

Artificial Intelligence Adoption and Faculty Leadership in Malaysian Higher Education Digital Transformation

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ABSTRACT

Artificial intelligence is changing teaching, learning, research, administration, evaluation, and institutional decision-making, making it a defining force in higher education. The national digital transformation strategy in Malaysia, which includes MyDIGITAL, the Malaysia Digital Economy Blueprint, the National Artificial Intelligence Roadmap, the National AI Office, and higher education digitalization plans, is directly associated with the implementation of AI in higher education. However, leadership, faculty preparedness, governance, trust, ethics, and institutional change management are more important for the successful deployment of AI in higher education than technology acquisition alone. As part of a larger digital revolution, this conceptual paper explores how Malaysian university administrators may assist professors in embracing AI. The essay suggests a faculty-centered institutional change management framework based on digital transformation literature, change management theory, responsible AI principles, and Malaysia's national policy background. The leadership vision, faculty capability development, participatory governance, ethical and responsible AI use, curriculum and assessment redesign, and ongoing evaluation are the six strategic components that make up the framework. The paper makes the case that academics shouldn't be viewed as passive AI system users. Rather, they ought to be positioned as academic leaders in AI-enabled education, co-designers, and critical evaluators. By providing institutional leaders looking to execute AI adoption in ways that are inclusive, ethical, pedagogically meaningful, and in line with Malaysia's digital future, the essay adds to the conversation around leadership in higher education.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence, Malaysia digital transformation, Higher education leadership, faculty development, institutional change management.

INTRODUCTION

Artificial intelligence has rapidly expanded beyond its earlier position as a specialized technical field and has become increasingly embedded in the daily functions of higher education institutions (Kassen, 2026). Faculty members now engage with AI-supported tools in lesson preparation, instructional design, student feedback, academic writing, learning analytics, plagiarism detection, administrative processes, student advising, research exploration, and institutional decision-making (Naseer et al., 2026). The rapid growth of generative AI has further intensified this transformation by making AI applications more accessible to academics, administrators, and students with limited technical backgrounds (Wajeed, 2026). As a result, the key issue for universities is no longer whether AI will influence academic work, but how institutions can guide its adoption in a responsible, ethical, and educationally meaningful manner while safeguarding academic standards, professional judgment, student learning, and public trust.

Malaysia offers an important context for examining this issue because AI adoption in higher education aligns closely with the country's broader digital transformation agenda (Ul Haq et al., 2026). National initiatives on digital economy development, AI readiness, digital talent, ethical technology use, and institutional innovation have created strong expectations for universities to adapt to the needs of a technology-driven society (Pasi & Dhamak, 2026). Higher education institutions play a central role in this transformation because they prepare future graduates, generate research, support innovation, and shape social understanding of emerging technologies (Ul Hassan et al., 2025). Therefore, universities are expected to strengthen their internal systems, curricula, pedagogical practices, and governance structures to respond effectively to the demands of the digital economy.

Nevertheless, AI adoption in universities should not be treated as a simple technological upgrade. It represents a wider institutional change that affects academic identity, teaching practice, assessment design, workload distribution, data governance, ethical responsibility, and institutional policy (Aithal & Maiya, 2023). While faculty members may recognize AI as a valuable tool for improving productivity, innovation, and student support, they may also express concern about academic integrity, professional displacement, algorithmic bias, privacy, workload pressure, unequal access, and unclear institutional expectations (Aithal & Maiya, 2023). These concerns should not be dismissed as resistance to change. Instead, they should be addressed through inclusive, transparent, and structured change management processes that actively involve faculty members in decision-making.

This article examines how institutional leaders in Malaysia can support faculty members through the process of AI adoption. It argues that successful AI integration requires a faculty-centered approach that combines strategic leadership, capacity development, ethical governance, curriculum and assessment redesign, and continuous institutional evaluation. By proposing a conceptual framework and practical change management strategies, the article aims to support Malaysian higher education institutions in aligning responsible AI adoption with the country's wider digital transformation priorities.

Malaysia's Digital Transformation and the Role of Higher Education

The digital transformation goal in Malaysia has positioned digital technology as a catalyst for national development (Mena-Guacas et al., 2025). MyDIGITAL and the Malaysia Digital Economy Blueprint focuses on six key areas, which include digital adoption, digital talent, transformation of the public sector, inclusive digital participation, trusted digital environments and ethical use of technology (Krishnan, 2025). These priorities have direct bearing on higher education. Universities need to be producing graduates that can work with digital tools, understand AI systems, solve complicated challenges and act responsibly in technology rich settings (Qin, 2026).

