

Artificial Intelligence as a Catalyst for Digital Human Rights Education: Building Ethical Literacy in High-Tech Societies

Sam Omotoso

Duke University School of Law, NC, United States

samuelomotoso19@gmail.com

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Abstract

The intersection of artificial intelligence and human rights education represents a transformative moment in the democratization of knowledge. This article examines how digital platforms including social media, online courses, podcasts, and webinars are revolutionizing human rights education delivery and accessibility. Drawing on recent scholarship and policy developments, this paper explores the potential of AI enhanced digital tools to build ethical literacy in high tech societies while addressing the challenges of digital divides, algorithmic bias, and equitable access. The analysis incorporates perspectives from the Global South, emphasizing the need for context driven, rights-based approaches to AI integration in educational systems. Through examination of current initiatives, pedagogical innovations, and ethical frameworks, this article demonstrates that while AI offers unprecedented opportunities for expanding human rights education, its implementation must be carefully governed to prevent the exacerbation of existing inequalities.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, human rights education, digital platforms, ethical literacy, accessibility, social media, digital transformation

Introduction

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies has fundamentally altered the landscape of education delivery, creating new pathways for human rights education (HRE) to reach global audiences. As the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk emphasized in 2024, "unprecedented advances in digital technology, including generative artificial intelligence, offer us previously unimaginable opportunities to move forward on the enjoyment of human rights" (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR], 2024). This technological revolution coincides with an urgent need for ethical literacy, the capacity to critically evaluate, understand, and engage with digital technologies through a human rights lens.

Digital platforms have emerged as powerful catalysts for democratizing human rights education, transcending geographical, economic, and social barriers that have historically limited access to such knowledge. Social media networks, Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), podcasts, and webinars now enable millions of learners worldwide to engage with human rights content in ways that were unimaginable a decade ago. However, this digital transformation is not without challenges. As Effoduh et al. (2024) argue in their analysis of AI governance in Africa, the legitimization and deployment of AI systems must be approached with careful attention to context, ensuring that technological advancement serves to enhance rather than undermine human rights protections.

This article explores how AI functions as a catalyst for digital human rights education, with particular focus on the role of digital platforms in making HRE more accessible to broader audiences. It examines the opportunities and challenges inherent in AI enhanced educational delivery, the ethical considerations that must guide implementation, and the pathways toward building a more inclusive, rights respecting digital educational ecosystem.

The Digital Transformation of Human Rights Education

Human rights education has undergone a profound transformation in the digital age. Traditionally delivered through formal educational institutions, non-governmental organizations, and in person training programs, HRE is now increasingly accessible through digital channels that reach audiences previously excluded from such learning opportunities (Miao et al., 2021). This shift has been accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which necessitated rapid digitalization of educational content and delivery mechanisms, revealing both the potential and limitations of technology mediated learning.

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education, Farida Shaheed, in her October 2024 report to the General Assembly, emphasized that while AI in education presents opportunities to advance the right to education, particularly for individuals with disabilities and those in remote areas, its implementation must be approached with caution and a robust human rights framework (Shaheed, 2024). The report highlights that AI powered content creation and presentation tools can quickly incorporate new information into curricula, making education more responsive to diverse learning needs and current events capabilities particularly valuable for human rights education, which must remain current with evolving rights frameworks and emerging challenges.

Digital platforms have fundamentally altered the accessibility landscape for human rights education. Global Campus of Human Rights, for instance, offers numerous MOOCs devoted to human rights issues that are topical or underrepresented, drawing academics and experts from all regions of the world to combine original videos, readings, discussions, and quizzes in multidisciplinary and intersectional courses (Lambert, 2020). These courses cover topics ranging from children's rights and disability rights to economic and social rights, reaching thousands of learners who might not have had access to such specialized education through traditional channels.

Social Media as a Human Rights Education Platform

Social media platforms have emerged as particularly powerful tools for human rights education, offering unique capabilities for real time engagement, community building, and grassroots mobilization. These platforms enable human rights educators to reach millions of users, share multimedia content, facilitate discussions, and create networks of learners and advocates across geographical boundaries. As Prasanna and Lavanya (2023) note in their analysis of digital freedom and expression, social media platforms play a crucial role in contemporary human rights discourse, serving as spaces where individuals can exercise their right to freedom of expression while also accessing information about rights and advocacy strategies.

