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Teaching the Machine, Learning the Law: Reimagining Indian Higher Education Governance in the Age of Artificial Intelligence.

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Abstract
The rapid diffusion of generative artificial intelligence into Indian classrooms, laboratories and examination halls has outpaced the regulatory architecture built to govern higher education. This paper critically examines the intersection of Artificial Intelligence (AI), the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, and the regulatory practice of the University Grants Commission (UGC) and the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), arguing that India presently governs AI in higher education not through purpose-built rules but through the retrofitting of a 2018 anti-plagiarism regulation never drafted with generative AI in mind. Drawing on recent institutional enforcement actions, including mass thesis rejections for undisclosed AI use, the AICTE's 2025 "Year of Artificial Intelligence" mandate, the unresolved RAGHAV copyright controversy, and comparative international instruments such as the UNESCO Guidance for Generative AI in Education and Research, the paper demonstrates that India's approach is reactive, fragmented across regulators, and silent on authorship, algorithmic bias and data protection in pedagogic contexts. It argues that NEP 2020's technology optimism, expressed through bodies such as the National Educational Technology Forum, has not been matched by binding, AI-specific quality-assurance or ethical standards. The paper offers an original contribution in the form of a tiered, principle-based regulatory framework spanning disclosure norms, institutional AI policies, accreditation indicators and a proposed National AI-in-Education Code designed to harmonise innovation with academic integrity, equity and accountability. It concludes with concrete recommendations for the UGC, AICTE, universities, educators and lawmakers to ensure that AI strengthens rather than hollows out the intellectual foundations of Indian higher education.
Keywords: Artificial Intelligence · National Education Policy 2020 · UGC Regulations · Academic Integrity · Higher Education Governance · AI Ethics · Higher Education Commission of India.

Introduction

Indian higher education stands at an inflection point that is at once technological and constitutional. The generative AI wave large language models capable of drafting essays, solving problem sets, generating code and even producing entire theses on demand arrived in Indian classrooms within months of the launch of publicly accessible chatbots, long before regulators had settled the more basic reforms envisaged by the National Education Policy

(NEP) 2020.[1] The Policy, approved by the Union Cabinet on 29 July 2020, had already imagined a technology-enabled university system built around flexible multidisciplinary learning, a National Educational Technology Forum (NETF) for the "free exchange of ideas" on educational technology, and an overarching Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) to replace the fragmented regulatory landscape of the University Grants Commission (UGC), AICTE and the National Council for Teacher Education.[2] Five years on, the HECI Bill remains unenacted, the UGC and AICTE continue to regulate higher education through parallel and occasionally inconsistent instruments, and neither body has issued a dedicated, binding regulation on generative AI.[3]

This regulatory silence has not translated into institutional inaction. In February 2026, Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar Bihar University rejected dozens of doctoral theses after detecting more than forty per cent AI-generated content, an episode that captures, in miniature, the central tension this paper interrogates: universities are enforcing consequences for AI misuse through a plagiarism regulation drafted in 2018, years before ChatGPT existed, while the UGC itself has issued no AI-specific notification.[4] The Indian regulatory experience thus diverges sharply from jurisdictions that have issued dedicated instruments UNESCO's 2023 Guidance for Generative AI in Education and Research being the most influential example and raises the question this paper sets out to answer: can NEP 2020's vision of a "vibrant knowledge society" survive contact with a technology that the Policy itself never anticipated, using regulatory tools that were never built for it?[5]

The paper proceeds in four movements. First, it examines the technology vision of NEP 2020 and its structural gaps concerning AI governance. Second, it maps the current regulatory patchwork UGC's plagiarism regulations, AICTE's 2025 "Year of AI" mandate, and ad hoc institutional policies to demonstrate the absence of a coherent national approach. Third, it analyses the ethical and legal fault lines that this patchwork leaves exposed: algorithmic bias, data privacy, authorship and copyright, and accountability for AI-assisted assessment. Finally, drawing on comparative international practice, the paper proposes an original, tiered regulatory framework intended to reconcile innovation with the constitutional and pedagogical commitments that underpin Indian higher education.

