Accepted Manuscript

Accepted Manuscript (Uncorrected Proof)

Title: Ethical Dilemmas Experienced by Nursing Faculty Regarding Students' Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence for Academic Requirements: A Phenomenological Study

Authors: Hamdoni K. Pangandaman[1,*], Norhanie A. Lininding[1], Monalinda M. Macawadib[1], Sittie Ainah Mai-Alauya[1], Norhanie A. Ali[1], Maslainie D. Aliola[1], Paida P. Abdulmalik[1], Magna Anissa A. Hayudini[2], Ananghulma J. Kahalan[2], Roy Albert N. Acosta[3], Almirrah B. Abdullah[1], Soraya L. Bato-Hassan[1], Princess Jehanne M. Dimaporo[1]

1. *Mindanao State University–Marawi, Lanao del Sur 9700, Philippines*
2. *College of Health Sciences, Mindanao State University–Sulu, Sulu 7400, Philippines*
3. *Graduate School of Nursing, Palawan State University, Philippines*

To appear in: ***Journal of Client-centered Nursing Care***

Received date: 2026/02/10

Revised date: 2026/02/10

Accepted date: 2026/08/31

Accepted Manuscript (Uncorrected Proof)

This is a “Just Accepted” manuscript, which has been examined by the peer-review process and has been accepted for publication. A “Just Accepted” manuscript is published online shortly after its acceptance, which is prior to technical editing and formatting and author proofing. Journal of Client-centered Nursing Care provides “Just Accepted” as an optional and free service which allows authors to make their results available to the research community as soon as possible after acceptance. After a manuscript has been technically edited and formatted, it will be removed from the “Just Accepted” Web site and published as a published article. Please note that technical editing may introduce minor changes to the manuscript text and/or graphics which may affect the content, and all legal disclaimers that apply to the journal pertain.

Please cite this article as:

Pangandaman, H. K., Lininding, N. A., Macawadib, M. M., Mai-Alauya, S. A., Ali, N. A., &. Aliola, M. D., et al., 2026. Ethical Dilemmas Experienced by Nursing Faculty Regarding Students’ Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence for Academic Requirements: A Phenomenological Study. To be published in *Journal of Client-centered Nursing Care* [Preprint].

Doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.22034/jccnc.12.4.571.10

Accepted Manuscript (Uncorrected Proof)

Abstract

Background: Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) offers new forms of academic support but also complicates judgments about authorship, learning authenticity, fairness, and professional formation in nursing education. This study explored the ethical dilemmas experienced by nursing faculty when responding to students' use of GenAI for academic requirements.

Methods: A descriptive phenomenological study was conducted with 15 nursing faculty purposively recruited from four higher education institutions in Lanao del Sur, Philippines. Semi-structured interviews were completed from March to May 2025 and analyzed using Colaizzi's seven-step method. Two researchers independently coded all transcripts, reconciled interpretations by consensus, and used NVivo 14 to organize the analytic record. Credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability were addressed through saturation, field notes, selected-participant member checking, independent coding, expert review and pilot testing of the guide, an auditable coding structure, and contextual description.

Results: Four themes and nine subcategories were identified: integrity versus innovation (AI as a learning scaffold and a threat to critical engagement; authenticity as evidence of learning); ambiguity of ethical boundaries (absence of shared institutional standards; ambiguous classification and procedural fairness); professional accountability and role modelling (academic integrity as preparation for professional practice; faculty responses as ethical role modelling); and the call for ethical literacy and institutional support (faculty preparedness and shared interpretation; institutional governance and common standards; ethical literacy for responsible integration).

Conclusion: Faculty did not describe GenAI as inherently acceptable or unacceptable; rather, ethical judgment depended on whether its use supported learning, was transparently disclosed, and was evaluated under fair institutional rules. Nursing programs should establish explicit, assessment-specific GenAI guidance, due-process procedures, and continuing ethical-AI education for faculty and students.

Keywords: Academic integrity, Ethics, Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI), Nursing education, Nursing faculty

Accepted Manuscript (Uncorrected Proof)

Highlights

- This study explored the ethical dilemmas experienced by nursing faculty when responding to students' use of GenAI for academic requirements.
- The faculty members' experiences were categorized in four overarching themes that were resolved into nine evidence-linked subcategories. Faculty distinguished learning support from AI use that appeared to displace students' own reasoning.
- Unclear rules created uncertainty about classification, evidence, sanctions, and fair treatment.
- Participants connected academic integrity with ethical formation for future nursing practice.
- Shared policies, due process, faculty development, and ethical AI literacy were viewed as necessary for responsible integration.

