



## **TRANSITIONING TO AI-INTEGRATED EDUCATION: EXAMINING HIGHER EDUCATION EDUCATORS' EXPERIENCES IN ADOPTING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of higher education educators in adopting Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies in teaching, learning, and academic-related functions. As universities continue transitioning toward AI-integrated education, educators are confronted with both opportunities and challenges in integrating AI tools into instructional delivery, assessment, research, and administrative work. The study aimed to understand how educators perceive, experience, and adapt to AI adoption within the context of higher education. Artificial Intelligence (AI) has the potential to address some of the biggest challenges in education today, innovate teaching and learning practices, and accelerate progress towards SDG 4 (Artificial Intelligence and Emerging Technologies, 2026). SDG 4 or to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all (Goal 4 | Department of Economic and Social Affairs, n.d.). Using a qualitative phenomenological research design, data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews with selected higher education educators from various academic disciplines who actively utilized AI technologies in their professional practice. Phenomenological research is a qualitative research approach that seeks to understand and describe the universal essence of a phenomenon. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the gathered narratives and identify recurring patterns and meanings. The findings revealed several emerging themes: (1) AI as a Tool for Instructional Innovation, (2) Increased Efficiency and Productivity, (3) Ethical and Academic Integrity Concerns, (4) Challenges in Technological Readiness and Competency, (5) Resistance and Adaptation to Technological Change, and (6) The Need for Institutional Policies and Professional

Development. Participants described AI as transformative in improving lesson preparation, content generation, assessment, and student engagement. However, concerns regarding overdependence on AI, misinformation, academic dishonesty, and lack of institutional guidelines were also emphasized. The study concludes that while AI adoption presents significant opportunities for innovation in higher education, successful integration requires institutional support, ethical governance, faculty training, and clear policy frameworks. The findings contribute to the growing body of knowledge on AI integration in higher education and may serve as a basis for AI policy formulation, faculty development programs, and strategic digital transformation initiatives in universities.

**Keywords:** *Artificial Intelligence Adoption, Higher Education, Phenomenology, AI-Integrated Education, Educator Experiences, Digital Transformation*

## INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies has significantly transformed various sectors worldwide, including education. AI in education refers to digital tools that use algorithms and predictive modeling to assist with learning, planning, assessment, and instruction (Healey & Healey, 2026). Universities and higher education institutions are increasingly integrating AI-powered tools into teaching, learning, research, and administrative processes. AI technologies such as generative AI platforms, intelligent tutoring systems, automated assessment tools, and predictive analytics are reshaping the educational landscape by enhancing efficiency, personalization, and accessibility. As institutions transition toward AI-integrated education, educators play a critical role in determining the successful adoption and implementation of these emerging technologies. The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) and advanced technologies in educational administration presents a transformative approach to enhancing both efficiency and educational quality (Olanike Abiola Ajuwon, 2023).

The growing accessibility of AI tools has enabled educators to automate repetitive tasks, generate instructional materials, facilitate student engagement, and improve academic productivity. AI-powered applications are now being used to assist in lesson planning, assessment generation, content development, plagiarism detection, and research writing support. Furthermore, AI technologies have become increasingly relevant in supporting flexible and blended learning environments, especially in the context of digital transformation initiatives in higher education. Artificial intelligence, or AI, in education, is the utilization of modern hi-tech mechanisms such as natural language processing (NLP), machine learning, etc. The AI techniques serve to improve teaching and learning (Poonam Nathani, 2024). Despite the potential benefits of AI integration, the adoption of AI technologies in universities also presents various challenges and concerns. Educators face issues related to technological readiness, ethical considerations, academic integrity, data privacy, and the reliability of AI-generated information. Many faculty members experience uncertainty regarding the appropriate use of AI in instruction, particularly due to the absence of comprehensive institutional policies and guidelines. In addition,

disparities in digital literacy and technological competencies among educators may influence the level of AI adoption within universities.