The accessibility of social media platforms makes them particularly valuable for reaching marginalized communities and younger audiences who are digital natives. Podcasts, for example, have become an increasingly popular medium for human rights education. The "Human Rights Education Now!" podcast, produced by Human Rights Educators USA, aims to inform broader audiences about HRE stories, practices, and theories while expanding awareness and knowledge about human rights frameworks (Human Rights Educators USA, 2024). Such podcasts make human rights education accessible to individuals who may be commuting, exercising, or engaging

in other activities, integrating learning into daily life in ways that traditional educational formats cannot.

However, social media platforms also present challenges for human rights education. Issues of digital accessibility remain significant, as documented in a 2024 study examining digital accessibility within social media platforms, which found that many posts across social media platforms lack or have inaccurate accessibility features such as alt text and closed captioning (Raymond et al., 2024). This creates barriers for blind and deaf consumers, highlighting that even as digital platforms expand access for some populations, they may simultaneously create or perpetuate exclusion for others. Additionally, the spread of misinformation on social media platforms poses risks to human rights education, as false narratives can undermine accurate understanding of rights frameworks and advocacy strategies.

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and Human Rights Education

MOOCs represent one of the most significant innovations in democratizing human rights education. These online courses, which are typically free or low cost and open to unlimited participants, have enabled educational institutions, international organizations, and civil society groups to share human rights knowledge with global audiences. Amnesty International launched its first MOOC in partnership with EdX in 2015 on "Human Rights: The Right to Freedom of Expression," which attracted 30,000 registrants (Amnesty International, 2021). This demonstrated the enormous appetite for accessible human rights education and established a model that numerous organizations have since replicated.

The Global Campus of Human Rights has been at the forefront of developing MOOCs devoted to human rights issues. Their courses explore topics ranging from the impact of AI on human rights to children's mental health as a human right, applying a multi-regional approach that ensures diverse perspectives are represented (Lambert, 2020). This geographical and cultural diversity is crucial for human rights education, as it prevents the imposition of Western-centric frameworks and ensures that learners understand human rights as universal principles that manifest differently across contexts.

EdX and Coursera, two of the largest MOOC platforms, offer extensive catalogs of human rights courses delivered by leading universities and institutions worldwide. These courses cover topics including social justice and equality, corporate social responsibility, development challenges, and the ethical responsibilities of organizations in both the private and public sectors (edX, 2024). The flexibility of MOOCs, allowing learners to study at their own pace, revisit content, and engage with diverse multimedia materials makes them particularly well-suited for adult learners and professionals seeking to integrate human rights principles into their work.

Research has shown that MOOCs can effectively build knowledge and skills related to human rights. However, completion rates for MOOCs remain relatively low, with some studies suggesting that only 5-15% of enrolled learners complete courses (Amjad et al., 2024). This highlights the need for pedagogical innovations that enhance engagement and support learners in completing coursework, particularly learners from marginalized communities who may face additional barriers to sustained participation.

Webinars and Online Workshops: Real-Time Human Rights Learning

Webinars and online workshops offer opportunities for real time engagement with human rights content and experts, combining the accessibility of digital platforms with the interactive elements of traditional classroom instruction. UNESCO's 2024 Digital Learning Week, held in Paris,

explored how artificial intelligence is reshaping education through 40+ sessions featuring over 300 international speakers (Miao et al., 2021). The event challenged debates on AI in education that are often framed in extremes, instead promoting a shared vision that the integration of AI in education must be human centered, equitable, safe, and ethical.

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has organized numerous webinars exploring current trends and challenges in digital human rights (Callamard, 2022). These events bring together experts, policymakers, and advocates to discuss emerging issues and share best practices, creating networks of practitioners who can collaborate across borders and sectors. The accessibility of webinars requiring only internet connectivity and often available in multiple languages makes them valuable tools for building capacity among human rights defenders, educators, and policymakers worldwide.

