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# REVISING ASSESSMENT REGULATIONS IN OPEN AND DISTANCE EDUCATION IN THE AGE OF AI

**Kyriaki Rassia**[i],
**Evangelia Manousou**
Hellenic Open University,
Greece

**Abstract:**
The proliferation of distance learning in higher education—accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic and sustained by technological innovation—has brought assessment practices and academic integrity frameworks into sharp focus. However, institutional regulations and study guides often remain outdated, particularly in addressing the pedagogical and ethical implications of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools such as ChatGPT. This article explores how open and distance learning (ODL) universities are responding to these challenges. Through a comparative review of policies from twelve ODL institutions across Europe, Africa, and Australasia, the study reveals inconsistent regulatory responses, limited integration of AI-specific guidance, and a continued reliance on surveillance-driven assessment. These gaps not only jeopardize the validity and inclusiveness of evaluation methods but also undermine trust in the academic process. The article concludes with actionable policy recommendations, suitable for the revision of their academic regulations. These include the incorporation of transparent AI-use declarations, critical thinking–driven assessment design, and national-level coordination for ethical, inclusive, and future-ready evaluation models. In doing so, the study contributes to the broader discourse on policy reform and pedagogical resilience in the AI age.

**Keywords:** distance assessment, academic regulations, artificial intelligence, study guides, academic integrity

## 1. Introduction

The digital transformation of higher education, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has brought remote learning and online assessment to the forefront of institutional policy. While many universities quickly adopted digital platforms to maintain continuity, a slower and more fragmented response has emerged regarding the long-term governance

[i] Correspondence: email kyriaki.rassia@ac.eap.gr, rassiakyriaki@gmail.com

 

of remote assessment practices. In particular, official academic documents—such as study guides, examination regulations, and codes of academic conduct—often remain grounded in pre-digital paradigms, offering limited guidance for the design and implementation of robust, pedagogically sound, and ethically defensible distance assessment strategies.

The recent rise of generative artificial intelligence (AI) technologies, such as ChatGPT and similar large language models, has further complicated the landscape of academic assessment. These tools raise important questions about authorship, originality, and the boundaries of permissible support in open-book or unsupervised environments. Yet, in most universities, existing assessment regulations either ignore these developments entirely or respond to them solely through the lens of misconduct and surveillance.

This article argues that higher education institutions must urgently revisit and update their academic regulations to respond to the realities of contemporary distance assessment—particularly in light of the expanding role of AI. Through a comparative review of academic policies and examination guidelines from European and international institutions, the study investigates how universities are (or are not) adapting their regulatory frameworks to address the pedagogical and ethical implications of remote assessment in the AI era. The findings contribute to an emerging field of policy scholarship focused on digital integrity, critical thinking, and trust-based learning in open and distance education systems.

Specifically, the study aims to explore how open and distance learning (ODL) institutions are responding to the integration of generative AI tools in their assessment practices. It addresses the following research questions: (1) How are institutional policies evolving to reflect the challenges and opportunities posed by AI in distance assessment? (2) What similarities and divergences exist among ODL universities in regulating AI use in student evaluation? (3) How can policy frameworks be redesigned to promote ethical, inclusive, and pedagogically aligned assessment in the AI era?

## 2. Literature Review

The ongoing evolution of educational practices in higher education has necessitated a reevaluation of distance assessment policies, particularly in light of the rapid integration of generative artificial intelligence (AI). The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of remote learning and assessment formats, exposing critical gaps in academic regulations. Despite the transition to digital environments, many institutional frameworks remain rooted in conventional paradigms and are not properly equipped to address the opportunities and challenges posed by tools such as ChatGPT.

Recent scholarship highlights ethical concerns related to AI in education. Pratiwi et al. (2025) argue that the increased reliance on AI for academic writing can undermine intellectual engagement, while Chan and Hu (2023) report mixed student perceptions, pointing to fears of overreliance and the devaluation of educational effort. These findings

underscore the need for institutional policies that promote ethical AI use while fostering critical thinking.

Student engagement and policy legitimacy are further emphasized by Sullivan et al. (2023), who advocate for the inclusion of student voices in the formation of AI policies. Such participatory approaches can reinforce academic trust and ethical alignment. Nevertheless, institutional responses to AI remain inconsistent. Atkinson-Toal and Guo (2024) document significant disparities among UK universities, with only a subset proactively formulating comprehensive AI education strategies.