This path is further reinforced by the National Artificial Intelligence Roadmap, which presents AI as a strategic technology for innovation, productivity, and competitiveness (Jeon, 2025). The National AI Office of Malaysia has been positioned as a key organization for promoting AI use, innovation, governance, and policy in more recent times (Jamaluddin et al., 2025). (Nguyen, 2026)The National Guidelines on AI Governance and Ethics also highlight the necessity of ethical, open, inclusive, and reliable AI practices (Nguyen, 2026).

Digitalization in higher education has expanded beyond digital administration and online learning environments. AI-assisted instruction, digital credentials, automated academic services, adaptive learning systems, smart campus operations, and data-driven institutional planning are now all part of it (George & Wooden, 2023). Faculty are now at the core of institutional change as a result of this transition. Through curriculum design, classroom decisions, assessment techniques, research supervision, student mentorship, and academic governance, faculty members put policy into reality (Burgan, 2006). Adoption of AI is likely to remain fragmented, inconsistent, or shallow in the absence of faculty participation and understanding (Choiriyah et al., 2025).

Problem Statement

Adoption of AI is approached by several colleges using policy statements, training sessions, or technologies. These are significant, but without a well-defined institutional reform approach, they fall short. AI platforms may

be made available to faculty, but they are not given instructions on how, when, or why to use them. Departments may use AI in disparate ways, leading to inconsistent procedures. Different professors may provide students contradictory information on what constitutes appropriate use of AI. While academic members feel left out of decision-making, administrators may encourage digital transformation.

Thus, the issue is not just technological. It is both cultural and organizational. Institutions must redefine instructional quality, academic integrity, faculty development, student assistance, and responsible innovation in order to adopt AI. This issue is particularly significant in Malaysia since the country's digital transformation objectives rely on institutions' capacity to produce graduates who are prepared for AI while upholding inclusive and moral teaching methods.

Research Question

This article addresses the following research question:

How can Malaysian higher education leaders guide faculty through AI adoption using effective institutional change management strategies?

Theoretical Foundations

The digital transition, change management, and appropriate application of artificial intelligence in education are the three bodies of literature that this paper draws from (Romano et al., 2024).

Organizational change that is influenced by digital technologies is referred to as digital transformation (Lu, 2024). This type of change occurs when technology has an effect on processes, structures, capabilities, and the production of value (Challoumis, 2024). Therefore, artificial intelligence should not be considered solely as a tool for efficiency in educational institutions (Yuskovych-Zhukovska et al., 2022). It demands strategic alignment with teaching, research, governance, and student development, and it alters the work that is done in the institution of higher education.

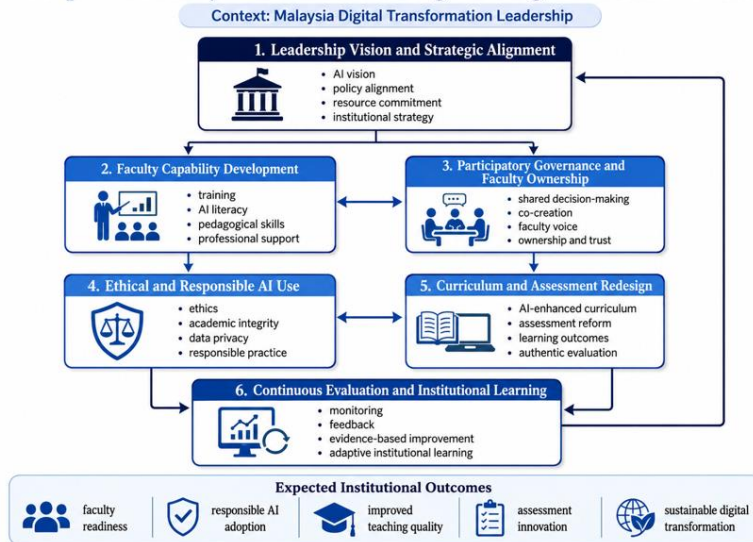
It is helpful to have a theory of change management since leaders frequently fail to successfully accept new technologies when they concentrate on execution without taking into account human readiness (Somera & Petrova, 2024). The change model developed by Kotter places an emphasis on the following: urgency, coalition building, vision, communication, the removal of barriers, short-term gains, and institutionalization respectively (Kerrigan, 2022). The idea of the diffusion of innovations proposed by Rogers demonstrates that adoption is contingent upon factors such as perceived utility, compatibility with preexisting values, complexity, trialability, and noticeable outcomes (Overbye-Thompson & Hamilton, 2025). These notions are extremely pertinent to the implementation of AI in faculty. There is a correlation between faculty members' perceptions of the instructional usefulness of artificial intelligence (AI), the availability of safe testing environments, the provision of peer assistance, and their trust in the governance of the institution (Abusabeib, 2025).