Plain Language Summary

Tools such as ChatGPT can help students plan and communicate academic work, but they can also make it difficult for educators to judge what a student genuinely understands. This study interviewed 15 nursing faculty members from four colleges or universities in Lanao del Sur, Philippines. Faculty described nine related concerns within four broader themes. They valued AI as a possible learning aid, yet worried when it appeared to replace students' thinking or obscure authorship. Unclear institutional rules made faculty unsure whether suspected use should be treated as misconduct and how to respond fairly. Participants also believed that their decisions model the professional values students will carry into nursing practice. They therefore called for common guidance, fair procedures, and ethical AI education for both faculty and students. The findings reflect faculty experiences and suspicions; the study did not test student work or determine whether any specific submission was AI-generated.

Accepted Manuscript (Uncorrected Proof)

Introduction

Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) has rapidly entered higher education through systems that can produce, revise, summarize, and translate text in response to user prompts. These capabilities may support brainstorming, language development, feedback, and access to explanations, but they also unsettle established assumptions about authorship, assessment validity, and evidence of learning (Saúde et al., 2024; UNESCO, 2023). In nursing education, these questions carry added significance because academic tasks are intended not only to demonstrate knowledge but also to cultivate clinical judgment, accountability, and ethical reasoning (De Gagne et al., 2024; Sengul et al., 2025).

Recent nursing-education scholarship portrays GenAI as neither a uniformly beneficial learning technology nor simply a new form of misconduct. Faculty and students report potential advantages alongside concerns about overreliance, inaccurate content, inequitable access, privacy, transparency, and weakened independent reasoning (Dabney & DeNotto, 2025; Ostick et al., 2026; Topaz et al., 2025). This mixed picture shifts the central question from whether GenAI is present to how its use should be disclosed, bounded, taught, and evaluated. It also makes unverified suspicion problematic: polished language or an unfamiliar writing style may prompt concern, but neither alone establishes that GenAI was used or that learning did not occur.

Nursing faculty occupy a pivotal position in this transition. They design assessments, judge whether learning outcomes have been met, respond to possible misconduct, and model the ethical standards expected of future nurses. Yet decisions about students' GenAI use may be made in settings where institutional definitions, evidentiary standards, and permitted-use categories remain unsettled. Such conditions can produce competing obligations: respecting learner autonomy while protecting educational standards; promoting benefit while preventing dependency or misinformation; and treating students consistently when access, digital literacy, and faculty interpretations differ. These tensions can be examined through principlism, which considers autonomy, beneficence, nonmaleficence, and justice as interacting—not mechanically decisive—ethical considerations (Beauchamp & Childress, 2019).

Although international literature on GenAI in higher education is expanding, evidence remains limited on how nursing educators in resource-constrained and culturally distinctive settings experience and reason through these dilemmas. Digital infrastructure, faculty preparedness, institutional governance, and local professional expectations may shape what responsible use means in practice (Owoeye et al., 2025; Yang, 2024). Without educators' accounts, policies risk being technically focused but ethically and contextually incomplete.

Accordingly, this study explored the lived experiences and ethical reasoning of nursing faculty regarding students' use of GenAI for academic requirements in higher education institutions in Lanao del Sur, within the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), Philippines. The guiding question was: How do nursing faculty experience, interpret, and respond to ethical dilemmas associated with students' GenAI-assisted academic work?

Materials and Methods

Study Design and Conceptual Orientation

A qualitative descriptive phenomenological design was used to examine how nursing faculty experienced and made meaning of ethical dilemmas associated with students' GenAI use. Phenomenology was appropriate because the inquiry focused on educators' lived moral tensions rather

Accepted Manuscript (Uncorrected Proof)

than on estimating prevalence or testing causal relationships. Colaizzi's seven-step method provided the analytic structure for moving from significant statements to formulated meanings, subcategories, overarching themes, and a comprehensive description (Praveena & Sasikumar, 2021). Principlism—autonomy, beneficence, nonmaleficence, and justice—served as a sensitizing ethical framework during guide development and interpretation; it did not replace inductive engagement with participants' accounts (Beauchamp & Childress, 2019). Reporting was informed by the Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ) (Tong et al., 2007).

