even with the National AI Strategy 2020 and Draft AI Policy 2024 in Bangladesh [6].

Adoption of AI in higher education has found that new technologies offered incredible challenges and opportunities. Besides the ability to make the learning experience more personalized and simplify the administrative processes, AI-assisted services also brought up new concerns about the integrity of academic work, the biased algorithms, and the potential damage to the traditional teaching process. The lack of AI policy has led to the emergence of ethical challenges and governance gaps in higher education faculty and students [7].

The need to fill this policy gap was also established considering the valid ambitions of Bangladesh on the Fourth Industrial Revolution and digitalization. Universities are leading in the field of AI innovation and job training, yet they also do not have the requisite policy framework to help them deal with complex legal, ethical, and educational questions [8]. This research gap required an in-depth analysis of the stakeholders regarding the governance issues and AI policy demands in the higher education system in Bangladesh.

The primary aim of this study was to explore, through the perspective of the stakeholders, how urgently AI policy could be developed in the context of Bangladeshi higher education. Its particular objectives are to: 1) map prevailing patterns of AI adoption and policy gaps in Higher Education Institutions (HE-ins), 2) determine the principal ethical dilemmas and governance challenges to its adoption, 3) explore the existing vision of policy priorities and stakeholder needs on the introduction of AI, 4) explore the potential impact of policy barrenness on academic integrity and educational equity.

2. RELATED WORK

The global debate on AI in HE policy also witnessed various reactions and the widening of models of governance. International organizations established comprehensive guidelines on how to integrate AI in education particularly that of the UNESCO, and emphasized on integrative deployment practices, ethics, and human-friendly design. Initially knowing the basics of AI and ethics and pedagogy of AI are some of the particular skills that have to be acquired to be able to incorporate AI in a responsible manner as explained by the UNESCO Competency Framework of Teachers of AI [9].

The research about AI adoption in developed countries opened new policy opportunities [10]. The United States introduced the use of AI education tools and adaptive learning systems as a reaction to the problem of academic dishonesty and access opportunities. Although in Finland, it was deemed as a part of AI literacy and educator training, in Singapore, it was integrated into the STEM education and lifelong learning systems [10]. On the contrary, these diverse responses can act as a guide to the powerful policy of AI within the emerging markets.

The digitalization of Bangladeshi higher education has gone a step further regardless of minor challenges. Despite the fact that the National AI Strategy 2020 in the country had a bold plan of the use of AI in the development of the country, it did not include a mechanism of how the education sector should be implemented [11]. Although the resulting draft AI policy 2024 had better data governance, ethics and regulation frameworks, gaps remain, especially in the sectoral guidance of higher education sector. Institute like BRAC University in Bangladesh have been among the pioneers in moving forward with AI implementation relative to the public universities who have introduced AI-enable learning aids tools [12]. Nevertheless, the public universities were faced with infrastructure restriction, financial shortage, and

unqualified teachers. This discontinuity highlighted the problem of fair use of AI with an overall holistic approach to solving institutional discrepancies.

The ethical implication of AI in education is one of the areas that need urgent policy intervention. Other ethical issues were bias, privacy, academic integrity, and creation of educational inequality [13], [14], [15]. Research has established that AI can be biased when training on biased data, and can discriminate against the underrepresented groups during admission, grading, and course recommendations. The governance of AI in education was problematic due to challenges of privacy and security in data. There had been apprehensions that AI apps would use large volumes of student data that had cast doubt on student privacy, and data ownership and data misuse [16], [17]. There was no clear instruction on how data should be handled, stored and shared, so this was a loophole that institutional policy was required to close.

AI in Educational Policy The literature regarding the implementation of AI (Artificial intelligence) policy in education has reported that there is a wide divide between policy intention and actu al practice. UNESCO survey showed that less than one in ten percent of schools and institutions at a global scale attempted to enact AI teaching in an official manner, i.e. there is obviously a policy vacuum [18], [19]. This result was correlated with the necessity of policy intervention, as well as referred to the difficulty in developing effective governance [20], [21].

