

Article: Theoretical essay based on a narrative literature review

Ethical principles applied in the preparation of final projects in Angolan higher education

Princípios éticos aplicados na elaboração dos trabalhos de fim de curso no ensino superior Angolano

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article was to analyse the ethical principles applicable to the preparation of Final Course Projects (FCP) in Angolan Higher Education, in the light of constructivist, sociocultural and humanist perspectives. It is configured as a theoretical essay based on a narrative literature review, supported by scientific literature on academic integrity, supervision, authorship, methodological rigour, confidentiality and responsible use of artificial intelligence. The analysis was organised into five axes: autonomy, research honesty, rigour, responsibility and confidentiality. The reflection carried out indicates that these principles do not automatically follow from the pedagogical theories examined; they are related by the author to FCP as interpretative keys to understanding the student's ethical formation, the supervisor's mediation and institutional responsibility. It is argued that the ethical quality of FCP depends on the articulation between explicit training in integrity, dialogical supervision, transparent criteria for authorship and use of sources, data protection and institutional policies adapted to digital challenges. It is concluded that ethics must integrate the entire process of preparing the FCP and not be limited to the final-stage plagiarism checks or formal compliance with regulations.

Keywords: Angola; higher education; ethical principles; Final Course Projects.

RESUMEN

O presente artigo teve como objectivo analisar os princípios éticos aplicáveis à elaboração dos Trabalhos de Fim de Curso (TFC) no Ensino Superior angolano, à luz das perspectivas construtivista, sócio-interacionista e humanista. Configura-se como ensaio teórico de revisão bibliográfica narrativa, sustentado por literatura científica sobre integridade académica, supervisão, autoria, rigor metodológico, confidencialidade e uso responsável da inteligência artificial. A análise foi organizada em cinco eixos: autonomia, honestidade científica, rigor, responsabilidade e confidencialidade. A reflexão realizada indica que esses princípios não decorrem automaticamente das teorias pedagógicas examinadas; eles são relacionados pelo autor aos TFC como chaves interpretativas para compreender a formação ética do estudante, a mediação do orientador e a responsabilidade institucional. Sustenta-se que a qualidade ética dos TFC depende da articulação entre formação explícita em integridade, orientação dialógica, critérios transparentes de autoria e uso de fontes, protecção de dados e políticas institucionais adaptadas aos desafios digitais. Conclui-se que a ética deve integrar todo o processo de elaboração do TFC e não limitar-se ao controlo final de plágio ou ao cumprimento formal de regulamentos.

Palabras clave: Angola; Ensino superior; Princípios éticos; Trabalhos de fim de curso.

INTRODUCCIÓN

The preparation of Final Course Projects (FCP) constitutes a decisive moment in the academic career, because it requires the student to articulate theoretical knowledge, methodological choices, scientific writing and ethical responsibility. The credibility of the final product depends not only on formal correctness, but on the possibility of recognizing how the sources were used, how decisions were made and what limits condition the conclusions.

In Angolan Higher Education, this requirement acquires particular relevance given the expansion of research training and the need to consolidate institutional cultures of integrity. Alfredo and Simões identified weaknesses in the articulation between training in research ethics and the monographs produced in Angolan institutions (1). Canoquena, Rodriguez and Samba also observed recurring difficulties in the technical and scientific writing of Angolan academic works (2).

Plagiarism, inadequate attribution of authorship, methodological opacity and undeclared use of digital tools should not be treated solely as individual failures. Silveira and Almeida point out that plagiarism involves academic, ethical and legal dimensions (3). Therefore, the institutional response needs to combine prevention, training, supervision and proportional accountability procedures.

Constructivist, sociocultural and humanist perspectives offer useful pedagogical foundations for interpreting this problem. Constructivism highlights the student's activity in the construction of knowledge; sociocultural theory emphasizes mediation and dialogue; and humanism values dignity, authenticity and integral development. These theoretical frameworks do not, in and of themselves, produce a catalogue of ethical duties.