NEP 2020's Technology Vision: Optimism without Architecture

NEP 2020 rests on five declared pillars access, equity, quality, affordability and accountability and situates technology as a cross-cutting enabler of all five rather than as a freestanding regulatory subject.[6] Its principal institutional response to educational technology is the NETF, conceived as an autonomous platform for exchanging ideas on the use of technology to enhance learning, assessment, planning and administration, alongside a specialised unit to coordinate digital infrastructure and content for online and digital education.[7] The Policy also identifies artificial intelligence, alongside big data, machine learning, 3-D machining and genomic studies, as a "cutting-edge area" that undergraduate curricula should incorporate to enhance employability.[8]

Read critically, this vision treats AI principally as a subject to be taught rather than as an infrastructural force that will reshape how teaching, assessment and research are themselves conducted. The Policy's technology chapter is

[1]Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, National Education Policy 2020 (30 July 2020).

[2]ibid, ch 18 (Technology Use and Integration) and ch 19 (creation of Higher Education Commission of India); see also Vajiram & Ravi, "National Education Policy 2020, UPSC Notes" (2026).

[3]Research Experts, "UGC Guidelines for AI Plagiarism: What Indian PhD Students Must Know in 2026" (researchexperts.in, 2026).

[4]"Upholding Academic Integrity in Educational Research: UGC's Crackdown on AI Misuse in PhD Theses and Guidelines for Researchers", Education for All in India (10 February 2026).

[5]UNESCO, F Miao and W Holmes, Guidance for Generative AI in Education and Research (UNESCO 2023).

[6]Vajiram & Ravi (n 2).

[7]National Education Policy 2020 (n 1) ch 18; ResearchGate, "National Education Policy 2020 and School Education" (2024).

[8]Press Information Bureau, Government of India, "AI in Education" (2026); B S Kuchekar, School of Pharmacy, MIT-WPU, "National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 Higher Education" (SlideShare, 2026).

aspirational and platform-oriented it creates fora for dialogue rather than binding standards for disclosure, academic integrity, or algorithmic accountability. This is unsurprising: NEP 2020 was drafted in 2019–2020, before generative AI systems could produce publication-ready academic prose, and its authors could not reasonably have anticipated the scale of disruption that followed. The difficulty is structural, however, rather than merely historical. NEP 2020 delegates the operational detail of technology governance to bodies the NETF and the still-unformed HECI that either lack regulatory teeth or do not yet exist, leaving the UGC and AICTE to govern AI through instruments never designed for the purpose.[9] The Policy's five-pillar architecture is not undermined by AI so much as tested by it: equity is strained by unequal access to AI tools across urban and rural institutions; quality is strained by the difficulty of verifying human authorship in assessment; and accountability is strained by the absence of any body empowered to audit algorithmic decision-making in admissions, proctoring or grading.

The UGC's Regulatory Patchwork: Retrofitting a Pre-AI Rule for an AI Problem

The principal instrument through which Indian universities currently address AI misuse in academic work is the UGC (Promotion of Academic Integrity and Prevention of Plagiarism in Higher Educational Institutions) Regulations, 2018, a text drafted to address textual copying and never amended to define or address generative AI content.[10] In practice, universities and the UGC have extended the Regulations' definition of plagiarism to cover undisclosed AI-generated text by analogy: content produced by a generative model and submitted without attribution is treated as a form of academic misconduct falling within the existing similarity-and-originality framework, even though the 2018 Regulations do not contemplate authorship by a non-human system at all.[11] The BRABU episode illustrates the resulting practice theses were returned for mandatory rewriting and subjected to Turnitin-based similarity screening, with AI-origin content treated as functionally equivalent to copied text, notwithstanding the conceptual difference between reproducing another author's expression and generating original-seeming but unoriginal expression algorithmically.[12]