The necessity of AI policies in Bangladeshi higher education had very few information sources. Rather than focusing on governance and policy needs, the past studies have generally covered technical aspects, which are mainly associated with the implementation of AI [22], [23]. Due to this research gap, we empirically studied the perspectives of stakeholders and policy priorities in Bangladeshi HEIs.

The worrying trends in academic honesty and development of critical thinking in AI use in Bangladeshi higher education are already evident in newer initiatives [24]. In a study, there was found that one survey used AI to manage the course 65% of the students, and the other 51.6% of the students feared dependency on AI and failure to develop their analytical skills [24]. These results implied that there should be an explicit policy framework regarding the responsible AI benefits in academia.

3. METHODOLOGY

This research employed a qualitative approach using the in-depth interviews (IDI) about the perception of the stakeholders about AI policy requirements in higher education in Bangladesh. A qualitative study was chosen because it offers delicacy and awareness of the complexity of AI governance, deficiencies on its policy and practitioner experiences [25]. The depth interviews helped to understand the views of the participants more deeply, and the abilities to follow emergent themes and collect in depth and context-related insights regarding AI policy needs [26].

The principles of the interpretive phenomenological analysis, based on the experience of the participants in using AIs and their demands towards the policies, informed the research design. Such a method enabled one to delve into both the individual and pattern of experience at group level among the stakeholders and was therefore a sufficient point on which conclusions on policies can be made [27].

Sample Only purposive sampling was utilized in which 20 people were taken as a sample population of which 10 teachers and 10 university students of various universities in Bangladesh were included. Out of the faculty 7 were men and 3 women their rank was between lecturers and professors as shown in Table 1, Table 2 and Figure 1 and Figure 2. The 6 and 4 boys and girls, respectively, of the student population, were scattered in grades of freshman to postgraduate Table 3, Figure 3. Such a balanced coverage across types creates professional and learner perspectives, which is a solid starting point of the inquiry about the study question. Purposive sampling was therefore the option since the representatives of key stakeholder groups that were influenced by AI-policy making in academia were incorporated [27]. Only the participants that passed several criteria were involved: they are in higher education and are conversant with digital technologies and willing to discuss the AI questions in detail.