Based on these assumptions, the author relates the three perspectives to principles relevant to FCP. Autonomy is associated with responsible intellectual authorship; honesty, the faithful presentation of sources and procedures; rigour, argumentative and methodological coherence; responsibility, the consequences of decisions made; and confidentiality, the protection of the people and data involved.

Recent literature shows that academic integrity and research integrity should be brought together from students' first research experiences. Krásničan et al. propose supervision instruments capable of articulating these two fields (4), while Favaro et al. defend educational approaches, and not exclusively punitive ones, for the development of integrity (5).

Supervision occupies a central position in this articulation. A thematic review demonstrated that the integrity of research depends on shared responsibilities between institutions, supervisors and students (6). Studies on advanced training add that the supervisor acts as a model of conduct and mediator of the student's entry into a research community (7).

The problem that guides the essay is: what ethical principles should guide the preparation of Final Course Projects in Angolan Higher Education, when interpreted from constructivist, sociocultural and humanist perspectives?

The objective is to analyse the ethical principles applicable to the preparation of Final Course Projects in Angolan Higher Education, considering the constructivist, sociocultural and humanist perspectives.

Regarding the type of study, it is a theoretical essay based on a narrative literature review. It is not a systematic review nor an original empirical article, because it does not adopt an exhaustive search protocol, does not select a sample of participants and does not produce primary data. Literature is mobilized to construct a critical and contextualised interpretation.

The argumentative path combines literature on academic integrity, research ethics, supervision and scientific writing. The works were selected based on thematic relevance, timeliness and DOI availability, prioritizing articles published in scientific journals. The analysis looked for convergences and tensions between ethical values, supervision practices and institutional responsibilities.

Figure 1 shows the structure of the article. After formulating the problem and objective, the theoretical bases are explained; then, the five ethical principles are discussed; finally, implications for supervision, training and institutional policies are proposed.

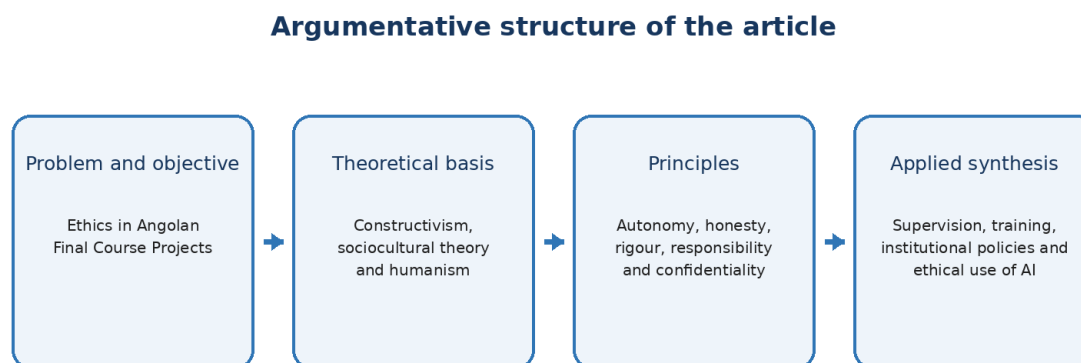


Figure 1. Argumentative structure of the article. Source: prepared by the author (2026).

LITERATURE REVIEW

- The Ethical Principles Applied in the Preparation of Final Course Projects

Understanding the ethical principles applied to FCP requires a consistent theoretical basis, involving academic ethics, humanism, research integrity, among other no less important elements.

Research integrity brings together honesty, rigour, transparency and responsibility throughout the research cycle. In the context of FCP, the supervisor works as a quality mediator without replacing the student's authorship; This monitoring function has been described as decisive for the quality of final projects (8).

Krásničan et al. (4) defend a rapprochement between research integrity and academic integrity, highlighting that student training must prepare them to develop responsible research practices from their first scientific experiences.

