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Digital Transformation in Higher Education Management: Analysis of Readiness and Implementation

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Abstract:
Digital transformation in higher education has become a strategic issue that requires institutional readiness to integrate technology into academic management and educational services. This study aims to analyze the level of readiness of higher education institutions, identify the influencing factors, and describe the implementation and challenges of digital transformation in higher education management. The research employs a qualitative approach with a case study strategy, utilizing data collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation, which are analyzed using triangulation techniques and thematic coding. The findings indicate that digital transformation readiness is determined by three main dimensions, namely technological infrastructure, human resource competence, and organizational culture, which collectively influence the effectiveness of digital system implementation. In addition, the study reveals that the primary challenges include limited financial resources, low digital literacy, and resistance to change. This research contributes to strengthening a multidimensional perspective on digital transformation and offers practical implications for higher education administrators in designing more adaptive, integrated, and sustainable digitalization strategies.

Keywords:
Digital Transformation; Higher Education Management; Technology Readiness.

INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation has emerged as a global phenomenon that is fundamentally reshaping higher education through the integration of information technologies into organizational processes, learning environments, and data-driven academic services (Carmo et al., 2025). Universities worldwide are increasingly encouraged to adopt digital systems to enhance operational efficiency, improve learning quality, and strengthen institutional competitiveness within knowledge-based ecosystems (Nguyen, 2026). In developing contexts, digital transformation also represents a strategic reform agenda aimed at improving access, flexibility, and service quality (Chapman et al., 2026). The adoption of technologies such as Learning Management Systems, academic information systems, and real-time data dashboards signals modernization in higher education management (Matthews et al., 2021), although the transformation extends beyond technology to encompass organizational change, cultural adaptation, and continuous human resource development (Jain et al., 2025).

Despite its widespread adoption, significant disparities persist in institutional readiness and

implementation, particularly in developing countries (Irikefe et al., 2026). These gaps include limited digital literacy, inadequate infrastructure, resistance to change, and the absence of integrated transformation strategies (Hammarén et al., 2026). Furthermore, fragmented digital systems often hinder effective data-driven decision-making (Nguyen, 2026), while poorly managed transformation processes risk inefficiency and declining service quality (Bouteraa et al., 2026). These challenges highlight the need for in-depth investigation into the factors shaping digital readiness and implementation in higher education institutions.

Conceptually, digital transformation can be understood through an integrated theoretical framework. Digital Transformation Theory emphasizes strategic, technology-driven organizational change to enhance institutional value (Carmo et al., 2025), while the Technology Readiness Index (TRI) explains individual and organizational preparedness through dimensions such as optimism, innovativeness, discomfort, and insecurity (Toșa et al., 2024). The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) further clarifies that perceived usefulness and ease of use determine technology adoption (Aung et al., 2026). Additionally, Change Management theory highlights the importance of leadership, communication, and organizational commitment in managing transformation (Hammarén et al., 2026), while the Resource-Based View (RBV) underscores the strategic role of internal resources such as human capital, technology, and organizational culture (Bouteraa et al., 2026).

Empirical studies confirm that digital transformation enhances learning quality, administrative efficiency, and data-driven decision-making in higher education (Jain et al., 2025). The rapid shift during the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated digital adoption, though institutional readiness remained uneven (Treve, 2021). Research also highlights the critical role of infrastructure and digital competence among educators (Chapman et al., 2026), as well as the influence of organizational culture in fostering innovation (Qvortrup & Lykkegaard, 2022). However, barriers such as limited resources, insufficient training, and user resistance continue to constrain effective implementation (Nguyen, 2026), indicating the complex and multifaceted nature of digital transformation.