Table 1. The Participants by Group and Gender

Group	Total	Male	Female
Teacher	10	7	3

Student	10	6	4

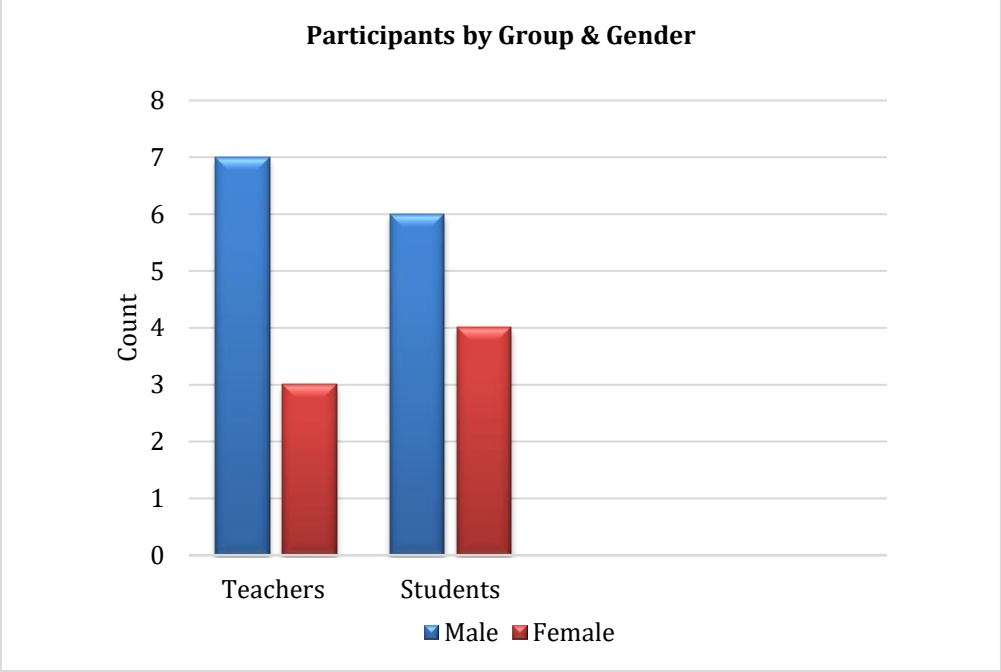

Figure 1. Shows the Participants by Group and Gender

Table 2. The Teacher Positions

Name	Gender	Position
Teacher_1	Male	Professor
Teacher_2	Male	Assistant Professor
Teacher_3	Male	Associate Professor
Teacher_4	Male	Lecturer
Teacher_5	Male	Associate Professor
Teacher_6	Male	Assistant Professor
Teacher_7	Male	Lecturer
Teacher_8	Female	Lecturer
Teacher_9	Female	Professor
Teacher_10	Female	Assistant Professor

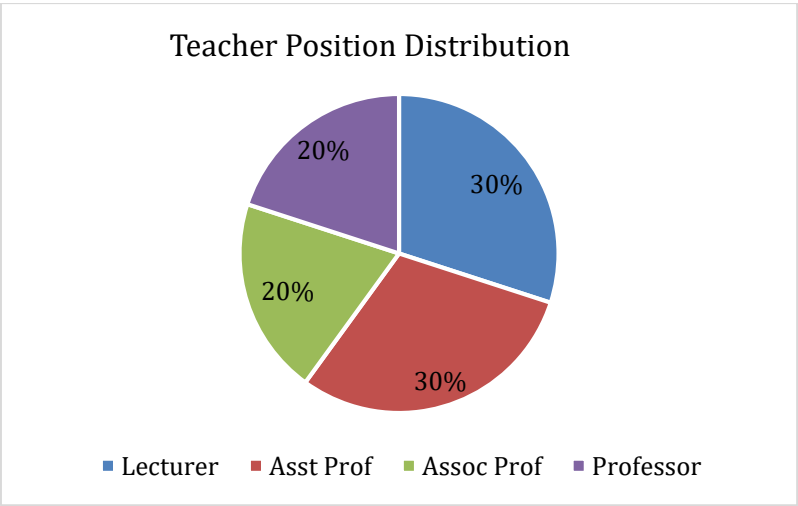

Figure 2. Shows the Teacher Positions Distribution

Table 3. The Student Details Table

Name	Gender	Student Year
Student_1	Male	3rd Year
Student_2	Male	1st Year
Student_3	Male	4th Year
Student_4	Male	Masters
Student_5	Male	Masters
Student_6	Male	Masters
Student_7	Female	4th Year
Student_8	Female	1st Year
Student_9	Female	3rd Year
Student_10	Female	3rd Year