For Favaro et al. (5), academic integrity should not be limited to punishing inappropriate behaviour, but should also involve educational processes that allow students to understand the principles that support responsible academic production.

Academic integrity should be taught as a research practice. Researcher training needs to include authorship, consent, data management, conflicts of interest and responsible communication, as advocated by recent studies on ethical care in educational research (9).

Rigour and social responsibility are inseparable dimensions of integrity. A Lusophone synthesis highlights that trust in science depends on the conduct of the researcher, the quality of the procedures and the transparent communication of results (10).

Institutional culture conditions the possibility of acting with integrity. Evidence from African universities shows that policies, leadership, training and safe channels of advice influence the perception of a climate of integrity (11).

Recent reviews show that fraud and plagiarism respond to personal, pedagogical, technological and organizational factors; therefore, isolated codes and final sanctions are insufficient (12).

The distinction between academic integrity and misconduct is also relevant: the first guides training values and practices, while the second describes violations that require fair investigative procedures (13).

Ethical training must accompany the transition between learning, professional practice and research. In integrated learning environments, the internalisation of integrity values favours responsible conduct beyond the classroom (14).

Digital assessment modalities have increased concerns about fraud and authorship. A systematic review of online examinations shows the need to interpret prevalence estimates with caution and to combine assessment design, pedagogical support and proportional verification (15).

Angolan legislation reinforces this commitment by requiring integrity standards and providing for control and sanction mechanisms. However, the effectiveness of these provisions depends on the implementation of policies that combine clear standards, solid supervision, continuous training of agents involved in the FCP preparation process, as well as humanized support for students.

Therefore, promoting academic ethics is, simultaneously, an epistemological, institutional and human commitment. For this reason, the consistency and credibility of the FCP depend on a set of principles, including the following: principle of autonomy, principle of freedom, principle of honesty, principle of responsibility, principle of rigour and, finally, the principle of confidentiality.

- Principle of Autonomy

The principle of autonomy refers to the researcher's ability to carry out research with intellectual independence, without undue manipulation by the supervisor, colleagues or the institution.

In the constructivist tradition, cognitive development is understood as the subject's activity in relation to the environment. Applied to the context of FCP, these foundations allow us to support an ethical interpretation of autonomy: the student must make justified intellectual decisions, without the supervisor appropriating their work or replacing its authorship.

In the humanist tradition, autonomy is a condition for meaningful learning. Based on these assumptions, autonomy, authenticity and involvement of the researcher with the object of study can be related. This relationship is a theoretical interpretation of the author and not an automatic derivation of an ethical code from pedagogical theory.

For the sociocultural tradition, autonomous thinking is built in contexts of dialogue and collaboration, in which the student is encouraged to express and review their ideas. In the humanistic approach, autonomy is inseparable from respect for individuality.

Sá et al. (8) highlight supervision as an important element in ensuring the quality of FCP. For the authors, the supervisor should not take over the student's work, but create conditions for the student to develop their research autonomy.

In light of these assumptions, it can be considered that, in the preparation of the FCP, decision-making independence translates into the commitment that the supervisee assumes in the research process, preventing practices that violate research ethics. It is important to highlight that the principle of autonomy constitutes a central element for the critical, ethical and investigative training of the supervisee, so its implementation depends on a balanced stance on the part of the supervisor, who must act as a facilitator and mediator, and not as an exclusive conductor of the process.

Therefore, autonomy contributes not only to the production of work, but also to the training of professionals capable of making informed decisions and contributing to the advancement of scholarly knowledge.

- Principle of Scientific Honesty

The principle of research honesty concerns the fact that the researcher faithfully presents the procedures, results and limitations of the research, without altering the data to confirm hypotheses or favor certain conclusions. In this sense, honesty requires the researcher to recognize the contributions of other authors, avoiding behaviours that misappropriate ideas.