From a regulatory perspective, existing frameworks in distance education often lag behind technological developments. Nkuyubwatsi (2016) critiques traditional assumptions embedded in many policy documents, while Delgado et al. (2022) warn that unrepresentative data may embed systemic bias into AI tools, leading to inequitable outcomes in assessments.

The role of self-regulation and academic identity also emerges as a key concern. Mohammadi (2020) notes that students with weak academic identities often exhibit reduced self-regulation—an issue magnified in remote learning contexts where AI tools are readily available. Addressing this requires a combination of pedagogical scaffolding and ethical guidelines that encourage responsible AI engagement.

Several studies highlight innovative pedagogical approaches to AI integration. Kong et al. (2024) propose structured models that leverage AI to support self-regulated learning rather than replace cognitive effort. Similarly, Porter et al. (2022) emphasize the importance of clearly delineating institutional accountability when deploying AI in high-stakes academic contexts.

Empirical evidence further supports AI's educational potential. Sun and Zhou (2024), through a meta-analysis, demonstrate that generative AI can significantly enhance academic achievement in both independent and collaborative learning environments. Lin et al. (2024) corroborate these findings, noting generally positive student perceptions, but caution against overreliance and the need for ethical safeguards.

Complementary to AI, digital tools such as e-portfolios also contribute to integrity and engagement. McCarthy et al. (2022) reveal that e-portfolios can reinforce self-evaluation and reflective practices, although their implementation must be sensitive to student workload and learning culture.

Ethical dilemmas are a recurring theme. İskender (2023) highlights risks related to privacy and socioeconomic inequality, stressing the need for vigilant policy responses. Burger et al. (2023) explore AI's role in academic research and literature reviews, urging institutions to provide clear ethical protocols for AI-assisted scholarship.

Bannister et al. (2023) identify a research gap in the application of AI in English Medium Instruction (EMI) settings, calling for comprehensive frameworks that balance innovation with integrity. Similarly, Mariyono and Hidayatullah (2024) emphasize the need for ethical AI policies that promote diversity and inclusion in multicultural learning environments.

Khatri and Karki (2023) argue for an expanded discourse on academic integrity in the AI age, suggesting that institutions must reconsider how educational values are

upheld amid technological shifts. This aligns with Figueroa et al. (2024), whose scoping review reveals both optimism and concern among stakeholders regarding AI's dual potential as an enabler and a disruptor in higher education.

Finally, recent work by Bali et al. (2024) reinforces the notion that institutional responses to generative AI must transcend basic integrity enforcement. Their analysis suggests that higher education should adopt a more holistic strategy, integrating *AI literacy*, staff support, and participatory policy-making as core components of institutional adaptation. These insights align with our premise that ODL institutions must reform assessment frameworks not only to regulate but also to *educate through* the use of generative AI, while Zhao et al. (2024) provide critical insight into how disabled students use generative AI, underscoring the importance of inclusive policy design that ensures equitable access to AI tools and support services.

In summary, the literature reveals a growing consensus that AI will continue to shape the future of distance education. However, institutions must act proactively to develop regulatory frameworks that are ethical, inclusive, and pedagogically meaningful. While awareness is increasing, coherent policy responses remain limited. This study addresses that gap by analyzing how academic documents reflect—or fail to reflect—the realities of assessment in the age of AI.

## 3. Material and Methods

This study follows a qualitative, document-based comparative methodology, informed by the PRISMA framework (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses), adapted for non-clinical policy reviews. The aim was to systematically identify, screen, and analyze institutional policies and practices concerning the integration of generative artificial intelligence (AI) into assessment processes across open and distance learning (ODL) universities.

### 3.1 Search and Selection Strategy

A structured web-based search was conducted between May and July 2025 to identify relevant institutional documents, policy announcements, official AI guidelines, and staff/student resources. Keywords included: "AI policy in higher education", "remote assessment", "academic integrity and generative AI", "distance learning universities AI", and specific university names. The search targeted official institutional websites, quality assurance platforms, AI literacy resources, and indexed academic repositories (e.g., RedALyC, OpenAIRE).

Additionally, materials from recent academic events—such as the July 2025 national webinar hosted by the Hellenic Open University—were incorporated. These included visual presentations, recorded talks, and policy summaries, used to triangulate and enrich institutional profiles.

A total of 36 institutional entries were initially identified. After title/abstract screening and removal of duplicates, 17 sources were deemed eligible. Of these, 12 ODL

institutions met the inclusion criteria and were included in the final synthesis. The selection process is summarized in the adapted PRISMA flow diagram (Figure 1).