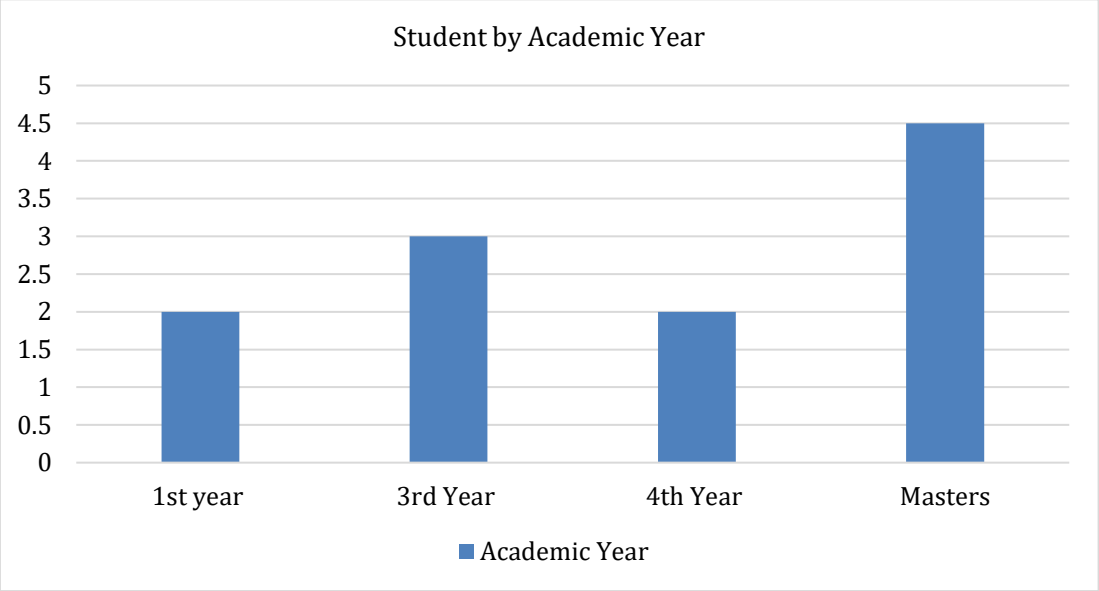

Figure 3. Shows the Student Year Distribution

All of these steps of sampling included ethical considerations. An informed consent was signed by all participants who were made aware of the purpose of the study, methods employed, data processing and their rights as participants of the experiment. Anonymization procedures and the secure mechanisms of data storing were employed to maintain the confidentiality.

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were used to collect data between March and May 2024. Each interview lasted between 45-60 minutes and was conducted in the language that participants were comfortable speaking to (Bengali or English) to ensure ease and enable a better expression of opinions [28]. The interviews were all recorded (awaiting permission of the participants) and transcribed word-to-word and analyzed.

Thematic analysis Analysis Thematic analysis was the main technique of analysis based on six steps recommended by Braun and Clarke in their systematic approach to identifying, analysing and reporting patterns in qualitative data [28]. The analysis commenced by a few readings of transcripts to familiarize them and to identify extracts that seemed potentially relevant to the research objectives.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Results

The research analyzed the necessity of the immediate policy of AI in Bangladeshi higher educations and found the gaps in preparedness, morality, regulation, and fairness. The subjects that were raised in the meetings repeatedly were capacity, security, equitable access, ethical dilemmas and ambiguous policies.

Despite the increase in the use of AI, both the educators and students highlighted that the absence of a standard training and standards contributes to its misuse and this is problematic to the institutions as well as to the students.

4.1.1 Policy and Governance Vacuum

Weak regulation of AI was reverberated in the universities. The confusion, inconsistency and lack of direction in AI implementation were discussed between teachers and students, so it was up to institutions to solve this problem independently.

4.1.2 Absence of National AI Policy Framework

The teachers also cited the absence of top-down government mandates. The teacher: "We are just playing with the AI tools that we carry with no formal guidelines (Teacher 1). Concerns were similar among students. The only fact that no one informs us about is whether assignments should be AI or not (Student 1). This gap on the national front meant that colleges would make a policy at the spur of the moment.

4.1.3 Institutional Policy Gaps

Universities had no uniform internal regulations. I never got any policy in my university and, therefore, all departments make different decisions (Teacher 2). There were inconsistencies that were confirmed by students. One teacher loves use of AI and the other punishes it. Such differences (Student 2) undermine resource distribution and evaluation process transparency.

4.1.4 Policy Awareness Deficit

The stakeholders did not know much about the global AI principles. Created some guidelines at UNESCO, but no one here was talking of it, I did just read some of the guidelines (Teacher 4). Students noted the same gap. On the one hand, we just hear about ChatGPT, but we do not know how it is controlled in other places (Student 4). The universities are hampered by a lack of policy knowledge.
Ethical and Academic Integrity Concerns

4.1.5 Ethical and Academic Integrity Concerns

The research has established that ethical issues and anxieties over academic honesty are major hurdles in the adoption of AI. Teachers and students were worried of plagiarism, favoritism, responsibility and absence of critical thinking. The unchecked application of AI leads to uncertainty the lack of uniformity in practices by universities adds to the ethical risks. The respondents emphasized transparency and attention to detail in an attempt to maintain a sense of equity and quality in post-secondary studies.