This retrofitting strategy has three structural weaknesses. First, it conflates two distinct integrity harms verbatim copying, which the 2018 Regulations were designed to police, and undisclosed algorithmic authorship, which raises questions of originality, authorship attribution and pedagogical validity that plagiarism law does not naturally answer. Second, it leaves enforcement standards to individual institutions, producing exactly the fragmentation the BRABU case reveals: some universities apply blanket AI-content thresholds, others rely on faculty discretion, and still others have no policy at all, since the UGC's own core framework contains no AI-specific language.[13] Third, it creates a compliance vacuum for legitimate, disclosed uses of AI in research and teaching literature synthesis, coding assistance, translation, and accessibility support, because a regulation oriented entirely toward prohibition provides no positive framework for responsible use, disclosure norms, or permitted-use categories.

AICTE has moved further and faster than the UGC. In late 2024 it declared 2025 the "Year of Artificial Intelligence," directing all 14,000-plus AICTE-affiliated institutions, reaching an estimated forty million students, to submit institutional AI implementation plans, deploy AI-detection tools alongside conventional plagiarism software, develop disclosure-based AI-use policies, and train faculty and students in responsible AI use.[14] AICTE has also partnered with private AI providers for instance, an arrangement with the search platform Perplexity to extend AI research tools to AICTE-affiliated institutions as part of the initiative reflecting a more proactive, if institutionally uneven, embrace of AI governance than that adopted by the UGC.[15] The result is a bifurcated regulatory landscape: technical education is subject to a mandated national framework, while the much larger universe of UGC-regulated universities operates under an implicit, judicially untested extension of a 2018 rule.

[9]Leadschool, "NEP 2020 (National Education Policy 2020) — Complete Guide" (2026).

[10]UGC (Promotion of Academic Integrity and Prevention of Plagiarism in Higher Educational Institutions) Regulations 2018.

[11]Research Experts (n 3).

[12]Education for All in India (n 4).

[13]Research Experts (n 3).

[14]Drishti IAS, "AICTE's 2025 'Year of AI'" (2025).

[15]Press Information Bureau (n 8).

This divergence between two co-existing higher-education regulators is itself a governance failure that NEP 2020's proposed HECI was intended to resolve by unifying regulatory authority, underscoring the cost of the Bill's continued non-enactment.[16]

AI-Assisted Teaching, Research, Examination and Administration

Universities are deploying AI across four functions simultaneously teaching, research, examination and administration each of which raises distinct governance questions that a single anti-plagiarism regulation cannot address. In teaching, AI-assisted personalised learning platforms and automated content generation promise efficiency gains consistent with NEP 2020's access and equity goals, but risk entrenching a two-tier system in which well-resourced institutions deploy sophisticated, human-supervised AI tools while under-resourced institutions adopt unsupervised, ungoverned tools purely to reduce cost. In research, the central difficulty is not detection but definition: current enforcement practice treats "AI-generated content" as a single undifferentiated category, whether it is a fully AI-authored paragraph or an AI-polished sentence retaining substantial human intellectual contribution, a distinction the Indian Copyright Office's own struggles with the RAGHAV case show to be genuinely unsettled even for creative works, let alone scholarly ones (discussed in Part V below).

In examinations, AI-proctoring and automated evaluation tools introduce a governance gap of a different character one concerning the institution's own use of AI to assess students, rather than students' use of AI in their own work. No UGC or AICTE instrument currently sets standards for the accuracy, appeal mechanisms, or bias-auditing of AI-assisted evaluation systems, even as institutions increasingly deploy them for scale. In administration, AI-driven admissions screening, scholarship allocation and plagiarism detection itself raise identical accountability concerns, since detection tools carry their own error rates and biases that are rarely disclosed to the students whose academic careers depend on their output. The absence of any regulatory requirement that institutions disclose, validate, or permit appeal against AI-assisted institutional decisions is, this paper argues, a more urgent gap than the student-misconduct question that has so far dominated public and regulatory attention.