### 3.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Institutions were included if they offered accredited ODL or blended tertiary education, if they had at least one publicly available or semi-official document (guide, declaration, presentation) addressing AI in assessment or pedagogy and if they represented diverse national/regional contexts (Europe, Africa, Oceania, North America).

On the other hand, institutions with no identifiable AI-related policy, or with inaccessible/non-verifiable sources, were excluded.

### 3.3 Data Extraction and Coding

For each selected institution, the existence of AI usage declarations and eventual restrictions on AI in supervised exams were extracted. Additionally, the presence of transparency frameworks was considered, as well as the availability of staff training and student AI literacy resources and formal policy documents vs. pilot or informal practices. The extracted data were coded thematically using NVivo-inspired matrices and then mapped across five comparative axes. This allowed for the identification of institutional clusters, divergences, and exemplary practices.

In addition, where available, the year of policy introduction or update was also recorded, in order to map the temporal dynamics of institutional responses to generative AI. However, the lack of consistent publication dates across universities limited the precision of this analysis.

### 3.4 PRISMA Flow Diagram

An adapted PRISMA diagram is presented below to illustrate the flow of source selection:

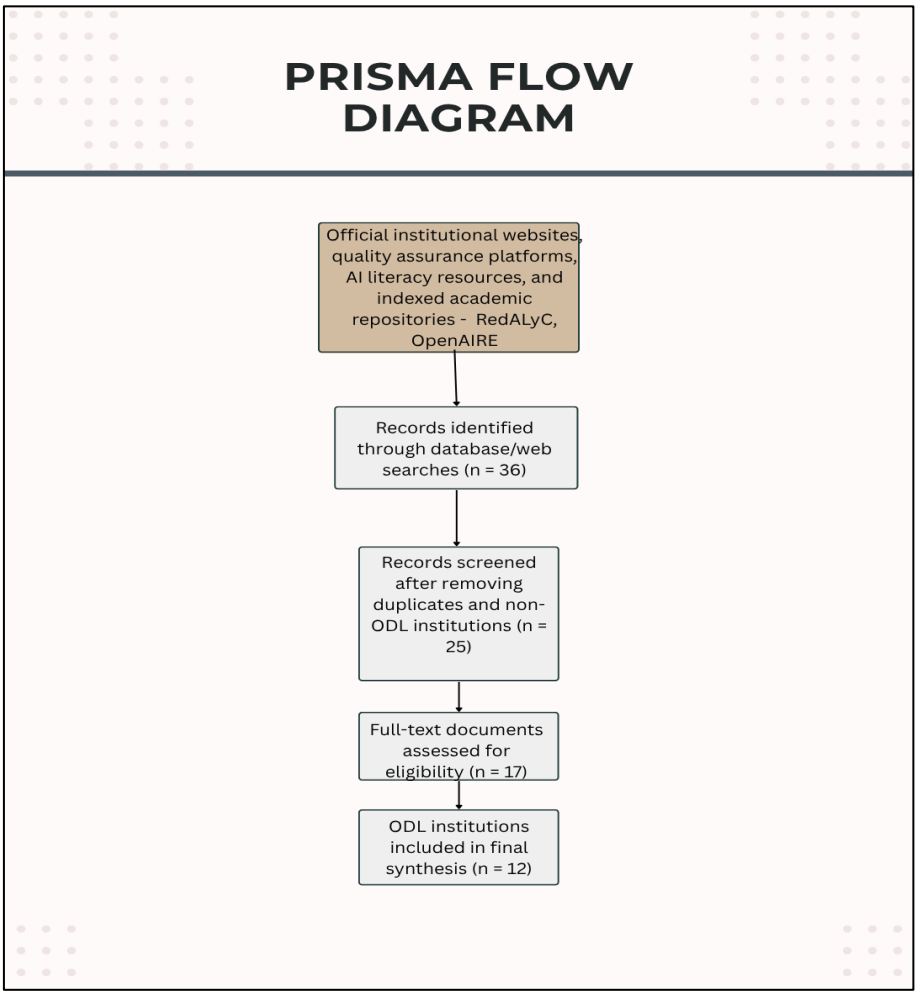


**Figure 1:** PRISMA Flow Diagram

## 4. Results and Discussion

This section presents a comparative analysis of institutional responses to generative artificial intelligence (AI) in assessment and instructional design across twelve open and distance learning (ODL) universities. Drawing from official policy documents, internal guides, and recent conference material, the results highlight emerging models of AI integration, ongoing tensions between regulation and innovation, and the broader pedagogical shifts currently underway.