Artificial intelligence (AI) in education (AIED) has evolved into a substantial body of literature with diverse perspectives (Shan Wang & Fang Wang, 2024). The transition toward AI-integrated education requires not only technological infrastructure but also a deeper understanding of educators' lived experiences, perceptions, and adaptation processes. Exploring these experiences is essential in identifying the opportunities, barriers, and support mechanisms necessary for effective AI integration in higher education institutions. Through understanding the perspectives of educators, universities can develop responsive policies, professional development programs, and ethical frameworks that promote responsible and sustainable AI adoption. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is no longer a futuristic concept; it is now a transformative force reshaping various industries, including education. AI's integration into educational systems promises to enhance learning experiences, streamline administrative processes, and personalize education for students worldwide (South African Broadband Education Networks, 2024).

This study examined the lived experiences of higher education educators in adopting Artificial Intelligence technologies within the university setting. Specifically, it aimed to explore how educators perceive AI integration, the challenges they encounter, the opportunities they experience, and the institutional support needed to facilitate responsible AI adoption in higher education.

## **Research Objectives**

Generally, this study aimed to examine the lived experiences of higher education educators in adopting Artificial Intelligence technologies in university instruction and academic practice.

Specifically, it sought to:

1. explore educators' experiences in integrating AI technologies in teaching and learning;
2. identify the opportunities and benefits experienced by educators in AI adoption;
3. determine the challenges and concerns encountered during AI integration;
4. examine how educators adapt to AI-integrated education;
5. identify institutional support mechanisms needed for responsible AI adoption in higher education.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

This study utilized a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore and understand the lived experiences of higher education educators in adopting Artificial Intelligence technologies in teaching and academic practice. This approach was

appropriate for the study because it sought to capture the perspectives, perceptions, and realities of educators transitioning toward AI-integrated education. Phenomenology is a type of research that seeks to explain the nature of things through the way people experience them. It translates literally as the “study of phenomena (Dovetail Editorial Team, 2023).

The phenomenological design enabled the researcher to gather rich and detailed narratives regarding educators’ experiences, challenges, adaptation processes, and insights related to AI adoption. The qualitative method of phenomenology provides a theoretical tool for educational research as it allows researchers to engage in flexible activities that can describe and help to understand complex phenomena, such as various aspects of human social experience (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022). Through this method, the researcher aimed to identify common themes and meanings that characterize the phenomenon of AI integration in higher education.

### **Participants of the Study**

The participants of the study consisted of selected higher education educators from universities and colleges who actively utilized Artificial Intelligence technologies in teaching, research, assessment, or administrative functions. Purposive sampling was employed to identify participants with relevant experiences and sufficient exposure to AI-integrated educational practices. Purposive sampling is a widely used non-probability technique that is integral to qualitative and mixed methods research for its focus on detailed and contextual understanding (Tajik et al., 2025).

The study involved faculty members from various academic disciplines, including Information Technology, Engineering, Education, Business, and Liberal Arts. Participants were selected based on the following criteria:

1. currently employed as higher education educators;
2. actively using AI technologies in academic-related functions;
3. willing to participate in in-depth interviews;
4. capable of articulating their experiences regarding AI adoption.

### **Data Gathering Procedure**

The researcher secured the necessary approvals and informed consent from all participants prior to data collection. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather detailed narratives and lived experiences regarding AI adoption in higher education. Semi-structured interviews are a flexible form of qualitative data collection that balances structure with openness (Chavez, 2026).

The interviews focused on the following areas:

- experiences in using AI technologies;
- perceived benefits and opportunities of AI integration;
- challenges and concerns encountered;
- adaptation strategies and coping mechanisms;

- institutional support and policy recommendations.

Interviews were conducted either face-to-face or through online conferencing platforms depending on participant availability and preference. Each interview was audio-recorded with participant consent and later transcribed verbatim for analysis.

## **Data Analysis**

Thematic analysis was utilized to analyze the qualitative data gathered from the interviews. The researcher carefully reviewed and coded the interview transcripts to identify significant statements, recurring patterns, and emerging themes.

The following steps were observed during data analysis:

1. transcription and familiarization with the data;
2. coding of significant statements;
3. identification of recurring themes and subthemes;
4. thematic categorization and interpretation;
5. synthesis of the essence of participants' experiences.

The analysis focused on understanding the common experiences and meanings associated with AI adoption in higher education.