Ethical and Legal Fault Lines: Bias, Privacy, Authorship and Accountability

The absence of AI-specific regulation leaves at least four legal fault lines exposed. The first concerns authorship and copyright. The Indian Copyright Act 1957 defines the "author" of a computer-generated literary, dramatic, musical or artistic work as "the person who causes the work to be created," a provision drafted in 1994 without generative AI in contemplation.[17] The unresolved RAGHAV/Suryast controversy illustrates the resulting uncertainty: the Indian Copyright Office initially registered artist Ankit Sahni's AI-assisted artwork "Suryast" in November 2020, listing Sahni and the RAGHAV AI tool as co-authors apparently the first such registration anywhere in the world only to issue a withdrawal notice a year later questioning whether an AI system could hold the legal status necessary to be recognised as an author or co-author under sections 2(d)(iii) and 2(d)(vi) of the Act.[18] Indian courts have separately held, in the context of examination papers set by the Central Board of Secondary Education, that a juristic (non-natural) entity cannot itself be an "author" for copyright purposes unless it can show that natural persons were engaged to create the work a principle that, if extended, would cut against recognising AI systems as co-authors, but which has never been tested squarely against an AI-generated academic or creative work in litigation.[19] For universities, this ambiguity matters directly: if a student uses AI substantially in producing a thesis chapter, it is not merely unclear whether this constitutes misconduct under UGC's plagiarism framework it is separately unclear, as a matter of copyright law, who if anyone can claim authorship of the resulting text at all.

The second fault line concerns algorithmic bias. AI-assisted admissions screening, essay-grading and proctoring systems trained on historical data risk reproducing and amplifying existing patterns of exclusion along caste, regional, linguistic and gender lines that have long structured unequal access to Indian higher education precisely the inequities NEP 2020's equity pillar was designed to redress. No UGC or AICTE instrument currently requires

[16]National Education Policy 2020 (n 1) ch 19.

[17]Copyright Act 1957, s 2(d)(vi) (as inserted by the Copyright (Amendment) Act 1994).

[18]Registration of Suryast, No A-135120/2020 (Copyright Office, Government of India, November 2020); "Exclusive: Indian Copyright Office Issues Withdrawal Notice to AI Co-author", Managing Intellectual Property (14 June 2022).

[19]Rupendra Kashyap v Jiwan Publishing House Pvt Ltd (Delhi High Court); discussed in White Black Legal, "The Intersection of AI and Copyright Law" (2025).

bias auditing, algorithmic impact assessment, or disaggregated outcome reporting for AI tools used in high-stakes educational decisions.

The third fault line concerns data privacy. The Digital Personal Data Protection Act 2023 establishes India's first comprehensive personal-data framework, including specific obligations concerning the processing of children's and students' personal data, yet no UGC or AICTE circular has yet operationalised these obligations for AI tools that ingest student writing, biometric proctoring data, or learning-analytics profiles a gap that becomes more acute as institutions adopt AI proctoring and adaptive-learning platforms that build detailed behavioural profiles of learners.

The fourth fault line concerns accountability and transparency. Where an AI detection tool wrongly flags a student's original work as AI-generated a documented risk given the acknowledged error rates of such tools no regulation currently guarantees the student a right to contest the finding, to an explanation of how the determination was reached, or to independent human review before an adverse academic consequence, such as thesis rejection, is imposed. The BRABU case again shows the practical stakes: mandatory rewriting was imposed without any indication that students had a structured avenue to dispute the AI-detection findings underlying that decision.[20]