Setting and Participants

The study involved four higher education institutions offering Bachelor of Science in Nursing programs in Lanao del Sur, Philippines. Full-time and part-time nursing faculty were recruited purposively to obtain information-rich accounts from educators directly responsible for assessment. Eligibility required at least one year of teaching experience, direct involvement in evaluating written or performance-based student outputs, and awareness of GenAI tools such as ChatGPT or Gemini. Recruitment continued until successive interviews produced no new overarching patterns relevant to the study question. Fifteen faculty members participated.

Interview Guide Development

The interview guide was informed by a review of literature on AI ethics, academic integrity, and nursing education, together with a contextual review of institutional policies and faculty-development materials. Three nursing-ethics educators and two educational-technology specialists reviewed the guide for clarity, relevance, neutrality, and conceptual coverage. It was pilot tested with three nursing faculty members who were not included in the final sample, and wording was refined in response to their feedback. Broad prompts invited concrete experiences, for example, "Can you describe an instance where you faced an ethical concern regarding an AI-assisted assignment?" Follow-up probes explored participants' interpretations, emotional responses, decision-making, and institutional context. Table 1 shows the domains of guidance for semi-structured interviews.

Table 1. Domains of the Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Interview focus	Ethical principles	Purpose
Faculty perceptions of students' use of GenAI in academic work	Autonomy; beneficence	To understand how faculty interpret the role and acceptability of AI in learning and assessment.
Ethical dilemmas when evaluating AI-assisted submissions	Nonmaleficence; justice	To explore conflicts involving authenticity, fairness, evidence, and academic integrity.
Strategies and institutional responses	Beneficence; justice	To identify reasoning processes, coping strategies, and recommendations for responsible use.

Data Collection

In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted from March to May 2025, either face-to-face or through a secure online platform according to participant preference and logistical feasibility. Interviews lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and were audio-recorded after consent. Field notes

Accepted Manuscript (Uncorrected Proof)

documented contextual observations and nonverbal cues where observable. The 15 interviews yielded 14 hours and 25 minutes of recordings. Audio files were transcribed verbatim within 24 hours of each interview, producing more than 120 pages of textual data. Participant identifiers (P1–P15) were used in the analytic files and quotations.

Data Analysis

Analysis proceeded concurrently with data collection using Colaizzi's seven steps. First, the researchers repeatedly read each transcript to become familiar with the whole account. Second, statements directly relevant to ethical challenges, judgments, emotions, and responses were extracted. Third, meanings were formulated while retaining links to the original statements. Fourth, related meanings were compared and grouped into subcategories. Fifth, subcategories were organized into overarching themes and examined in relation to the four principles of autonomy, beneficence, nonmaleficence, and justice. Sixth, an integrated description of faculty experiences was developed. Seventh, summarized interpretations were returned to selected participants for comment on accuracy, coherence, and representativeness.

NVivo 14 was used to organize transcripts, codes, significant statements, subcategories, and themes. Two researchers independently coded all transcripts and compared their coding frameworks. Differences were discussed until consensus was reached, with oversight from a senior qualitative researcher. Consensus was used to strengthen interpretive coherence; no numerical intercoder-reliability coefficient was calculated because the aim was collaborative phenomenological interpretation rather than coder interchangeability. The final analytic hierarchy comprised four themes and nine subcategories, each supported in the Results by a verbatim excerpt from the source dataset.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was addressed across credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Ahmed, 2024). Credibility was supported by in-depth interviewing, continuation of recruitment to thematic saturation, contemporaneous field notes, and review of summarized interpretations by selected participants (Member checks). Dependability was strengthened through an expert-reviewed and pilot-tested guide, prompt verbatim transcription, a stated seven-step analytic procedure, independent coding by two researchers, consensus meetings, and senior qualitative oversight. Confirmability was supported by retaining links among transcripts, significant statements, codes, subcategories, themes, and illustrative quotations in NVivo, allowing interpretations to be traced to the data. Transferability was supported by describing the institutional setting, eligibility criteria, participant experience, academic roles, teaching assignments, interview mode and duration, and scope of the dataset so that readers can judge applicability to other settings.

Researcher Reflexivity

The retained study documentation did not include a formal reflexive diary or sufficient information to report interviewer credentials, prior relationships with participants, or detailed researcher positioning. These omissions were not reconstructed retrospectively. They are reported transparently as limitations on the assessment of reflexivity and confirmability.