## **Trustworthiness of the Study**

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the study, the researcher observed the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

- Credibility was established through prolonged engagement and member checking.
- Transferability was achieved by providing detailed descriptions of the participants and context.
- Dependability was maintained through systematic documentation of research procedures.
- Confirmability was ensured by minimizing researcher bias and maintaining accurate records of data collection and analysis.

## **RESULTS**

The thematic analysis of the participants' narratives revealed several significant themes that describe the lived experiences of higher education educators in adopting Artificial Intelligence technologies. Thematic analysis (TA) is one of the most widely utilized methods for analyzing qualitative data, offering a structured yet flexible framework for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning within datasets (Ahmed et al., n.d.).

## Theme 1: AI as a Tool for Instructional Innovation

Participants described Artificial Intelligence as a transformative tool that enhances instructional delivery and classroom engagement. Educators emphasized that AI technologies assist in lesson planning, content generation, assessment preparation, and instructional material development.

Many participants shared that AI reduced the time spent on repetitive tasks, allowing them to focus more on student interaction and instructional improvement. AI-generated content and automated feedback systems were viewed as valuable tools in supporting flexible and personalized learning experiences.

One participant stated:

“AI helps me prepare instructional materials faster and gives me more time to focus on improving my teaching strategies.”

The findings suggest that educators perceive AI as an innovative support mechanism that contributes to more efficient and engaging teaching practices.

## Theme 2: Increased Efficiency and Productivity

Another prominent theme identified was increased efficiency and productivity. Participants expressed that AI technologies significantly improved workflow efficiency, particularly in administrative tasks, grading, research writing, and content organization.

Educators highlighted that AI tools reduced workload pressure and simplified complex academic tasks. Several participants also emphasized the usefulness of AI in generating ideas, organizing lesson content, and supporting research-related activities.

However, some participants cautioned against excessive dependence on AI-generated outputs, stressing the importance of human validation and critical thinking.

## Theme 3: Ethical and Academic Integrity Concerns

Ethical concerns emerged as one of the major challenges experienced by educators during AI adoption. Participants expressed concerns regarding plagiarism, misinformation, overreliance on AI-generated content, and the potential misuse of AI by students.

Many educators reported difficulties in ensuring academic honesty in student outputs due to the increasing accessibility of generative AI platforms. Some participants also questioned the reliability and accuracy of AI-generated information.

One educator explained:

“AI can be helpful, but there is always the risk of students becoming too dependent on it instead of developing their own critical thinking and writing skills.”

The findings indicate that responsible AI usage and ethical governance remain critical concerns in higher education institutions.

#### Theme 4: Challenges in Technological Readiness and Competency

Participants identified technological readiness and digital competency as important factors influencing AI adoption. While some educators adapted easily to AI technologies, others experienced difficulties in understanding and utilizing AI tools effectively.

Limited training opportunities, insufficient technical support, and varying levels of digital literacy were identified as barriers to effective AI integration. Some participants also reported apprehension toward rapidly evolving technologies.

The study highlights the importance of continuous professional development programs and institutional capacity-building initiatives to support educators in adapting to AI-integrated education.

#### Theme 5: Resistance and Adaptation to Technological Change

The transition toward AI-integrated education was accompanied by both resistance and adaptation among educators. Some participants initially resisted AI adoption due to fear of technological complexity, job displacement, or uncertainty regarding ethical implications.

Over time, however, many educators gradually adapted to AI technologies through self-learning, peer collaboration, and institutional support. Participants recognized that AI integration is becoming increasingly necessary in modern higher education environments.

The findings suggest that adaptation to AI technologies is influenced by openness to innovation, institutional culture, and availability of support systems.

#### Theme 6: Need for Institutional Policies and Professional Development

Participants consistently emphasized the need for universities to establish clear policies, ethical guidelines, and structured faculty training programs related to AI adoption.

Educators stressed that institutions must provide:

- AI governance frameworks;
- ethical guidelines for AI usage;

- faculty capability-building initiatives;
- technical support and infrastructure;
- continuous monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

Participants believed that institutional policies are essential in promoting responsible, ethical, and sustainable AI integration in higher education.

The findings underscore the significant role of universities in guiding the responsible adoption of AI technologies through policy development, faculty support, and strategic planning.