Mercado and Rêgo (9) highlight the need to establish clear criteria for attributing authorship, in order to ensure that those who effectively contributed to a given work are recognized and assume responsibility for the production.

the pedagogical literature maintains that honesty is part of the researcher's reflective stance, which recognizes the provisional and contextual nature of the knowledge produced, while responsibility, in turn, resides in the commitment to the quality and coherence of the investigative process.

In humanistic epistemology, honesty is defined as a set of fundamental values for the researcher to act with integrity, authenticity and commitment to the common good.

In the sociocultural perspective, defended by Vygotsky, the individual's moral and social development occurs through interaction with other people. Thus, honesty can be understood as a conduct guided by social relationships and shared norms.

The interaction referred to in the perspective in question is driven by dialogue. This time, the literature on dialogical education states that science must be practiced with transparency, allowing dialogue and criticism.

Broadly speaking, honesty in research includes three sub-principles: truth in data, transparency and recognition of authorship. Applied to the context of FCP, this understanding allows us to consider that the student develops honest practices not only because there are institutional norms that prohibit practices that compromise research integrity, but also because, through the educational process and interaction with the teacher and colleagues, he adds values of responsibility, truth and respect.

Truth in data consists of presenting the results exactly as they were obtained, without manipulations designed to favor the interests of the researcher. Transparency concerns the clear way in which methods, limitations and sources are presented, allowing the study to be verified. Recognition of authorship consists of giving credit to the authors and collaborators who effectively contributed to the research.

Presidential Decree No. 310/20, of December 7, which approves the Legal Regime of the Higher Education Subsystem, establishes, regarding the mission of Higher Education Institutions, that they play a fundamental role in the high-level qualification of citizens, based on comprehensive training, valuing education for citizenship, the development of creativity and the ability to work as a team, in close connection with research aimed at solving problems local and national institutions, the provision of services to the community, the dissemination and transfer of knowledge and the carrying out of actions that add value to the institution itself and the communities in which they operate.

Thus, during the process of preparing the FCP, the supervisor must help the student understand honesty as a conscious practice of research. The teacher, as a mediator of the learning process, plays an important role, as it can encourage the construction of ethical attitudes.

- Rigour Principle

Rigour is an essential element to ensure that the knowledge produced is valid and meaningful. From this perspective, the methodological literature argues that rigour is built on the critical relationship with the object of study and the clarity of the procedures adopted. For the sociocultural tradition, a rigorous research is one that is supported by well-constructed arguments, active listening and debate with peers.

Rogers states that rigour should not be confused with rigidity, but with depth, seriousness and commitment to the truth and to the subjects involved in the research.

In the context of FCP, the study carried out by Alfredo and Simões (1) shows that some ethical principles mentioned in the Final Course Projects are not observed in practice. This situation reveals

the existence of a distance between formal knowledge of research standards and their effective application.

Given these assumptions, ethics and scientific rigour can be directly related, as a rigorous FCP is not only one that presents a formally correct structure, but one in which the methodological, ethical and analytical procedures are effectively followed and duly justified.

Caldas and Madureira-Carvalho (10) understand research integrity as a set of principles that should guide the production and communication of knowledge. The authors' reflection covers the integrity of science and the researcher, as well as the social responsibility of scientific activity.

From this perspective, it is considered that rigour in research must be understood as a commitment to the quality and veracity of the knowledge produced. In the context of FCP, this implies coherence between the research problem, objectives, theoretical foundation, methodological procedures, data analysis and conclusions, avoiding manipulation or inappropriate selection of information to confirm certain ideas in advance.

In addition to these considerations, it can be concluded that rigour in research is not limited to technical precision, but involves theoretical, methodological and ethical coherence. It is a crucial element for the credibility of the research, as it ensures the validity and reliability of the results.

- Responsibility Principle

The principle of responsibility refers to the commitment that those involved in an research must assume regarding the consequences of their actions. In this order, the researcher and his collaborators must assume responsibility for the decisions made during the research, including methodological quality, data processing and the consequences of publishing the results.