Accepted Manuscript (Uncorrected Proof)

Results

Participant and Dataset Characteristics

Fifteen nursing faculty members from four higher education institutions participated. Teaching experience ranged from 3 to 25 years; 80% of participants were women. Academic ranks ranged from instructor to associate professor, and participants taught theoretical and clinical nursing courses. Table 2 summarizes the characteristics documented in the study record.

Table 2. Participant and Interview Characteristics (N = 15)

Characteristic	Study sample or dataset
Institutions represented	4 higher education institutions
Teaching experience	3–25 years
Women	80%
Academic rank	Instructor to associate professor
Teaching assignment	Theoretical and clinical nursing courses
Interview duration	Approximately 45–60 minutes
Total recorded interview time	14 hours 25 minutes
Transcribed material	More than 120 pages

Overview of Themes and Subcategories

Analysis produced four overarching themes and nine subcategories (Table 3). The hierarchy clarifies the distinct but connected meanings within each broader pattern. Quotations are presented verbatim and identified by participant code. Because the study examined faculty experiences, references to students' GenAI use represent participants' perceptions or suspicions rather than independently verified use.

Table 3. Analytic Hierarchy of Themes and Subcategories

Overarching theme	Subcategory	Central meaning
1. Integrity versus innovation	1.1 AI as a learning scaffold and a threat to critical engagement	GenAI could organize ideas, yet faculty worried it might substitute for students' reasoning.
	1.2 Authenticity as evidence of learning	Highly polished work triggered uncertainty about whether the output represented student learning.
2. Ambiguity of ethical boundaries	2.1 Absence of shared institutional standards	Policy gaps left faculty unsure how strictly or consistently to respond.
	2.2 Ambiguous classification and procedural fairness	Faculty hesitated to label suspected GenAI use as conventional plagiarism without clear definitions or evidence.

Accepted Manuscript (Uncorrected Proof)

Overarching theme	Subcategory	Central meaning
3. Professional accountability and role modelling	3.1 Academic integrity as preparation for professional practice	Faculty linked present academic habits to future clinical accountability.
	3.2 Faculty responses as ethical role modelling	Educators viewed their responses as demonstrations of professional values.
4. Call for ethical literacy and institutional support	4.1 Faculty preparedness and shared interpretation	Training was needed to reduce inconsistent interpretations and build confidence.
	4.2 Institutional governance and common standards	Participants sought official, consistently applied guidance.
	4.3 Ethical literacy for responsible integration	Faculty favored learning to use technology ethically over simple avoidance or prohibition.

Theme 1: Integrity Versus Innovation

Faculty accounts contained a dual appraisal of GenAI: it could support academic work, yet it could also obscure whether students had engaged in the reasoning the assessment was designed to elicit. The ethical tension was not technology versus tradition in the abstract; it concerned the relationship between the tool, the learning outcome, and the student's intellectual contribution.

Subcategory 1.1: AI as a Learning Scaffold and a Threat to Critical Engagement

Participants recognized organizational and productivity benefits, particularly when GenAI helped students arrange ideas. Concern arose when assistance appeared to become substitution. In this account, the ethical boundary was crossed when the tool seemed to displace, rather than support, the student's critical engagement.

> *"AI can help students organize their thoughts, but sometimes I feel they are no longer thinking critically. It is like they just copy whatever ChatGPT says." (P3)*

> *"I allow them to use ChatGPT to outline their ideas, but when I ask why a certain nursing intervention is appropriate, some cannot explain it. That is when I feel the tool has done the thinking for them." (P7)*

The statement conveys conditional acceptance: assistance with organization was viewed as potentially beneficial, whereas uncritical adoption of generated content weakened the evidentiary value of the task.

Subcategory 1.2: Authenticity as Evidence of Learning

Faculty also described uncertainty when submitted work appeared inconsistent with their expectations of a student's usual performance. The concern centered on authenticity—whether the assignment could still be treated as evidence of the learner's own understanding.

> *"I am torn because I know it can support learning, but when a student submits something that sounds too perfect, I immediately question its authenticity." (P8)*

Accepted Manuscript (Uncorrected Proof)

"I do not want to accuse a student just because the English suddenly improved. Still, when the work is far from the student's usual performance and there are no drafts, I question whether it is truly their own." (P11)

The phrase "I am torn" captures the moral ambivalence of acknowledging educational value while doubting authorship or learning. The account reflects suspicion rather than proof; participants did not describe a validated method for determining whether a particular text was AI-generated.

Theme 2: Ambiguity of Ethical Boundaries

Participants' uncertainty was intensified by the absence of common rules. Two related issues emerged: faculty lacked shared standards for acceptable use, and they lacked a stable classification and procedure for suspected misuse.