Existing literature reveals a critical gap in integrating technological readiness, human resources, and organizational culture within a unified analytical framework (Irikefe et al., 2026). Prior studies often focus on isolated aspects, particularly technology adoption, while overlooking broader organizational dynamics (Carmo et al., 2025). Moreover, the dominance of quantitative approaches limits the exploration of contextual and experiential dimensions of transformation (Nguyen, 2026). Addressing this gap, recent research trends emphasize interdisciplinary perspectives and a shift toward qualitative and mixed-method approaches to capture the complexity of digital transformation (Jain et al., 2025; Qin, 2026), including the use of thematic analysis and triangulation to enhance analytical depth (Nguyen, 2026). This synthesis supports a multidimensional conceptual framework linking digital readiness across technology, human resources, and organizational culture to the effectiveness of transformation implementation.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study strategy to deeply understand the dynamics of digital transformation in higher education management based on the empirical context in the field, which allows for the exploration of the phenomenon in a holistic and contextual manner (Owusu et al., 2025). The qualitative approach was chosen because it is able to explore the meanings, perceptions, and experiences of actors involved in the digital transformation process, which cannot be adequately explained through a quantitative approach (Williams et al., 2026). The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary data, where primary data is obtained through in-depth interviews and direct observation of digitalization practices in universities, while secondary data is obtained from institutional documentation such as academic systems, Learning Management System (LMS), and digitalization policy documents. Data collection techniques are carried out through three main methods, namely semi-structured interviews to explore the perspective of informants, observation to observe the implementation of digital systems directly, and documentation to strengthen the validity of data through written evidence (Shelley et al., 2026). The research instrument is in the form of interview guidelines prepared based on the theoretical framework used, as well as observation sheets to record the phenomenon of digital implementation in the field. The data inclusion criteria in this study include informants who have direct involvement in the digital transformation process, such as university leaders, academic managers, IT education staff, lecturers, and students, who were selected through purposive sampling techniques to ensure the relevance and depth of information (East et al., 2025). Meanwhile, data that is not directly related to the implementation of digital transformation or does not meet the validity of the information is excluded from the analysis as part of the exclusion criteria.

The unit of analysis in this study is a higher education institution with a focus on digital management practices that include the readiness of technology, human resources, and organizational culture in supporting digital transformation. The research subjects include institutional leaders, academic managers, education staff, lecturers, and students as users of the digital system, thus allowing the triangulation of perspectives from various key actors in the higher education ecosystem. The data analysis technique used is thematic analysis through the stages of open coding, axial coding, and categorization to identify patterns and relationships between themes that emerge from qualitative data (Issac et al., 2026). The analysis process is carried out iteratively by integrating data triangulation techniques to increase the validity and credibility of findings through comparison between interview, observation, and documentation data (Villar Pérez & Ferreira Díaz, 2026). In addition, this study also applies member checking techniques to ensure the accuracy of data interpretation from the perspective of informants (Mashongaika et al., 2026). In the data processing process, the researcher uses a qualitative coding-based manual approach with the help of a categorization matrix to organize the data systematically. This approach allows for an in-depth analysis of the relationship between digital readiness and the implementation of digital transformation, resulting in valid, reliable, and contextual findings according to the research objectives.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

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The results of this study are presented based on qualitative data analysis through open coding, axial coding, and thematic categorization processes that produce three main findings, namely digital readiness, digital transformation implementation, and digital transformation barriers.

Table 1. The Finding and Result

Findings	Aspects	Points	Implications for Higher Education
Digital Readiness	Technological Infrastructure	Variation in infrastructure readiness; some universities already use integrated systems (LMS, academic systems, dashboards), while others still rely on manual or semi-digital systems	Infrastructure readiness determines the success of digital transformation implementation
	Human Resources	Differences in digital literacy and technological competence among lecturers and education staff	Digital competence of educators influences effective use of educational technology
	Organizational Culture	Institutions with adaptive leadership and strong digital vision show higher readiness; others show resistance to change	Organizational culture plays a critical role in accelerating digital transformation
Digital Transformation Implementation	Academic System Integration	Some universities implement comprehensive digital systems enabling full online academic services	Integrated systems improve efficiency and real-time decision-making
	Learning Management System (LMS)	LMS improves accessibility and learning flexibility, but feature utilization is not optimal	Need for lecturer training and system optimization
	Service Digitalization	Partial implementation in some institutions leads to operational inefficiencies	Full integration enhances institutional performance
Barriers to Digital Transformation	Financial Constraints	Limited budgets hinder infrastructure development and technology adoption	Funding allocation is critical for digital transformation success
	Human Resource Limitations	Lack of competent IT personnel affects system development and management	Need for IT capacity building and recruitment
	Resistance to Change	Lecturers reluctant to adopt technology due to limited understanding and discomfort	Institutional support and training needed to reduce resistance