The International Association for Human Rights Education has complemented its annual conference with an international webinar series coordinated in collaboration with Human Rights Education Review (Bajaj, M. 2011). This series has run since 2019, providing scholars, researchers, and practitioners with opportunities to present and discuss current research and policy relating to human rights education. The shift to online formats has enabled greater international participation than was possible with in person events alone, demonstrating how digital platforms can enhance rather than simply replicate traditional educational models.

Building Ethical Literacy Through AI-Enhanced Education

The integration of AI into human rights education platforms offers opportunities to personalize learning experiences, provide adaptive feedback, and analyze learning patterns to improve educational outcomes. However, as Effoduh (2024) argues in his analysis of explainable AI from a Global South perspective, the deployment of AI systems must be guided by principles that ensure transparency, accountability, and contextual appropriateness. This is particularly crucial in human rights education, where the content itself concerns fundamental principles of dignity, equality, and justice.

Ethical literacy, the capacity to critically evaluate the ethical implications of technologies and to engage with digital tools in ways that respect human rights has become essential in high tech societies. As Dabbagh et al. (2024) argue, AI ethics education should be mandatory for schoolchildren, with age-appropriate instruction focusing on both technical proficiency and ethical implications. Their framework for AI literacy integration in elementary schools delineates ethical pillars such as data privacy and unbiased algorithms that are essential for students to grasp, paralleling the integration of foundational subjects such as languages and mathematics.

Educational institutions are increasingly recognizing the need to integrate AI ethics into curricula across disciplines. The Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning at Harvard University has developed resources to support AI literacy and ethics education, helping students understand what generative AI tools are, how they work, and where their strengths and limitations lie (Harvard University, 2024). This includes discussing how AI generates content, why it can sometimes produce errors or "hallucinations," and how to responsibly use and cite these tools. Such instruction equips students to make informed decisions about AI use while recognizing the ethical implications of technology deployment.

Recent research has examined the effectiveness of AI ethics education interventions. A 2024 study on AI literacy for ethical use of chatbots found that curriculum design focused on ethical usage particularly contributes to understanding of Large Language Model concepts and their ethical use in decision support (Yamamoto et al., 2024). The study employed the Technology Acceptance

Model to investigate how AI ethical principles influence technology acceptance, finding that perceived usefulness, justice and fairness, privacy, and data protection directly impact attitudes toward AI tools. This research underscores that ethical considerations are not peripheral to technology adoption but rather central to how users engage with and trust AI systems.

The Global South Perspective: Context-Driven Approaches to AI in Education

Effoduh's (2024) work on explainable AI from a Global South perspective provides crucial insights for understanding how AI should be deployed in human rights education globally. His research, based on interviews with 255 people primarily in Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa, demonstrates that AI principles developed in the Global North often break down when applied in different contexts, undermining their intended benefits. For instance, he documents a case in Kenya where cattle herders used a U.S.-designed image vision model to identify malnourishment in livestock, but the software repeatedly misdiagnosed malnourishment in Kenyan cattle because it was trained on Western breeds (Effoduh, 2024). The herders were unaware of these discrepancies, and the repeated misdiagnoses led to mistrust in the AI system.

This example illustrates a broader challenge for AI deployment in education: systems designed without consideration of local contexts may fail to serve their intended purposes or, worse, may perpetuate biases and inequalities. As Effoduh et al. (2024) argue in their analysis of data governance policy for AI use in Africa, trustworthy and inclusive data governance requires attention to the unique challenges and opportunities present in different regions, including limited infrastructure, diverse linguistic landscapes, and different regulatory frameworks.

The application of these insights to human rights education is profound. Educational AI systems must be trained on diverse datasets that reflect the communities they serve, incorporate multiple languages and cultural perspectives, and be designed with input from local educators and learners. The UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence, adopted to address ethical challenges on a global scale, emphasizes the need for AI systems to respect cultural diversity and to be designed and deployed in ways that reduce rather than exacerbate inequalities (United Nations, 2024).