### 4.1 Policy Landscape: From Prohibition to Structured Integration

The data indicate a significant transition from AI prohibition toward structured policy frameworks. Institutions such as The Open University (UK), UNED (Spain), and Háskólinn á Bifröst (Iceland) have issued detailed guidance on when and how AI tools can be used. At The Open University, the use of AI is permitted under transparent conditions but remains banned in supervised examinations. Similarly, Háskólinn á Bifröst has developed a comprehensive internal framework that specifies the types of assessments in which AI use is either acceptable or restricted, signaling a deliberate alignment of AI policy with pedagogical intent.

In contrast, Open Universiteit (Netherlands) continues to enforce a strict no-use policy unless explicit permission is granted, allowing AI tools only in research or reflective learning with proper disclosure. This cautious stance reflects deep concerns about academic misconduct, though it may also limit opportunities for responsible AI experimentation. Meanwhile, other institutions such as the Open University of Cyprus remain in a transitional phase, with policy documents either under development or not publicly available. As indicated in recent academic forums, however, the university has initiated educational programs that incorporate AI tools thematically, suggesting a bottom-up momentum even in the absence of finalized top-level regulation.

Notably, most of the reviewed institutions began issuing or updating AI-related assessment policies between late 2022 and mid-2024, indicating a period of rapid regulatory adaptation following the public release of ChatGPT in late 2022. However, the pace of change varied significantly, with some universities formalizing policies within months, while others remained in exploratory or developmental phases well into 2025.

### 4.2 Transparency and Pedagogical Realignment

Transparency is increasingly recognized as essential in ensuring ethical and accountable AI use. Multiple universities have implemented mechanisms to operationalize this principle. Sheffield Hallam University, for instance, requires students to submit an AI Transparency Scale declaration alongside assignments. Similarly, The Open University has introduced a tiered classification system to help students and instructors differentiate between acceptable and problematic uses of AI in coursework.

These mechanisms are reinforced by staff training and AI literacy efforts. The Open University and UNED offer structured workshops, handbooks, and webinars for both faculty and students. Háskólinn á Bifröst supplements its policy with practical AI tools to support learners, including systems for tracking engagement and generating personalized feedback. The inclusion of tools like OpenAI Whisper, as seen in recent presentations, also points to efforts in accessibility and inclusive design, aligning AI policy with broader values of digital equity.

The incorporation of AI support into teaching is also evident at institutions such as the Open University of Catalonia (UOC), which promotes personalized feedback systems using ChatGPT and other generative models. UNED has developed an entire AI ecosystem, including recommenders, intelligent tutoring systems, and automated language support platforms. These developments suggest that institutions are not only regulating AI use but actively embedding it within the learning architecture.

### 4.3 Cross-Institutional Synthesis

While institutional strategies differ in scope and pace, a number of converging features can be observed across the more progressive models. Most institutions reviewed have established mandatory AI use declarations, particularly for written assignments and coursework, coupled with clear restrictions in proctored or summative evaluations (Table 1). There is a growing understanding that AI tools must be treated neither as inherently

disruptive nor wholly neutral, but as context-dependent agents requiring careful framing.

In addition, transparency frameworks have emerged as a cornerstone of institutional strategy. These range from structured classification systems (such as Sheffield Hallam's AITS) to assessment-specific guidance documents that explicitly define what constitutes authorized and unauthorized use. Equally important is the increasing investment in staff training and digital upskilling, with institutions like UNISA and UNED offering online integrity modules and AI-specific learning resources for academic staff.

Significantly, there is also a noticeable pedagogical shift from defensive regulation to proactive integration. The Open University (UK), for example, incorporates Critical AI Literacy into its curriculum, while Háskólinn á Bifröst has adopted AI-supported analytics to monitor student engagement within learning management systems. The Open University of Cyprus has begun to offer thematic courses on ethical AI use and student support using generative tools, even in the absence of a finalized institutional policy. These developments point toward a growing consensus that the challenge posed by AI is not merely regulatory but fundamentally educational.