Literature on responsible artificial intelligence adds an ethical dimension. Student data, assessment fairness, authorship, transparency, bias, accessibility, and academic accountability are all aspects of artificial intelligence that are considered in higher education (Memarian & Doleck, 2023). This recommendation from UNESCO on the use of generative artificial intelligence in education places an emphasis on human-centered use, regulation, capacity building, and the protection of both students and instructors (Giovanola & Granata, 2024). Along with human rights, openness, robustness, accountability, and inclusive growth, the OECD AI principles also place an emphasis on trustworthy artificial intelligence. Regarding the universities of Malaysia, these principles are in accordance with the government efforts to manage artificial intelligence and the overarching goal of responsible digital growth.

Proposed Faculty-Centered AI Change Management Framework

This article proposes a six-dimensional framework for leading faculty through AI adoption in Malaysian higher education (Asghar et al., 2025).

Proposed Faculty-Centered AI Change Management Framework



Leadership Vision and Strategic Alignment

The importance of AI adoption for the university must be made crystal clear by institutional leaders. Adoption of AI should be linked to national digital transformation, research productivity, graduate employability, teaching quality, and administrative enhancement (George & Wooden, 2023). "Use AI because everyone is using it" is a weak message that won't foster trust. "AI will be used to improve student learning, strengthen academic work, reduce repetitive tasks, and prepare graduates for responsible participation in Malaysia's digital economy" would be a more compelling statement. The limits of AI use should be established by leaders as well. Teachers need to know what constitutes appropriate use of AI in administration, research, teaching, assessment, and supervision. Adoption of AI might lead to misunderstandings and uneven academic standards if there are no common expectations (Ghamrawi et al., 2024).

Faculty Capability Development

One-time workshops should not be the exclusive approach to faculty development

Faculty AI learning pathways are a useful model. A university might, for instance, provide a 12-week AI teaching credential consisting of four modules: responsible AI fundamentals, AI for lesson design, AI for assessment, and AI for research supervision. Instead of only attending lectures, instructors should be required to create one actual teaching task for each module.

Participatory Governance and Faculty Ownership

Although they may increase compliance, top-down AI rules seldom foster ownership. Academic committees, departmental working groups, ethical panels, and curriculum boards are all good places for faculty members to get involved in AI governance (Shapiro, 2025). This is significant because AI has an impact on disciplinary standards and academic judgment (Cutler et al., 2012).

An Institutional AI Council comprising representatives from academic departments, IT departments, legal offices, quality assurance teams, student groups, and research ethics committees is one example of a participatory model (Da Mota, 2024). The council should examine AI policy, authorize institutional tools, provide guidelines, keep an eye on potential hazards, and suggest training requirements.

In assessment, faculty ownership is particularly crucial. AI regulations may vary according on the discipline (Chan, 2023). AI may be used differently, for instance, in computer science programming assignments than in law articles, medical case analysis, design projects, or language acquisition (Gaitantzi & Kazanidis, 2025). It should be permissible for departments to modify institutional AI principles to fit their particular disciplinary setting.

Ethical and Responsible AI Use

Adoption of AI must start with ethics in mind. Clear rules on data privacy, accountability, academic integrity, transparency, prejudice, and accessibility should be developed by universities (Onasanya & Aramide, 2025). Teachers should be aware of whether student data can be entered into AI tools, if lecturers must assess feedback generated by AI, and how students should disclose the use of AI in assignments (Emon & Chowdhury, 2026).

Transparency is also necessary for responsible AI (Balasubramaniam et al., 2023). (Moussa, 2024) Academic accountability should be retained by faculty members; they shouldn't completely delegate judgment to AI systems (Shah, 2026).

A checklist for institutional AI ethics can be useful. Faculty could respond to five questions before to utilizing an AI tool: What is the tool's educational purpose? What information is going to be entered? What dangers could kids face? How will the outputs be examined? How will the students be made aware?

Curriculum and Assessment Redesign

Adoption of AI should result in better curricula as well as quicker material creation (Ejjami, 2024). In order to create learning objectives, instructional strategies, and evaluations for an AI-rich setting, faculty members require assistance (Sangwa et al., 2025). Since students can use generative AI to fulfill many of these tasks, traditional take-home essays, coding projects, and summary assignments may need to be revised.

Process-based, authentic, oral, reflective, applied, and project-based forms should be the norm for assessment (Ramli et al., 2025). For instance, professors can request proposal drafts, annotated references, AI-use declarations, peer discussion recordings, brief oral defenses, and reflective comments outlining how the student used or rejected AI ideas, rather than just a final report.

Students should be taught AI literacy as part of the curriculum reform. AI limitations, bias, verification, data ethics, and professional accountability should all be understood by graduates. Business, education, health sciences, engineering, social sciences, law, and the humanities are just a few of the fields where this is pertinent.