Digital divides remain significant barriers to AI enhanced human rights education in many parts of the world (Miao et al., 2021). As of 2024, nearly one-third of the world's population, around 2.6 billion people, still lacks Internet access (UNESCO, 2023). This digital divide risks creating an AI divide, where those without access to digital infrastructure are excluded from the benefits of AI enhanced education. For instance, in 2023, 95.6% of individuals aged 55-74 with high levels of education across OECD countries used the internet during the three months prior to being surveyed, compared to 63.1% of their counterparts with no or low levels of education (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2024). These disparities highlight that even as AI creates new opportunities for learning, existing inequalities in access and digital literacy must be addressed to prevent the further marginalization of vulnerable populations.

Addressing Challenges: Privacy, Bias, and Equity in AI-Enhanced Education

The integration of AI into human rights education platforms raises significant concerns about privacy, data protection, and algorithmic bias. Using AI in educational settings often requires users to input personal information or academic work into platforms that collect and store data (Su & Yang, 2023). In some cases, this data may be used for purposes beyond the immediate educational context, such as marketing or further training of AI models, often without the user's explicit consent. This raises ethical questions regarding ownership and control over intellectual property

and private information, issues that are particularly significant in human rights education, where learners may be discussing sensitive topics related to oppression, discrimination, or political activism.

Algorithmic bias presents another critical challenge. Human and systemic biases in generative AI algorithms and large language models' data impact the output of AI tools and can perpetuate inequities when these biases are not removed or addressed (Su & Yang, 2023). For human rights education, biased AI systems could present skewed perspectives on rights issues, reinforce stereotypes, or fail to adequately represent the experiences and perspectives of marginalized communities. As Tankley (2024) argues, educational technology is not neutral; AI can automate educational inequity if systems are designed and deployed without careful attention to bias mitigation and equity considerations.

Educators and institutions deploying AI for human rights education must therefore implement robust safeguards. This includes using AI tools that have been vetted for privacy and data protection, providing transparency about how learner data will be used, and regularly auditing AI systems for bias. Harvard University, for example, has established an AI Sandbox and ChatGPT Edu Workspace that allow for the upload of confidential materials while maintaining appropriate security measures (Harvard University, 2024). Such institutional responses demonstrate that responsible AI integration in education requires investment in infrastructure and governance systems that prioritize learner privacy and data protection.

Furthermore, research has documented that AI detection tools used to identify AI generated content demonstrate bias against non-native English writers (Myers, 2023). This has significant implications for human rights education delivered through digital platforms to global audiences, as learners from non-English-speaking backgrounds may be unfairly flagged or penalized. Educators must be aware of these biases and develop assessment strategies that do not disadvantage learners based on linguistic background or writing style.

Pedagogical Innovations: Critical AI Literacy for Human Rights Education

The integration of AI into human rights education necessitates new pedagogical approaches that foster critical engagement with technology while building understanding of human rights principles. Long & Magerko (2020) has articulated the concept of "critical AI literacy," which involves not just understanding how to use AI tools but developing the capacity to critically evaluate their societal implications, power dynamics, and potential for both harm and benefit. This approach is essential for human rights education, where learners must understand not only the content of human rights frameworks but also how technology shapes access to rights, enforcement mechanisms, and advocacy strategies.

Several educational strategies have emerged for integrating AI ethics into human rights education. Scenario-based, problem-solving approaches that engage students with real-world cases have proven particularly effective (Holmes et al., 2024). For instance, a 2024 study found that educators should start teaching about AI from the perspective of ethics before moving on to specific AI aspects of tools or applications, explicitly teaching ethical issues rather than assuming students would assimilate ethical implications without guidance (Holmes et al., 2024). This suggests that human rights education curricula should frontload ethical frameworks, helping learners develop critical lenses through which to evaluate both AI technologies and their deployment in service of (or against) human rights.

The use of case studies has proven particularly valuable for building ethical literacy. The 2024 Conference on Human Centred Artificial Intelligence featured research on teaching human rights, ethics, and risk mitigation methods for engineers through hands-on approaches (Fragkaki et al., 2024). This exercise exponentially increased interest, engagement, and understanding of human rights obligations and violations among participants. Similar approaches can be adapted for diverse audiences, using cases drawn from various contexts to illustrate how AI technologies intersect with human rights issues.