Subcategory 2.1: Absence of Shared Institutional Standards

Without explicit guidance tied to assessment purposes, faculty relied on personal thresholds. This created uncertainty about whether a response was proportionate and whether colleagues would handle a comparable case in the same way.

"There are no clear policies from the school. Sometimes I am unsure if I am being too strict or too lenient." (P2)

"One faculty member permits AI for brainstorming while another gives a penalty for the same practice. Without a school policy, students receive different messages and we also feel uncertain." (P12)

The dilemma therefore involved more than rule enforcement. Faculty were asked to make consequential judgments while lacking an agreed definition of acceptable assistance and a common basis for calibrating responses.

Subcategory 2.2: Ambiguous Classification and Procedural Fairness

Participants distinguished suspected GenAI assistance from traditional copying, but they were unsure how it should be classified. Hesitation reflected concern about fairness to the student as well as concern about protecting academic standards.

"When I suspect a student used AI, I hesitate to accuse them because technically, they did not plagiarize in the traditional sense." (P5)

"I want to protect academic integrity, but I also do not want to accuse someone unfairly. We need a procedure that tells us what evidence is acceptable and what consequence is proportionate." (P14)

The account highlights a due-process problem: suspicion, definition, evidence, and sanction were not clearly aligned. Treating uncertainty as proof could harm a student, whereas ignoring possible undisclosed assistance could undermine assessment validity and consistency.

Accepted Manuscript (Uncorrected Proof)

Theme 3: Professional Accountability and Role Modelling

Faculty interpreted GenAI-related decisions through their identity as nurse educators. They linked classroom integrity to future professional conduct and saw their own responses as ethical instruction in action.

Subcategory 3.1: Academic Integrity as Preparation for Professional Practice

Participants worried that normalization of undisclosed or uncritical technology use could shape habits that extend beyond university. Academic expectations were therefore understood as part of preparing students for accountable clinical judgment.

> *"As educators, our behavior shapes how students will act as nurses later. If we ignore unethical practices now, they will carry that mindset into their clinical work." (P7)*
>
> *"In nursing, students must be accountable for every decision because patient safety is involved. If they become used to submitting answers they did not evaluate, that habit may follow them into practice." (P2)*

This account connects present educational decisions with future obligations to patients and the profession. The perceived risk was not GenAI alone, but the possible development of practices in which responsibility for reasoning becomes diffuse.

Subcategory 3.2: Faculty Responses as Ethical Role Modelling

Participants viewed the manner in which faculty addressed suspected misuse as a visible expression of professional values. Their role involved demonstrating consistency, transparency, and respect while still protecting academic standards.

> *"We are not just teaching nursing theories; we are teaching values. How we respond to AI misuse reflects our professionalism." (P10)*
>
> *"We should be transparent about when we use AI in teaching materials, too. It is difficult to demand disclosure from students if faculty members do not demonstrate the same honesty." (P15)*

The quotation positions faculty conduct—not only student conduct—as ethically consequential. A response that is arbitrary, accusatory, or opaque could contradict the values educators seek to teach.

Theme 4: The Call for Ethical Literacy and Institutional Support

Participants did not regard individual vigilance as an adequate institutional response. They called for faculty preparation, common governance, and ethical literacy that would support responsible engagement with changing technologies.

Subcategory 4.1: Faculty Preparedness and Shared Interpretation

Faculty described a need for practical education that would help them interpret GenAI-related situations consistently. Training was understood as both technical and ethical: educators needed to understand tool capabilities and limits while reasoning about learning outcomes, disclosure, benefit, harm, and fairness.

> *"We need training on how to handle AI-related issues. Right now, everyone has their own interpretation of what is right or wrong." (P4)*

Accepted Manuscript (Uncorrected Proof)

"Many of us know ChatGPT only from what students tell us. Training would help us understand what it can and cannot do before we judge whether a particular use is ethical." (P1)

The emphasis on "everyone" having a different interpretation shows how individual uncertainty can become institutional inconsistency. Shared learning was viewed as a prerequisite for defensible judgment.

Subcategory 4.2: Institutional Governance and Common Standards

Participants wanted official guidance that would reduce variation across faculty and courses. Their accounts implied a need for rules that specify permitted uses, disclosure expectations, evidence and review procedures, and proportionate responses.