In Humanist epistemology, like honesty, responsibility is a fundamental value for the researcher to act with integrity, authenticity and commitment to the common good..

Alfredo and Simões (1) argue that the weaknesses found in the teaching of research ethics in Angola justify a deep reflection on research training and the need for regulatory mechanisms for research activity. For the authors, responsibility for the integrity of the research cannot be limited to the student's individual knowledge, requiring a more consistent training and institutional intervention.

The expansion of generative artificial intelligence has introduced new authorship, transparency and evaluation challenges. Cotton, Cotton, and Shipway analyse risks and opportunities of ChatGPT for academic integrity (16), and Rasul et al. propose an articulated response between students, teachers and institutions (17). Automatic detectors alone do not provide a sufficient basis for sanctioning decisions, as assessment requires academic judgment and contextualised evidence (18).

Policies also need to consider the perspective of students. A study with broad student participation showed that institutional guidelines must be understandable and adjusted to real practices in the use of artificial intelligence (19). Recent reviews recommend declaring technological assistance,

preserving human responsibility for content, and redesigning tasks to value process, argumentation, and reflection (20).

ethical literature highlights that any research must seek real benefits and avoid harm to society. From these considerations, within the scope of preparing FCPs, it can be seen that responsibility is very important, as the work must contribute to solving society's problems, promoting collective well-being.

Analyzing the FCP Preparation Regulations of the Instituto Superior Politécnico da Caála, it is clear that the responsibility for the quality of the FCPs is attributed above all to the supervisor, as the regulations establish that even when external institutions are used, the supervisor will always be responsible for the quality of the work to be developed by the student,.

In this context, there is an urgent need to reinforce institutional policies and ethical training for students, so that a culture of integrity is promoted that encompasses not only respect for academic standards, but also the social and moral responsibility of research,.

Responsibility for the quality of the FCP must be attributed to both (supervisor and supervisee), in fact, the responsibility concerns the elements that contribute rigorously to the quality of the research, which is only possible when both subjects are involved. Of these elements, the following stand out:

- Consistency: focused on compliance with standards that include methods and materials, to guarantee the validity and reliability of the research;
- Social commitment: limited to guiding research towards purposes that benefit society and respect human rights;
- Compliance with legal and institutional standards: concerns compliance with regulations, codes of ethical conduct and laws that govern research, especially when involving human beings.

Therefore, the application of the principle of responsibility is not limited to preventing academic fraud, but includes the duty of consistency, methodological transparency and respect for human rights, ensuring that the research contributes positively to resolving the identified problem. Responsibility involves commitment to methodological rigour and the social and ethical impacts of research.

- Academic integrity in the digital age

Digitization has expanded access to sources, writing tools and analysis systems, but it has also made the distinction between legitimate support and undue substitution of intellectual work more complex. Contemporary literature describes integrity as a situated educational practice, crossed by sometimes contradictory expectations between students, teachers and institutions (21).

Dishonest behaviour does not result from a single cause. Pressure to perform, procrastination, inadequate time management, insufficient understanding of standards and inauthentic assessment

design can all work together (22). Therefore, prevention must combine academic literacy, pedagogical support and fair institutional procedures.

In the African context, the introduction of artificial intelligence occurs in institutions with unequal levels of infrastructure, teacher training and policy development. A contextualised approach must balance regulation, education and collective responsibility, avoiding importing solutions that ignore local conditions (23).

For Angolan FCPs, this implies requiring the student to declare relevant uses of digital tools, verify information and references, preserve versions of the work and take responsibility for intellectual decisions. Proposals aimed at African universities advocate policies that integrate digital skills, regulatory clarity and institutional monitoring (24).

Integrity also depends on ethically consistent supervision. Comparative studies show that support, involvement, perceived justice and role clarity condition the formative experience (25). Version records, methodological justification and oral defence make the process visible and strengthen authorship.