Community-based and participatory pedagogies also hold promise for human rights education in digital spaces. These approaches involve learners not just as consumers of content but as co-creators of knowledge, contributing their experiences and perspectives to collective understanding. Digital platforms enable such participation at scale, with features like discussion forums, collaborative documents, and social media hashtags creating spaces for dialogue and exchange. However, ensuring that these spaces remain inclusive and respectful requires active moderation and clear community guidelines that reflect human rights principles.

The Role of Educators and Institutions in AI-Enhanced Human Rights Education

The successful integration of AI into human rights education depends significantly on the capacity and readiness of educators and institutions to navigate this technological transformation. As Ng et al. (2021) argues, there is a generative AI literacy gap in higher education that must be addressed through comprehensive professional development and support for faculty. Educators need not only technical skills to use AI tools but also critical understanding of the ethical implications of these technologies and pedagogical strategies for integrating them effectively into curricula.

Centers for Teaching and Learning at colleges and universities face growing pressure to take a balanced approach to adopting new technologies (Bozkurt et al., 2024). They must provide resources and support pathways that go beyond simply targeting how to leverage AI or mitigate academic integrity violations, making concerted efforts to promote critical AI literacy, grapple with issues of social inequity, examine the environmental impact of AI technologies, and promote human centered design principles. This comprehensive approach is essential for ensuring that AI integration in human rights education advances rather than undermines the values and principles at the core of HRE.

The Seasons of CS program in California, part of the state Department of Education's Educator Workforce Investment grant, offered robust professional development during CSPDWeek from July 22-26, 2024, providing almost 300 educators from grades 6-12 with computer science workshops that included AI literacy and emphasized equity minded learning (Patel & Thurston, 2024). Programs like Every day AI by MIT and workshops on equity minded instruction in computer science fostered discussions on technological biases, drawing from work by expert researchers. Such professional development opportunities are crucial for building educator capacity to integrate AI into human rights education in ways that promote rather than undermine equity and inclusion.

Institutional policies and frameworks are equally important. Educational institutions must develop clear guidelines for AI use that reflect human rights principles, ensuring transparency about how AI systems are deployed, what data they collect, and how learner privacy is protected. The European Commission's 2022 ethical guidelines on the use of artificial intelligence and data in teaching and learning for educators provide a framework for such policies, emphasizing principles of human agency and oversight, technical robustness and safety, privacy and data governance,

transparency, diversity and fairness, societal and environmental well-being, and accountability (European Commission, 2022).

Measuring Impact: Assessing Learning Outcomes in AI-Enhanced Human Rights Education

As human rights education increasingly leverages digital platforms and AI technologies, questions of effectiveness and learning outcomes become critical. A 2025 systematic literature review of AI ethics education found that while efforts to teach AI ethics draw on holistic views and utilize progressive pedagogies like case studies and group projects, many real-world teaching interventions do not leverage well supported assessment techniques known to support student learning (Stahl et al., 2025). Rather, assessment is conducted primarily for research evaluative purposes. This gap in rigorous assessment raises implications for human rights educators, as responsible development and use of AI will be stymied if educators cannot successfully determine whether students have truly learned relevant content or skills.

Effective assessment of learning in AI enhanced human rights education must evaluate multiple dimensions: knowledge acquisition regarding human rights principles and frameworks, development of critical thinking skills related to rights issues, capacity to apply rights based approaches to real-world problems, and ethical literacy regarding technology use. Digital platforms offer opportunities for innovative assessment approaches, including adaptive testing that adjusts to learner responses, project-based assessments that can be submitted and reviewed digitally, and peer assessment mechanisms that leverage community knowledge.

However, assessment in human rights education must also attend to affective and behavioral dimensions. Human rights education aims not only to build knowledge but to foster empathy, challenge prejudices, and motivate action. Digital platforms may face limitations in assessing these dimensions, as they can measure knowledge retention and skill demonstration more readily than they can evaluate changes in attitudes or commitments to action. This suggests that AI enhanced human rights education should be complemented by opportunities for in person engagement, community-based learning, and direct involvement in rights advocacy, creating hybrid models that leverage the strengths of both digital and traditional educational approaches.