## **DISCUSSION**

The findings of the study reveal that Artificial Intelligence adoption in higher education has become a transformative and evolving phenomenon that significantly influences teaching, learning, research, and institutional practices. Educators viewed AI technologies as innovative tools capable of enhancing instructional efficiency, academic productivity, and learner engagement. The integration of AI-assisted platforms in lesson planning, content generation, assessment preparation, and administrative work demonstrates how universities are gradually transitioning toward digitally enabled and AI-integrated educational environments.

The participants' experiences indicate that AI technologies contribute positively to workload management and instructional innovation. Educators recognized that AI tools allow them to automate repetitive academic tasks and allocate more time toward meaningful student interaction and instructional improvement. These findings support existing literature emphasizing the role of AI in improving personalization, flexibility, and efficiency in higher education.

Despite these opportunities, the study also identified significant concerns related to ethics, academic integrity, misinformation, and overdependence on AI-generated outputs. Participants expressed apprehension regarding students' misuse of generative AI technologies, particularly in academic writing and assessment activities. The findings suggest that while AI provides substantial educational benefits, universities must also address the ethical and pedagogical implications associated with its use.

The study further highlights that technological readiness and digital competency strongly influence the adoption of AI technologies among educators. Variations in digital literacy, lack of technical training, and limited institutional support create barriers to effective AI integration. These challenges demonstrate the necessity for universities to provide continuous professional development programs and strengthen institutional support mechanisms to help educators confidently navigate emerging technologies.

Another important insight from the study is the process of adaptation and resistance experienced by educators during the transition toward AI-integrated education. While

some faculty members initially resisted AI adoption due to uncertainty and fear of technological disruption, many eventually adapted through self-learning, peer support, and exposure to institutional initiatives. This adaptation process reflects the broader digital transformation occurring in higher education institutions.

The findings also emphasize the importance of institutional governance in ensuring responsible AI adoption. Participants consistently called for clear policies, ethical frameworks, faculty development initiatives, and structured guidelines regarding AI usage in universities. The absence of comprehensive institutional policies contributes to uncertainty among educators regarding acceptable and responsible AI practices.

Overall, the study demonstrates that AI adoption in higher education is not solely a technological issue but also a pedagogical, ethical, organizational, and cultural transformation. Successful AI integration requires collaborative efforts among educators, administrators, policymakers, and stakeholders to ensure that AI technologies are utilized responsibly, ethically, and effectively.

## **Conclusions**

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that higher education educators generally perceive Artificial Intelligence as a valuable and transformative tool that enhances instructional innovation, productivity, and academic efficiency. AI technologies support educators in various academic functions, including lesson preparation, assessment generation, research assistance, and administrative work.

Despite these advantages, the transition toward AI-integrated education also presents significant challenges related to ethical concerns, academic integrity, technological readiness, and digital competency. Educators emphasized the need for responsible AI usage, human validation of AI-generated content, and institutional guidance in addressing ethical and pedagogical issues.

The study further concludes that successful AI adoption in universities requires strong institutional support, comprehensive faculty development programs, clear ethical policies, and strategic digital transformation initiatives. Universities play a critical role in ensuring that AI technologies are integrated responsibly, effectively, and sustainably within higher education environments.

Overall, the lived experiences of educators demonstrate that while AI adoption introduces both opportunities and challenges, it has become an essential component of the evolving educational landscape.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Universities should develop comprehensive AI policies and ethical guidelines to regulate the responsible use of Artificial Intelligence technologies in higher education.
2. Higher education institutions should provide continuous faculty training and professional development programs focused on AI literacy, responsible AI usage, and digital competency enhancement.
3. Institutions should strengthen technological infrastructure and technical support systems to facilitate effective AI integration in teaching and academic operations.
4. Educators should promote responsible AI Use.

## **Compliance with Ethical Standards**

The researcher observed ethical standards throughout the conduct of the study. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research and voluntarily agreed to participate through informed consent. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained, and all gathered information was used solely for academic and research purposes.

The researcher ensured that participants were treated with respect and dignity throughout the study. No conflict of interest existed, and all findings and interpretations were presented honestly, accurately, and without bias.

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