Continuous Evaluation and Institutional Learning

Evidence should be used to assess the adoption of AI (Bick et al., 2026). Academic integrity cases, workload shifts, tool usage, student happiness, teacher preparedness, student learning outcomes, and ethical issues should all be monitored by universities (Gbadago et al., 2025). Control should not be the sole purpose of evaluation (Behn, 2003). It ought to encourage learning in institutions.

A university might, for instance, test AI-supported feedback in five classes for a single semester. Evaluation might compare student performance, ethical issues, feedback quality, lecturer workload, and student participation. Wider implementation can then be informed by the results. Faculty members feel more confident and there is less danger thanks to this phased approach.

Strategies for Institutional Leaders

This article suggests eight useful tactics based on the concept;

First, create a clear, adaptable, and discipline-sensitive AI adoption policy for the entire university. Acceptable and forbidden uses, data privacy regulations, criteria for student disclosure, and teacher accountability should all be outlined in the policy.

Second, establish AI champions in every department or educational institution. These advocates ought to be reputable scholars who can assist colleagues, provide examples, and make the connection between departmental practice and central policy.

Third, provide academics AI training protected time. Adoption of AI requires more work initially. Universities should allocate time, recognition, or workload credit to faculty members who revamp courses, assessments, and instructional materials.

Fourth, create secure areas for testing. AI tools should be tested by faculty members in sandbox settings before being used in high-stakes instruction or evaluation.

Fifth, connect the deployment of AI with quality control. When applicable, ethical AI use should be incorporated into curriculum mapping, instructor evaluation, and program reviews.

Sixth, encourage the use of AI in a multilingual and culturally appropriate manner. AI tools should be evaluated for language appropriateness, cultural bias, and accessibility for various student groups in Malaysia's multicultural higher education setting.

Seventh, improve students' AI literacy. If students don't comprehend appropriate AI use, faculty adoption won't be total. AI literacy courses ought to be offered by universities to first-year students.

Eighth, before using AI tools in an institution, review them. Data protection, security, accessibility, bias, explain ability, vendor accountability, cost, and alignment with academic objectives should all be taken into account when making purchases.

DISCUSSION

Adoption of AI in Malaysian higher education should be viewed as a leadership challenge. Technology can facilitate change, but whether adoption is ethical, sustainable, and meaningful depends on leadership (Tang et al., 2025). Because they determine how AI is used in the classroom, how students are evaluated, how research is overseen, and how academic standards are upheld, faculty members are the primary agents of academic change.

One important lesson is that institutional leaders should not treat the adoption of AI as a software rollout (Fountain et al., 2019). AI has an impact on roles, values, and trust. Instead than opposing innovation, faculty members may oppose AI out of concern for unclear expectations, an unfair workload, inadequate governance, and harm to academic quality. Therefore, change management needs to take into account both the practical and emotional aspects of adoption.

A dimension of national development is added by the Malaysian context. It is required of universities to encourage responsible technology use and the development of digital talent. Adoption of AI in higher education will only support Malaysia's digital transformation if it enhances human potential rather than taking the place of scholarly judgment. Responsible augmentation—using AI to support administration, research, and teaching while maintaining human competence, ethics, and responsibility at the core—should be the aim.

Implications for Policy and Practice

For policymakers, the article recommends that national AI and digital education initiatives be accompanied by support for faculty development, shared templates for AI governance, standards for national AI literacy, and collaboration among universities. Making policy direction work in terms of real institutional tools.

The essay provides university leaders with a strategy for going from fragmented experimentation with AI to systematic adoption across the institution. Leaders should: Align AI strategy to academic mission Create participative governance Invest in faculty development Evaluate implementation.

The paper frames the adoption of AI as a chance for academic members to advance professionally. Faculty need support to critically engage with AI, reform assessment, mentor students and shape institutional policy.

"For undergraduates, the essay proposes that AI literacy should be incorporated into graduate preparedness. Students must learn to ethically utilize AI, validate outputs, secure data, avoid misuse, and apply AI within disciplinary and professional standards.

CONCLUSION

AI deployment is now a key element of Malaysia's digital transformation path in higher education. But institutional success demands more than access to AI tools. It needs leadership, trust, governance, faculty capacity, ethical safeguards and curriculum renewal. A faculty-centered AI change management approach for Malaysian higher education institutions was developed in this study. The framework focuses on leadership vision, capacity building, participatory governance, responsible use of AI, curriculum and assessment revision, and ongoing evaluation.

The paper ends by arguing that academics should be included as active collaborators in the AI transformation. Supported and trusted professors who are participating in decision-making will be more inclined to use AI to increase teaching quality, graduate preparation, and academic integrity. Malaysian institutions are well-positioned to take the lead in the adoption of pragmatic, ethical, inclusive AI that supports the country's digital transformation agenda.

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