AI Literacy, Faculty Capacity and the Digital Divide

NEP 2020's ambitions for AI-enabled higher education depend on a level of faculty and student AI literacy that current teacher-training infrastructure does not yet provide. UNESCO's 2023 Guidance for Generative AI in Education and Research found that, globally, only a small number of countries it identified China, Finland, Georgia, Qatar, Spain, Thailand and Türkiye had developed or were developing dedicated teacher-training frameworks on AI as of 2023, a gap the Guidance treats as the central obstacle to responsible adoption anywhere.[21] India was not among them. While the UGC's 2022 undergraduate curriculum reform incorporated AI, machine learning and related technical competencies as subjects of study, no comparable national framework yet exists for training the existing faculty workforce to teach with, supervise, and evaluate AI-assisted work a distinct competency from teaching AI as a technical subject.[22] This capacity gap compounds existing digital-divide inequities: a 2026 sectoral survey found that a substantial majority of Indian higher-education institutions still lack basic industry-readiness infrastructure, suggesting that the institutional foundation required to responsibly absorb generative AI reliable connectivity, trained faculty, institutional AI policies remains unevenly distributed across the sector even as central funding for AI-enabled learning centres has expanded.[23]

VII. Quality Assurance, Accreditation and the Missing AI Indicator

India's quality-assurance architecture principally the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) and the National Board of Accreditation (NBA) evaluates institutions against criteria that predate the generative AI era and contain no explicit indicator for AI governance, disclosure policy, or algorithmic accountability. This is a missed opportunity of some consequence: accreditation is the single most effective lever India's quality-assurance ecosystem possesses to standardise institutional behaviour nationally, because institutions have strong incentives to align with accreditation criteria regardless of their size or resource base. The absence of an AI-governance indicator means that even well-intentioned institutions have no external benchmark against which to design AI-use policies, disclosure requirements for faculty and students, or bias-audit procedures for AI-assisted evaluation. NEP 2020's proposed National Assessment Centre ("PARAKH") and its broader accreditation reform agenda offer a natural institutional home for such an indicator, but neither PARAKH nor NAAC has yet incorporated one.

AI in Legal and Professional Education

Legal education presents an especially sharp version of the general problem, because the profession it trains for is itself undergoing AI-driven disruption in research, drafting and even preliminary analysis. Law schools regulated by the Bar Council of India sit entirely outside the HECI's proposed remit and outside AICTE's mandate,

[20]Education for All in India (n 4).

[21]UNESCO, Miao and Holmes (n 5); see also M Kharbach, "Generative AI in Education: UNESCO's First Global Guidance" (2026).

[22]Press Information Bureau (n 8).

[23]Indian School of Public Policy, "Union Budget 2026–27: What it Means for Higher Education" (13 February 2026), citing TeamLease EdTech, Industry Readiness Report (January 2026).

governed instead by Bar Council curricular rules that, like the UGC's plagiarism framework, were not designed with generative AI in view. The tension is particularly acute in three respects: first, legal research and moot-court preparation are activities in which AI tools can generate plausible-sounding but doctrinally unreliable output the well-documented risk of AI "hallucination" of non-existent case law making AI literacy a matter of professional competence rather than mere academic integrity; second, legal drafting exercises, a core pedagogical method in Indian law schools, are especially susceptible to undisclosed AI authorship because their formulaic structure is easy for generative models to imitate; and third, professional education more broadly (medicine, engineering, management) faces parallel risks in clinical case analysis, design coursework and case-study pedagogy, suggesting that AI governance in higher education cannot be addressed by UGC and AICTE alone but must eventually draw in professional councils such as the Bar Council of India, the Medical Council structures now operating under the National Medical Commission, and the Institution of Engineers.