"It would be better if the university releases an official guideline about AI use so that all faculty will have the same standard." (P11)

"The university should state clearly which uses are allowed for each type of assessment. Then both students and teachers will know the expectation before the work is submitted." (P3)

A common standard was valued not merely for administrative convenience but as a condition of justice: comparable situations should be evaluated using comparable criteria.

Subcategory 4.3: Ethical Literacy for Responsible Integration

Participants favored an educational response that builds discernment rather than relying only on prohibition. Ethical literacy was framed as the capacity to use technology transparently, critically, and in ways aligned with learning and professional values.

"Ethical literacy should be part of both faculty and student development. We need to learn how to use technology ethically, not just avoid it." (P14)

"Students should be taught to question AI output, check the sources, and disclose how the tool helped them. Ethical use is a skill; it will not develop simply by prohibiting the technology." (P6)

This subcategory reframes institutional action from policing a tool to developing responsible users. It also recognizes that faculty and students require continuing support as GenAI capabilities and educational practices evolve.

Cross-Theme Synthesis

Across the four themes, faculty judgments followed a connected sequence. They first asked whether GenAI supported or displaced learning; they then confronted unclear definitions and procedures; they interpreted the decision through the lens of their responsibility as nurse educators; and they sought shared institutional capacities to make future decisions more consistent. The ethical dilemma, therefore, arose from an interaction among tool use, assessment purpose, evidentiary uncertainty, professional identity, and governance—not from GenAI use in isolation.

Accepted Manuscript (Uncorrected Proof)

Discussion

Principal Findings

This study found that nursing faculty experienced four overarching ethical tensions in students' GenAI-assisted academic work. Faculty recognized GenAI as a possible scaffold while worrying that it might replace critical engagement; questioned whether polished outputs represented authentic learning; struggled with policy absence and ambiguous misconduct classifications; linked academic integrity to future professional accountability; and called for shared preparation, governance, and ethical literacy. The manifested subcategories added analytical specificity by showing that the dilemma was not merely a conflict between innovation and integrity. It involved judgments about the purpose of assistance, evidence of learning, procedural fairness, faculty example, and institutional responsibility.

Learning Support, Critical Engagement, and Authenticity

The first theme illustrates conditional rather than categorical acceptance. Faculty could see value when GenAI organized ideas or supported learning, but concern intensified when it appeared to substitute for the student's reasoning. This distinction is consistent with emerging nursing education literature in which educators and students report both the usefulness and the risks of dependency, inaccuracy, and reduced intellectual engagement (Dabney & DeNotto, 2025; Ostick et al., 2026; Topaz et al., 2025). It also aligns with UNESCO's emphasis on human agency, transparency, and pedagogical purpose in the use of GenAI (UNESCO, 2023).

The authenticity subcategory adds an important caution. Faculty described polished language as a trigger for doubt, but the study did not verify whether any submission was AI-generated. Authenticity judgments should therefore focus on demonstrable learning rather than stylistic suspicion alone. Process evidence—such as drafts, source trails, reflective annotations, oral explanation, or supervised performance—may offer a fairer basis for judging learning than attempts to infer tool use from the finished text. Such strategies also shift assessment design toward the knowledge and reasoning educators actually need to observe.

Policy Ambiguity and Procedural Justice

The second theme shows that ethical uncertainty was both institutional and individual. In the absence of shared standards, faculty had to decide what counted as acceptable assistance, whether suspected use constituted misconduct, what evidence was sufficient, and what response was proportionate. Broader higher-education research similarly identifies governance and academic integrity uncertainty as central challenges in GenAI adoption (Saúde et al., 2024; UNESCO, 2023). Policies that merely prohibit "AI use" are unlikely to resolve this uncertainty because acceptable assistance may differ by task, learning outcome, and stage of work.

Justice requires both consistency and attention to context. Institutions should define assessment-specific levels of permitted use, require disclosure where relevant, communicate expectations before submission, and establish a review process that gives students an opportunity to explain their work. Procedures should distinguish learning-oriented correction from formal misconduct and avoid treating an unverified suspicion as conclusive evidence. They should also consider differences in access, language support, disability-related needs, and digital literacy so that rules do not inadvertently widen inequity.

Accepted Manuscript (Uncorrected Proof)

Professional Formation and Ethical Role Modeling

The third theme locates GenAI within professional formation. Participants regarded academic integrity as preparation for the accountability required in nursing practice and viewed faculty responses as demonstrations of professional values. This interpretation is compatible with scholarship that places cyberethics and AI ethics within nursing's broader obligations to responsible judgment, transparency, and protection from harm (De Gagne et al., 2024; Sengul et al., 2025). The findings do not establish that academic use of GenAI leads to unsafe clinical conduct. Rather, they show that faculty understood habits of disclosure, verification, and ownership of reasoning as ethically relevant to students' future professional identities.