4.1.6 Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty

It was emphasized repeatedly by teachers that the use of AI is a means of evading actual academic activity. It is a student who submits AI generated work and is completely unaware of what has been done (Teacher 1). Some students rely on the AI only to get their research completed (Teacher 2). Students who are admitted peers, petit latestthoughts openly use AI. Many classmates reproduce AI results and prepare their homework (Student 1). It is hard to tell who is learning and who only does it to take shortcuts (Student 3). Overall, it appears that the participants have a common assumption that the threat of plagiarism grows when institutional controls are not present.

4.1.7 Bias and Transparency Issues

According to teachers, AI products are occasionally biased or unclear. The system is able to propagate biases in general and nothing can validate the outputs (Teacher 3). The artificial intelligence does not justify how it comes to the conclusion, and that is dangerous (Teacher 4). There were also inconsistent yields among students. The question the same question answers differently and we do not know which one to believe (Student 4). It is also baffling when the hints of AI are opposite (Student 5). These concerns emphasize the importance of transparency in AI tools employed at <org orgName="academically"/>.

4.1.8 Accountability Challenges

According to them, they did not know who would be the responsibility of the improper use of AI. Who is accountable in case AI creates erroneous or plagiarized contents, the pupil, educator or platform? (Teacher 5). There is no set procedure in case of errors occurring (Teacher 6). The same concern was expressed by students. "We are not sure whether we will be punished because of AI errors or not (Student 6). It is not clear whether the responsible use of AI is even identified (Student 7). This lack of direction in accountability poses a problem and doubt in academic procedures.

4.1.9 Erosion of Critical Thinking

They also cautioned that over-reliance on AI would translate to students being deprived of their independence of problem-solving. Now, students do not even attempt to think, they imitate AI (Teacher 7). You know, critical thinking skills are fading (Teacher 8). The AI was a replacement of the student effort. It is more comfortable to leave the work to the AI than to think over a problem (Student 8). "Sometimes I think that I do not learn fully as I rely on AI too much (Student 9). Quote Participants were even concerned that AI could adversely suppress intellectual investment through uncontrolled use.

4.1.10 Equity and Access

Members of the group highlighted considerable variations between the availability of AI tools and resources between higher education institutions. According to them, learning environments were not fair due to unequal infrastructure, high prices, language, and exclusionary policies. These are challenges that put AI at a disadvantage, even among underprivileged students and the need to have more targeted programs to ensure equal access.

4.1.11 Digital Divide

Teachers remarked that pupils in impoverished or in rural communities often have no access to A.I. devices. Only students with good internet can access AI applications (Teacher 5). Some of the schools do not have computers or contemporary frameworks of artificial intelligence (Teacher 2). Students complained of the same. Many of them cannot afford AI utilities as they simply cannot have high quality connection present at all (Student 1). It is not just that the only some students should use these technologies (Student 2). Obviously, any digital divide restricts the learning opportunities of vulnerable students.

4.1.12 Cost Barriers

One of the major obstacles was high prices of AI platforms. Most of the students cannot afford AI tools which restrict their use according to the teacher (Teacher 3). Due to institutions could not afford everything to students (Teacher 4). Students narrated how cost factor came in. I am unable to afford the supplemental services of AI and I do not have most of the services (Student 3). The reason is the lack of money and inability to compete with peers who are able to access everything (Student 4). These economic obstacles lead to learning opportunities inequities.