Comparative Perspectives: Learning from International Regulatory Practice

International practice offers India a more developed regulatory vocabulary than its own instruments currently provide. UNESCO's Guidance for Generative AI in Education and Research, published in September 2023 and building on its 2021 Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence, proposes eight policy measures for education systems: promoting inclusion and linguistic diversity, protecting human agency, monitoring and validating GenAI systems, developing learner AI competencies, building teacher and researcher capacity, promoting plurality of opinion, testing locally relevant applications with evidence, and reviewing long-term implications for how knowledge itself is defined and assessed.[24] Notably, the Guidance also recommends an age threshold below which independent, unsupervised interaction with generative AI systems should not occur a granular, child-protection-oriented recommendation that has no counterpart in any Indian instrument.[25] UNESCO has since extended this framework through a 2024 AI Competency Framework for Students, organised around human-centred thinking, AI ethics, technical understanding and system design, offering a ready-made template that Indian curriculum bodies could adapt rather than construct from first principles.[26]

Comparative national practice also underscores India's regulatory lag. UNESCO's own 2023 survey found that most countries had, at that point, no binding national regulation of generative AI in education, a gap subsequent scholarship has traced across systems as different as China, Japan, Mongolia and the United States, each of which has since moved toward institution-level or system-level policy frameworks emphasising disclosure and human oversight rather than prohibition.[27] The comparative lesson for India is not that any single foreign model should be transplanted wholesale university systems differ too greatly in resourcing, language diversity and regulatory culture for direct transplantation to succeed but that the building blocks of a coherent framework (disclosure norms, competency frameworks, age-appropriate safeguards, and institutional monitoring obligations) are now reasonably well established internationally and available for adaptation.

Toward a Future-Ready Regulatory Framework: An Original Proposal

This paper proposes a four-tier framework the "AHEAD" model (Accountability, Harmonisation, Ethics-by-design, Assessment integrity, and Digital equity) intended to translate the diagnosis above into implementable regulatory architecture, without waiting for the still-unenacted HECI to materialise.

Tier One- a National AI-in-Education Code, issued jointly by the UGC and AICTE under their existing statutory powers pending HECI's enactment, and would replace the current practice of stretching the 2018 plagiarism regulation by analogy. The Code should define categories of AI use (assistive, substantive, autonomous), mandate disclosure at the point of submission rather than post-hoc detection, and separate the treatment of undisclosed algorithmic authorship from that of verbatim plagiarism, since the two present different pedagogical harms and warrant different institutional responses.

[24]UNESCO, Miao and Holmes (n 5); UNESCO, Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (2021).

[25]UNESCO, "Guidance for Generative AI in Education and Research" (unesco.org, updated 16 January 2026).

[26]F Miao and K Shiohira, AI Competency Framework for Students (UNESCO 2024), discussed in "A Framework for Developing University Policies on Generative AI Governance: A Cross-national Comparative Study" (arXiv, 2025).

[27]"Exploring Generative AI Policies in Higher Education: A Comparative Perspective from China, Japan, Mongolia, and the USA" (arXiv, 2024).

Tier Two- Institutional AI Governance Policies, mandatory for every UGC- and AICTE-regulated institution, modelled on the disclosure-and-training obligations AICTE has already imposed on technical institutions, but extended uniformly to universities and adapted for research degrees, where the RAGHAV-style authorship ambiguity is most consequential. Each institution's policy should specify permitted and prohibited AI uses by degree level, an appeal mechanism for students contesting AI-detection findings addressing the accountability gap identified in Part V and a designated AI ethics officer or committee.
Tier Three- Accreditation Integration, whereby NAAC and NBA incorporate an explicit AI-governance indicator into their assessment frameworks, converting accreditation's existing behavioural leverage into a driver of AI-policy adoption even at institutions with limited independent capacity to design such policies from scratch.
Tier Four- A Digital and AI Equity Fund, channelling a defined proportion of the UGC's now-enlarged budgetary allocation toward AI infrastructure and faculty training in under-resourced institutions, so that AI governance does not become, in practice, a luxury available only to well-funded universities while poorer institutions are left exposed to ungoverned commercial AI tools.[28]
Underlying all four tiers is a single regulatory principle this paper terms "disclosure over detection": Indian policy has so far invested almost entirely in after-the-fact AI-content detection, an approach that is technically unreliable, adversarial in character, and productive of exactly the kind of unappealable, opaque institutional decision-making identified in Part V. A disclosure-first architecture requiring students and researchers to declare AI assistance at the point of submission, much as authorship contributions or funding sources are already declared shifts the governance burden from imperfect algorithmic policing toward a norm of honest attribution, better aligned with NEP 2020's own emphasis on values-based education and academic integrity as institutional culture rather than compliance exercise.