Role modeling also constrains faculty conduct. If educators expect honesty and accountability from students, they should make assessment rules explicit, explain the educational rationale for restrictions, apply procedures consistently, and acknowledge uncertainty. A respectful inquiry into how an assignment was produced may model professional dialogue more effectively than an immediate accusation. In this sense, ethical teaching concerns both the standards imposed and the fairness with which they are enacted.

Ethical Literacy and Institutional Capacity

The final theme indicates that participants preferred capacity-building over simple avoidance. This is particularly relevant because GenAI capabilities and usage patterns change faster than static lists of prohibited tools can keep up with. Faculty development should combine practical knowledge of GenAI limitations with ethical reasoning, assessment redesign, disclosure practices, data privacy, source verification, and approaches to suspected misuse. Students likewise need guided opportunities to critique generated content, document their process, and retain responsibility for accuracy and professional judgment (Ramírez-Baraldes et al., 2025; Yang, 2024).

Principlism helps clarify why a shared response is needed. Respect for autonomy supports transparent, bounded opportunities for students to use tools in ways that advance learning. Beneficence supports uses that improve access, feedback, or comprehension. Nonmaleficence requires attention to misinformation, dependency, privacy, and erosion of competence. Justice requires clear expectations and consistent procedures for all learners and faculty. No single principle resolves every case; institutional policy should create a deliberative process through which competing obligations can be weighed against the intended learning outcome.

Implications for Nursing Education and Policy

The findings support a layered institutional response. First, each assessment should state whether GenAI is prohibited, permitted for specified functions, or permitted with disclosure and verification. Second, declarations should identify the tool and how it was used without implying that disclosure alone makes every use acceptable. Third, high-stakes assessments should include process or performance evidence that demonstrates the student's own reasoning. Fourth, procedures for suspected misuse should specify evidence, documentation, student response, review, and proportionate consequences. Fifth, faculty and student development should address prompt use, hallucinated or biased output, privacy, attribution, source checking, clinical accountability, and equitable access. Finally, policies should be reviewed regularly with input from educators, students, administrators, ethics specialists, and information-technology personnel.

Accepted Manuscript (Uncorrected Proof)

Strengths and Limitations

A strength of the study is its inclusion of faculty from four institutions with varied academic ranks, teaching assignments, and 3–25 years of experience. The guide was reviewed by nursing ethics and educational technology specialists and pilot-tested. Analysis followed an explicit phenomenological procedure, used independent coding and consensus, retained an auditable hierarchy in qualitative-analysis software, and included selected-participant checking. Presenting nine subcategories with verbatim excerpts makes the interpretive path more visible.

Several limitations should guide interpretation. The purposive sample was confined to nursing institutions in one Philippine province, so the findings are context-bound and are not intended for statistical generalization. Data represent faculty recollections, perceptions, and suspicions; the study did not examine student perspectives, observe faculty decisions, systematically audit institutional documents, analyze student submissions, or independently determine whether GenAI was used. Member checking involved selected rather than all participants. The retained documentation did not include a formal reflexive diary or sufficient detail about interviewer characteristics and prior participant relationships, thereby limiting the assessment of researcher positioning and confirmability. Finally, rapidly changing technologies and policies may alter the dilemmas described. Future work should include students and administrators, compare policy environments, examine assessment-specific practices, and evaluate the fairness and educational effects of different governance approaches.

Conclusion

Nursing faculty experienced students' use of GenAI for academic requirements as a set of interrelated ethical dilemmas rather than a single problem of rule compliance. Four themes and nine subcategories showed that faculty judgments turned on whether GenAI supported or displaced learning, whether submitted work remained credible evidence of student understanding, whether suspected misuse could be fairly classified and addressed, and how educator responses shaped professional formation. Policy gaps shifted institutional responsibility onto individual faculty members and produced uncertainty and inconsistent interpretations. Nursing schools should therefore pair clear, assessment-specific guidance and fair review procedures with continuing ethical-AI education, transparent disclosure practices, and assessment designs that make students' reasoning visible. Such an approach can protect integrity without treating innovation as inherently unethical.