4.1.13 Language and Cultural Limitations

AI fixed so, were inclined to adopt English and, thus, no use at local context. AI systems are unable to read text written in Bangali, it cannot be gernalizable (Teacher 7). Thus, you see, sometimes the cultural aspect of it is neglected which predetermines relevancy (Teacher 6). Students complained of challenges as well. "The Bangla assignments are translated wrongly by AI (Student 5). The instruments are not position specific to our local curriculums (Student 9). These cultural and linguistic restrictions restrict the equity of learning.

4.1.14 Capacity and Readiness

The results show that both faculty and students have a clear challenge in embracing AI due to skill shortage, training and infrastructure. To ensure the success of the integration of AI, participants emphasized that continuous professional development and improved infrastructure is needed. It is also

important to seal gaps in capacity and readiness when it comes to responsible and sustainable AI use in higher education.

4.1.15 Faculty Skill Gaps

Teachers claimed that they lacked skills to steer them in the right direction. I would not recommend students to use AI because I have no proper training myself and I would not teach responsibly (Teacher 2). We need to have a course to teach responsibly (Teacher 8). Students noted comparable restrictions. Some educators do not even understand how to use AI themselves, and that makes it more difficult to learn on our part (Student 3). Because there is no direction half the time, we are abusing AI (Student 10). Finally, the inexperience of the faculty can prevent a good fit to AI implementation.

4.1.16 Student Preparedness

Teachers also have no real agreement as to the preparedness of students in certain subjects. Engineering students can work with AI tools, and it is not so with others (Teacher 3). Not every child can be a good user of AI (Teacher 2). This disparity was proven by the students. Many of us do not study AI as homework/research (Student 9). The same student states that we only resort to trial and error which is not as effective, and it can be also dangerous (Student 4). Unparalleled preparedness results in unequal learning.

4.1.17 Infrastructure Limitations

The teachers explained that it is impossible to use AI due to outdated or insufficient infrastructure. The support of good AIs in advanced AIs is not available anywhere (Teacher 4). Since the Internet and hardware are sluggish, AI is not applied appropriately (Teacher 6). Similar frustrations were felt among students. We do not have computers and good internet systems to effectively access AI (Student 5). Slow system is detrimental to learning eefficiently (Student 7). The primary impediment to the AI implementation is bad infrastructure.

4.2 Discussion

The findings indicate that AI policy lacks policies to be governed by in institutions of higher learning in severe cases, and this is in line with the past studies that have identified such policy gaps and the uncertainty they present in governance [29]. It is high time to have a well-planned policy response as the absence of a national policy framework of AI in higher education, inconsistent institutional reactions, and the paucity of policy awareness all reveal. Such a state of ungovernmentality, in terms of the new technological applications that are pushing the boundaries of regulatory frameworks and mechanisms in efforts to regulate them, is indicative of the wider global trends, which brings much uncertainty with respect to content and operational responsibility. The fact that the control of AI application is decentralized in the management of organizations also complicates operationalization, which emphasizes the importance of roles and responsibilities [30].

Academic honesty and ethics: the threats of plagiarism and the damage to the skills of critical thinking that were not trained by AI. Such findings can be aligned with the evidence in the world that without explicit standards, AI solutions pose a significant threat to academic integrity [31]. Besides these ethical dilemmas, AI outcomes are not necessarily self-evident, and the question of accountability in situations where the use of AI has caused an error is even more complicated. The disillusionment of participants about the lost critical engagement can also be understood as the embodiment of the more long-term impact of AI on intellectual autonomy, which happens to be an issue in education that requires curriculum reform and continuous pedagogical innovation [32].

The privacy and security concerns are so massive, he said, given that there is now a national and international issue over AI systems in the field of education. But challenges in cybersecurity, the lack of transparency in the academic data-interest value generation process of generating AI content, and uncontrolled access to academic sensitive content all have the potential to undermine the trust of the AI. This factor is associated with the ethical demand of AI to safeguard privacy and data [32].