Challenges and Future Prospects

Any such framework faces three realistic obstacles. First, institutional capacity: AICTE's own Year-of-AI mandate, however welcome in ambition, depends on the willingness and ability of 14,000-plus affiliated institutions of highly uneven resourcing to design and implement genuine AI policies rather than symbolic ones, a risk the sector's documented industry-readiness gap makes concrete.[29] Second, jurisdictional overlap: with HECI unenacted, the UGC, AICTE, NAAC, professional councils and the newly expanding population of foreign university branch campuses now operating under a separate UGC regulatory track for Foreign Higher Educational Institutions each retain independent rule-making authority, risking further fragmentation rather than the harmonisation NEP 2020 promised, unless a coordinating instrument such as the proposed National AI-in-Education Code is adopted jointly.[30] Third, the pace of technological change itself: any framework calibrated to today's generative AI capabilities risks obsolescence as agentic and multimodal AI systems mature, suggesting that the Code proposed in Part X should be designed for periodic statutory review, perhaps biennially rather than as a static instrument.
Set against these obstacles are genuine grounds for cautious optimism. The scale of recent public investment, a 2026–27 Union Budget allocation lifting overall education spending to approximately ₹1.39 lakh crore, with the UGC's own allocation raised to ₹3,709 crore and specific provision for AI-enabled learning centres of excellence demonstrates that the fiscal capacity to build genuine AI governance infrastructure, rather than merely detection tools, now exists.[31] What is missing is not resources but regulatory architecture: the translation of budgetary intent into binding, coherent, disclosure-oriented rules of the kind proposed in Part X.

Conclusion

Indian higher education has responded to generative AI with considerable institutional energy but limited regulatory coherence. The UGC continues to govern AI misconduct through a 2018 regulation never designed for the purpose; AICTE has moved further and faster through its 2025 Year-of-AI mandate but governs only technical education; the Copyright Act's unresolved treatment of AI authorship, dramatized by the six-year-old and still-unsettled RAGHAV controversy, leaves basic questions of ownership and attribution unanswered even as universities adjudicate academic-integrity cases that turn on precisely those questions; and NEP 2020's

[28]Indian School of Public Policy (n 23).

[29]ibid.

[30]Vidya Mandir, "UGC Approves Foreign Universities in India 2026: Full List" (2026).

[31]Indian School of Public Policy (n 23); The AI World, "Union Budget 2026–27: Education & AI Push" (2 February 2026).

technology-optimistic vision, built around institutions such as the NETF and the still-unenacted HECI, has not yet been operationalised into binding standards for disclosure, bias auditing, data protection or accountability. This is not a case for retreat from AI in Indian universities the Policy's underlying ambition to build a technology-enabled, equitable and quality-driven higher-education system remains sound, and recent budgetary commitments show the state's willingness to invest in that ambition. It is, instead, a case for regulatory architecture to catch up with institutional practice. The four-tier AHEAD framework proposed in this paper a National AI-in-Education Code, mandatory institutional governance policies, accreditation integration, and a dedicated equity fund, unified by a disclosure-over-detection principle offers one route by which India's regulators, universities and lawmakers might close that gap, ensuring that artificial intelligence strengthens rather than quietly erodes the academic integrity, equity and human judgment that NEP 2020 itself identified as the foundations of a genuine knowledge society.

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