Ethical Considerations

Complying with ethical guidelines

Ethical approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of the Mindanao Institute of Healthcare Professionals, Inc. (Protocol No. REC-2025-13). All participants provided written informed consent before the interviews. They were informed that participation was voluntary, that they could withdraw, and that their identities would be protected in study records and reports. Participants were assured of confidentiality, and participant codes were used in quotations. The study was conducted in accordance with applicable ethical principles for research involving human participants.

Accepted Manuscript (Uncorrected Proof)

Acknowledgments

The authors thank the nursing faculty who shared their experiences and the participating higher education institutions that facilitated the study.

Author Contributions

All authors contributed to the conception and design of the study; acquisition, analysis, or interpretation of the data; drafting or critical revision of the manuscript for important intellectual content; and approval of the version submitted. All authors agree to be accountable for the integrity of the work.

Financial Support

The authors report that this research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Declaration of using Artificial Intelligence ChatGPT (OpenAI) was used during revision to support language editing, structural reorganization, expansion of reporting detail from the existing manuscript, and document formatting. It was not used to generate or alter participant data, create interview quotations, or perform the original qualitative analysis. The authors reviewed and verified the revised text and retain full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and originality of the manuscript.

Accepted Manuscript (Uncorrected Proof)

References

Ahmed, S. K. (2024). The pillars of trustworthiness in qualitative research. Journal of Medicine, Surgery, and Public Health, 2, 100051. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.glmedi.2024.100051

Beauchamp, T. L., & Childress, J. F. (2019). Principles of biomedical ethics (8th ed.). Oxford University Press.

Dabney, B. W., & DeNotto, L. A. (2025). A qualitative exploration of student perceptions on the use of AI in an undergraduate nursing research course. Journal of Nursing Education, 64(10), 620–626. https://doi.org/10.3928/01484834-20250519-03

De Gagne, J. C., Hwang, H., & Jung, D. (2024). Cyberethics in nursing education: Ethical implications of artificial intelligence. Nursing Ethics, 31(6), 1021–1030. https://doi.org/10.1177/09697330231201901

Ostick, M., Mariani, B., & Lovecchio, C. (2026). Nursing student and faculty perceptions and uses of generative AI chatbots in nursing education: A mixed methods study. Journal of Nursing Education, 65(7), 402–407. https://doi.org/10.3928/01484834-20260216-02

Owoeye, I. D., Chipps, J.-A., & Daniels, F. (2025). Challenges and opportunities in digital learning technologies for nursing education in low-resource settings: A scoping review. Africa Journal of Nursing and Midwifery, 27(1), 1–38. https://doi.org/10.25159/2520-5293/18827

Praveena, K. R., & Sasikumar, S. (2021). Application of Colaizzi's method of data analysis in phenomenological research. Medico-Legal Update, 21(2), 914–918. https://doi.org/10.37506/mlu.v21i2.2800

Ramírez-Baraldes, E. L., García-Gutiérrez, D., & García-Salido, C. (2025). Artificial intelligence in nursing: New opportunities and challenges. European Journal of Education, 60(1), e70033. https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.70033

Saúde, S., Barros, J. P., & Almeida, I. (2024). Impacts of generative artificial intelligence in higher education: Research trends and students' perceptions. Social Sciences, 13(8), 410. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci13080410

Sengul, T., Sarikose, S., & Gul, A. (2025). Ethical decision-making and artificial intelligence in nursing education: An integrative review. Nursing Ethics, 32(8), 2490–2515. https://doi.org/10.1177/09697330251366600

Tong, A., Sainsbury, P., & Craig, J. (2007). Consolidated criteria for reporting qualitative research (COREQ): A 32-item checklist for interviews and focus groups. International Journal for Quality in Health Care, 19(6), 349–357. https://doi.org/10.1093/intqhc/mzm042

Topaz, M., Peltonen, L.-M., Michalowski, M., Stiglic, G., Ronquillo, C., Pruinelli, L., Song, J., O'Connor, S., Miyagawa, S., & Fukahori, H. (2025). The ChatGPT effect: Nursing education and generative artificial intelligence. Journal of Nursing Education, 64(6), e40–e43. https://doi.org/10.3928/01484834-20240126-01

UNESCO. (2023). Guidance for generative AI in education and research. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000386693

Yang, Y. (2024). Influences of digital literacy and moral sensitivity on artificial intelligence ethics awareness among nursing students. Healthcare, 12(21), 2172. https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare12212172

Accepted Manuscript (Uncorrected Proof)