The digital divide in the less developed and rural Bangladesh was identified to be there. The sources of barriers to inclusive AI-supported education are differences in infrastructure, access to the Internet, the affordability and usability of AI tools, and the importance of language and culture. These results indicate the necessity of tailored policies, and we also propose that activities should be made to combat infrastructure obstacles, culturally-specific AI innovations, and the engagement of marginalized communities with creating and implementing such policies. AI can even increase this massive gap instead of bridging it unless such factors of unfairness are considered [33].

The major obstacles were low faculty and student aptitude, and readiness. Poor training, unequal distribution of technical experience, and infrastructure are barriers and abusers to the adoption of AI. The request of a continuing professional development by the participants is also aligned with the international best practices that emphasize on long-term capacity building activities to equip teachers and offer ethical and responsible AI learning. It is imperative to note that the fair and adjustable application of AI demands the creation of infrastructure, such as advanced hardware and the ubiquitous internet connectivity [34].

Because it is a qualitative study, the results cannot be generalized and rather say the perceptions of the stakeholders in the Bangladeshi higher education scenario. Nevertheless, it does seal a big gap in research by focusing on the experiences of the affected by the AI policy empty. In the future, the research may be more quantitative and compare different countries or organizations [35].

It has suggested that a national AI policy of higher education should be developed, and the process must be fast as it needs to have moral considerations and data privacy regulations. It requires uniform institutional internal rules and Transparency and fairness is attained through the use of national systems. Increasing capacity should be undertaken (e.g. training teachers and AI literacy in students on a regular basis). Besides creating culture-sensitive AI instruments that can aid in bridging the linguistic and socioeconomic divide, policymakers should focus on mitigating such disparities in terms of infrastructure.

Finally, but not the least, awarenessaction may promote a state of being conscious of the ethical standards and de facto AI structures that are in place in other countries that will enable various stakeholders to pursue ethical criticisms of AI-driven deployment. The findings indicate the potential of AI on the tertiary education system in Bangladesh and indicate that policy efforts on AI-enhanced higher education ought to occur in comprehensive, moral, and inclusive interventions that also focus on governance, capacity, equity, and integrity concerns.

5. CONCLUSION

To address government failures, solve moral dilemmas, and mitigate the problem of data security, access inequality, and capacity challenges, AI policy in higher education in Bangladesh is therefore an urgent requirement based on the findings of the study. The unified regulation on AI is not written by the national and institutional policies, and this is why it has certain discrepancies and uncertainties in its use, which threaten academic justice and fairness. Due to the fact that AI decision-making questions plagiarism, bias, and accountability, unregulated AI use by companies is also a source of concern moreover, systemic digital disparities and infrastructural inequalities have been identified as the factors preventing the fair access to AI-enhanced learning. The responsible AI uptake is checked by capacity resistance among faculty and students as well.

The effectiveness of policy can now be analysed and measured, looking at the effectiveness of policy in relative cross-national research and providing a reference point to compare to the situation in Bangladesh. However, a promising place is longitudinal research where the impact of such policy interventions as academic integrity and educational equity are tracked on sustainable AI governance. In fact, with the appropriate focus, these difficult problems can lead to Bangladesh being a nation that shapes the vision of AI that enhances the quality of education at higher education levels and can support equity and innovation.

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Name of Author	C	M	So	Va	Fo	I	R	D	O	E	Vi	Su	P	Fu
Md. Sefatul Islam	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

C : **C**onceptualization
M : **M**ethodology
So : **So**ftware
Va : **Va**lidation
Fo : **Fo**rmal analysis
I : **I**nvestigation
R : **R**esources
D : **D**ata Curation
O : Writing - **O**riginal Draft
E : Writing - Review & **E**diting
Vi : **Vi**sualization
Su : **Su**pervision
P : **P**roject administration
Fu : **Fu**nding acquisition

Conflict of Interest Statement

Authors state no conflict of interest.

Informed Consent

We have obtained informed consent from all individuals included in this study.

Ethical Approval

Not applicable.

Data Availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, [MSI], upon reasonable request.

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