Empirical evidence outside of Angola shows an association between uses of artificial intelligence and self-reported plagiarism practices, reinforcing the need for proportionate and evidence-based supervision (26). These findings cannot be automatically transferred to Angola, but they help to formulate questions for future research.

The ethical response, therefore, should not demonize technology nor normalize any use. It must establish pedagogical purposes, limits of assistance, declaration duties, data protection and accountability criteria that preserve authorship and learning.

- Principle of Confidentiality

Confidentiality consists of protecting the information provided by research participants. In the constructivist perspective, for example, confidentiality is a condition for creating an environment of trust between the researcher and the participants.

According to the sociocultural tradition, the bond established in interaction must be guided by the ethics of care, ensuring that the data collected is not used in a way that is harmful to those involved. For Rogers, protecting the identity and information of participants is a way of valuing their integrity and ensuring that the researcher does not cause psychological or social harm.

From the above, it can be seen that the sociocultural perspective highlights respect for confidentiality as an expression of recognition of the other as an ethical subject, while the humanist approach reinforces the exposed view, understanding confidentiality as a gesture of empathy and respect for human dignity.

These approaches are supported by Presidential Decree No. 109/19, of April 2, which approves the Scientific Research Career Statute, according to which Scientific Research Career personnel must guarantee professional secrecy regarding confidential matters under their custody.

When published, data obtained from participants must not allow their identification, unless the research requires it and there is authorization from the informant. In research, the principle of confidentiality is a very important element. This is one of the ethical pillars that ensure the protection of information provided by participants during the research process.

In the African context, Abdelkreem et al. (11), in their study of the research integrity climate in Egyptian universities, highlighted the importance of institutional conditions for promoting responsible behaviour in research. The study, carried out with academic researchers, relates the institutional culture of integrity with the practices of researchers and the existence of mechanisms that guide research conduct.

Based on these approaches, it can be considered that, in Angolan Higher Education, confidentiality is also understood as an institutional responsibility, as it is not enough to require the student to preserve data if the institution itself does not establish clear procedures for its protection.

In short, the guidelines for the practical application of ethical principles in FCP include mandatory ethical training throughout the course, the existence of clear regulations on academic integrity, the promotion of workshops on scientific writing and responsible use of technology, the systematic monitoring of supervisors and students and the encouragement of research with a positive social impact.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis developed allowed us to support that the preparation of Final Course Projects in Angolan Higher Education must be guided by ethical principles that go beyond formal compliance with standards. As a theoretical essay, the article does not establish causal relationships or generalise empirical findings; rather, it proposes a grounded interpretation of autonomy, honesty, responsibility, rigour and confidentiality in the research training process.

The articulation between constructivism, sociocultural theory and humanism offers a pedagogical lens to understand the ethics of FCP, as long as it is not claimed that the principles derive directly from these theories. Based on its assumptions, one can relate the student's autonomous activity, the supervisor's dialogical mediation and respect for human dignity with concrete duties of authorship, transparency and care.

The review indicates that integrity must be taught explicitly and continuously. Plagiarism prevention, attribution of authorship, data management, declaration of the use of artificial intelligence and recognition of limitations need to integrate supervision and evaluation. The supervisor supports and questions; the student maintains intellectual responsibility; and the institution provides clear rules, training, resources and fair procedures.

In the digital context, the institutional response must combine academic literacy, authentic task design, process monitoring and transparent criteria for the use of artificial intelligence tools. Detection systems do not replace academic judgment or authorize automatic conclusions. Ethical

responsibility requires verifying sources, declaring relevant technological assistance, and protecting personal or sensitive data.

It is concluded that a culture of integrity in FCP depends on the coherence between values, supervisory practices and institutional policies. The essay offers a conceptual synthesis applicable to the Angolan debate, but remains limited by the narrative nature of the review and the scarcity of empirical studies specific to Angola. Future research could examine regulations, supervisory practices, and student experiences at different institutions across the country.

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1. Conceptualization: LPA
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12. View: LPA
13. Original draft writing: LPA
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