**Table 1:** Institutional AI Policy Features Across 12 ODL Universities

| **Institution** | **AI Use Declaration** | **Restrictions in Exams** | **Transparency Framework** | **Staff Training / AI Literacy** | **Year of AI Policy Introduction / Update** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The Open University (UK) | Mandatory with categories | AI prohibited in proctored exams | Three-level classification | Workshops, Critical AI Literacy | **2023** |
| Open Universiteit (NL) | Prohibited without permission | AI not allowed in exams | Use only with disclosure | Partial/limited | **2023** |
| Háskólinn á Bifröst (IS) | Allowed under defined rules | Conditional restrictions | Policy defines boundaries | Unknown | **2024** |
| UNED (Spain) | Required, with guide | Prohibited in summative exams | AI Guide for Students & Staff | Webinars and MOOCs | **2024** |
| Athabasca University (CA) | Recommended (not mandatory) | Not specified | Authentic assessment model | Ongoing training | **2023** |
| University of South Africa (UNISA) | Mentioned in integrity course | Prohibited in online exams | Online Integrity Course | AI-integrity module | **2023** |
| University of South Australia | Mandatory with 5-level scale | AI banned in supervised settings | Institutional AI use scale | Full training program | **2024** |
| University of Dundee (UK) | Mandatory statement | Prohibited in | Staff guidance published | Available resources | **2023** |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | invigilated exams | | | |
| Sheffield Hallam University (UK) | AITS declaration required | Defined per assignment | AI Transparency Scale (AITS) | Declared training offered | **2024** |
| Open University of Cyprus (OUC) | Not publicly available | Not specified | In progress | Emerging | **In progress / 2025** |
| Fern Universität in Hagen (DE) | Policy under development | AI banned in hybrid exams | Transparency-oriented approach | Likely via EU projects | **In development (2025)** |
| Universitat Oberta de Catalunya | Integrated in feedback systems | AI use controlled by context | Contextualized AI practices | Integrated into LMS | **2023–2024** |

### 4.4 Relevance to Contemporary Discourse

The emerging institutional landscape reflects global debates on authenticity, academic ethics, and the transformation of assessment in the digital age. AI is no longer viewed solely as a risk to be mitigated but as a driver of innovation requiring pedagogical redesign. Institutions such as AbERTA and UNED exemplify this shift by embedding AI into feedback loops, assessment criteria, and learning pathways.

Nevertheless, inconsistencies in institutional readiness remain a challenge. The absence of harmonized national frameworks often leads to fragmented or ad hoc responses, particularly in contexts like Southern Europe. Although the universities have initiated public discourse and hosted national events on AI in education, a formal institutional policy has to be established or public guidance for AI use in assessments has to be provided.

In sum, the results suggest that leading ODL institutions are not simply reacting to the rise of generative AI but are actively reshaping their academic ecosystems in response. Transparency, staff development, and authentic assessment design emerge as key pillars of this transformation, with significant implications for national policy and institutional innovation moving forward.

## 5. Recommendations

In view of the comparative analysis and key findings, this section proposes a set of strategic, pedagogical, and institutional recommendations to support the responsible and effective integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in open and distance learning (ODL) environments. The recommendations are designed to be broadly applicable across contexts, reflecting global developments in assessment design, academic integrity, and educational technology policy.

### 5.1 Establish Clear and Inclusive AI Assessment Policies

ODL institutions should adopt formal, transparent policy frameworks that clearly define acceptable and unacceptable uses of generative AI in academic work. These policies must

differentiate between forms of assistance, such as basic language correction versus content generation, and establish guidelines for responsible use. Institutions should require students to disclose AI involvement in assignments through standardized declaration forms and include contextualized examples tailored to disciplinary norms. Such measures promote clarity, reduce ambiguity, and support a culture of ethical engagement with AI.

### 5.2 Innovate Assessment Formats for the Post-AI Era

Assessment strategies must evolve to reflect the new capabilities and risks introduced by generative AI. Institutions are encouraged to move beyond high-stakes, memory-based testing toward assessment formats that emphasize student voice, critical thinking, and authenticity. Examples include scenario-based writing, digital portfolios, reflective journals, and oral presentations. These approaches not only promote deeper learning but are also inherently more resistant to AI-driven shortcuts or substitution. The goal is to design assessments that minimize the incentives for misuse while maximizing meaningful learning outcomes.

### 5.3 Embed AI Literacy into Curricula and Professional Development

AI should not be viewed solely as a challenge to academic integrity, but as a tool that learners and educators must understand and use responsibly. Institutions should therefore integrate AI literacy into program curricula, developing learning outcomes related to ethical, critical, and creative AI use. This effort should be accompanied by structured training for educators on how to design AI-informed assessments, guide students through responsible tool usage, and adapt teaching strategies in AI-rich learning environments. AI literacy is not just a digital skill—it is a core academic and civic competence.