Looking Forward: Future Directions for AI in Human Rights Education

The integration of AI into human rights education is still in its early stages, with enormous potential for innovation and expansion. Several future directions merit attention from researchers, educators, policymakers, and technology developers. First, the development of AI systems specifically designed for human rights education represents a promising frontier. Current AI tools are largely general-purpose systems that must be adapted for educational use. Purpose-built educational AI that incorporates human rights frameworks, draws on diverse and representative datasets, and is designed with input from human rights educators and advocates could significantly enhance learning experiences while mitigating risks of bias and rights violations.

Second, greater attention to accessibility and universal design in AI enhanced educational platforms is essential. Digital platforms must be designed from the outset to be accessible to learners with disabilities, those with limited bandwidth or older devices, and those with varying levels of digital literacy. This requires not only technical accommodations but also thoughtful pedagogical design that provides multiple pathways for engagement with content.

Third, research on the effectiveness of different pedagogical approaches in AI enhanced human rights education remains limited. Rigorous empirical studies examining learning outcomes, engagement patterns, and the differential impacts on various learner populations would strengthen

the evidence base for best practices. Such research should be attended particularly to learners from marginalized communities, as they are both most likely to face barriers to participation and most likely to benefit from accessible human rights education.

Fourth, the governance frameworks for AI in education require continued development and refinement. The 2024 Global Digital Compact, adopted alongside the Pact for the Future by 193 UN member states, provides a roadmap for enhancing global digital collaboration and ensuring that digital technologies are governed in ways that respect human rights (United Nations, 2024). However, translating these high-level commitments into concrete policies and practices at institutional and national levels remains an ongoing challenge.

Finally, greater collaboration between the Global North and Global South in developing and deploying AI for human rights education is essential. As Effoduh et al. (2024) demonstrate, AI systems developed without consideration of diverse contexts may fail to serve their intended purposes or perpetuate inequalities. Collaborative development processes that involve educators, learners, and communities from various regions can help ensure that AI enhanced human rights education is truly inclusive and responsive to diverse needs and circumstances.

Conclusion

Artificial intelligence has emerged as a powerful catalyst for transforming human rights education, enabling unprecedented access to knowledge through digital platforms including social media, MOOCs, podcasts, and webinars. These technologies offer opportunities to democratize human rights education, reaching learners who have historically been excluded from such knowledge due to geographical, economic, or social barriers. As documented throughout this analysis, digital platforms are already enabling millions of people worldwide to engage with human rights content, build ethical literacy, and connect with global communities of learners and advocates.

However, the integration of AI into human rights education is not without significant challenges. Issues of digital divides, algorithmic bias, privacy and data protection, and equitable access must be addressed to ensure that technological advancement serves to enhance rather than undermine human rights. As Effoduh (2024) demonstrates through his research in the Global South, AI systems must be designed and deployed with careful attention to context, ensuring that they reflect diverse perspectives and serve the needs of all communities rather than primarily those in the Global North.

Building ethical literacy in high tech societies requires more than simply providing access to AI tools and digital platforms. It necessitates comprehensive educational approaches that help learners critically evaluate technologies, understand their societal implications, and engage with them in ways that respect human rights principles. Educators and institutions play crucial roles in this process, requiring professional development, institutional support, and policy frameworks that enable responsible AI integration.

Looking forward, the potential for AI to serve as a catalyst for human rights education remains enormous. However, realizing this potential requires sustained commitment to human rights principles in technology design and deployment, investment in infrastructure and capacity building, attention to equity and inclusion, and ongoing collaboration across sectors and regions. As digital transformation continues to reshape education globally, the imperative is clear: AI must be governed and deployed in ways that advance human rights for all, creating a more just, equitable, and rights respecting world. Only through such careful and principled integration can AI truly serve as a catalyst for building ethical literacy and expanding human rights education in high tech societies.

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