### 5.4 Support Participatory Policy Development

Trust and legitimacy in AI-related academic policies are strengthened when students are included in their design. Institutions should create inclusive mechanisms such as consultation committees, participatory policy reviews, and student focus groups to gather feedback and co-construct regulatory norms. Such processes help align institutional priorities with the lived realities of learners, reinforcing transparency and accountability while promoting student agency in shaping their own educational environments.

### 5.5 Shift from Surveillance to Ethics-Oriented Integrity Models

While institutions may feel pressure to adopt automated proctoring or AI-detection tools, a more sustainable long-term strategy is to cultivate intrinsic academic values. Integrity models should emphasize ethical reasoning, collaborative assessment, peer review, and constructive feedback. Surveillance technologies, where used, should be proportional and limited to contexts where alternative options are not feasible. Educational messages

should frame integrity not in terms of compliance and punishment, but as a shared commitment to fairness, responsibility, and intellectual growth.

### 5.6 Maintain Iterative and Data-Informed Policy Cycles

Institutional responses to AI should be viewed as dynamic processes rather than fixed solutions. Policies must be reviewed regularly—at minimum on an annual basis—in light of emerging technologies, pedagogical innovations, and regulatory developments. Institutions are encouraged to benchmark against international reference points (e.g., UNESCO, EUA, national quality assurance bodies) and to publish regular updates or impact reports. Transparent policy cycles support institutional agility, public trust, and long-term educational resilience.

### 5.7 Facilitate Cross-Institutional Collaboration

To ensure coherence, equity, and shared innovation, institutions should actively engage in regional and international collaborations focused on AI in education. This includes participating in research networks, sharing policy models and best practices, and contributing to open-source tools and frameworks. Through coordinated effort, ODL providers can collectively shape a future-oriented, learner-centered vision for AI-integrated assessment across borders.

## 6. Conclusion

This study has explored how twelve open and distance learning (ODL) universities are responding to the challenges and opportunities posed by generative artificial intelligence (AI) in the domain of assessment. The comparative analysis revealed significant variation in institutional readiness, yet a common shift is emerging across contexts: from reactive or restrictive policies toward more structured, transparent, and pedagogically grounded frameworks.

Key findings demonstrate that institutions leading this transition tend to combine mandatory AI use declarations with clearly defined assessment restrictions, transparency mechanisms, and targeted support for both students and academic staff. Importantly, these universities no longer frame AI solely as a threat to academic integrity but increasingly as a catalyst for innovation in assessment design and educational practice.

At the same time, the study identified notable gaps in policy development, particularly in institutions where AI guidelines remain informal, incomplete, or inaccessible. These disparities raise concerns about consistency, equity, and learner protection in an educational landscape that is rapidly being reshaped by AI tools.

The conclusions of this review affirm that addressing AI in assessment is not merely a matter of enforcement but of institutional vision and pedagogical renewal. Clear, inclusive policies; AI-aware assessment formats; and investment in digital and ethical literacy emerge as essential pillars for navigating this transformation. Institutions that commit to these principles—while remaining agile and responsive—will be better positioned to uphold academic standards and support learners in developing

meaningful, future-ready competencies. These findings collectively address the study's core research questions by revealing how institutional policies are evolving in response to generative AI, highlighting both convergence and divergence across open and distance learning universities, and outlining pathways for designing ethical, inclusive, and pedagogically aligned assessment frameworks for the AI era.

**Conflict of Interest Statement**

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

**About the Authors**

**Kyriaki Rassia** is a certified Adult Educator graduate of Italian and Spanish Language and Culture. Holding Master's degrees in "Educational Sciences" and in "Education and Technologies in Distance Learning Systems", she is a PhD candidate at the Hellenic Open University specializing in Distance Education, with a research focus on reforming e-assessment in the humanities. With 25 years of teaching experience, she has served as an oral examiner for the Italian language certification exams, and currently she has been teaching Methodology at The Higher School of Pedagogical and Technological Education. She has also been elected as an EU Student Careers Ambassador, representing the Hellenic Open University in European career development initiatives.

**Evangelia Manousou** is assistant professor at the Hellenic Open University since 2023. She has done postgraduate studies in Educational Informatics at the National and Kapodistrian University and holds a PhD in Open and Distance Learning Education at the Hellenic Open University, specializing in Instructional Design. She is working as a Tutor Supervisor in the field of Distance Learning at the Hellenic Open University. She has written a great variety of educational materials (software, books, MOOCS, etc.). Her particular scientific interests are: Open and distance education institutions and functions, distance learning materials, instructional design, learning theories, skills development, evaluation in distance learning in the era of AI: exploring alternative forms.

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