The first finding, digital readiness, consists of three main subcategories, namely technological infrastructure, human resources, and organizational culture. The data shows that there is a significant variation in infrastructure readiness between institutions, where some universities already have integrated academic systems, including Learning Management Systems (LMS), academic information systems, and real-time data-based dashboards. In contrast, other institutions still use manual or semi-digital systems in managing academic administration. These findings are in line with studies that show that digital infrastructure readiness is a key determinant in the success of digital transformation in higher education (Carmo et al., 2025). From the aspect of human resources, the data shows that there is a difference in the level of digital literacy and competence among lecturers and education staff, where some lecturers have been able to utilize digital technology for learning and evaluation, while others are still experiencing difficulties in using technology. This condition is

consistent with research findings that state that the digital competence of educators is a key factor in the implementation of educational technology (Chapman et al., 2026). In terms of organizational culture, it was found that institutions that have a strong digital transformation vision and adaptive leadership tend to show a higher level of readiness than institutions that are still resistant to change (Jain et al., 2025).

The second finding is the implementation of digital transformation which includes the use of academic systems, LMS, and online-based digital services. The results of the study show that some universities have implemented a comprehensive digital system, allowing students to access academic services online, from filling out KRS to learning evaluation. This implementation is supported by system integration that enables real-time data-driven decision-making. However, in other institutions, the implementation of digital transformation is still partial and has not been integrated between units, thus hindering operational effectiveness. These findings show that there is a disparity in the level of digital implementation between higher education institutions, as reported in previous research that emphasized that system integration is an important factor in improving the efficiency of academic services (Nguyen, 2026). In addition, the use of LMS in learning shows increased accessibility and flexibility for students, although there are still obstacles in optimizing features and maximizing their utilization by lecturers (Matthews et al., 2021).

The third finding is that obstacles in digital transformation include financial constraints, limited human resources, and resistance to change. Data shows that budget constraints are one of the main factors hindering the development of digital infrastructure and increasing technological capacity in universities. In addition, the lack of competent IT personnel is also an obstacle in the management and development of digital systems. Resistance to change was also found to be a significant obstacle, especially among lecturers who are not used to using technology in the learning process. These findings are in line with research showing that the main obstacles to digital transformation include interrelated organizational, technological, and human factors (Hareem et al., 2026). In addition, resistance to change is often caused by a lack of understanding of the benefits of technology as well as inconvenience in adopting new systems (Hammarén et al., 2026).

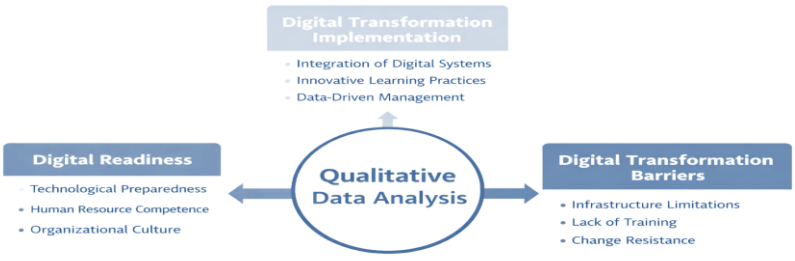

Figure 1. The Digital Transformation Process

From figure 1 above, the results of the axial coding analysis show that the three main themes are interrelated and form a systematic relationship pattern between digital readiness, digital transformation implementation, and the obstacles faced. Institutions with a high level of readiness in terms of infrastructure, human resources, and organizational culture tend to show more effective and

integrated implementation of digital transformation. On the other hand, institutions with low readiness experience various obstacles that result in the implementation of digitalization that is not optimal. This pattern shows that the success of digital transformation is not only determined by a single factor, but is the result of an interaction between various dimensions of readiness that support each other. These findings are supported by research that states that organizational readiness is a major prerequisite for the successful implementation of digital technology (Irikefe et al., 2026).

In addition, the results of the study also show that there are differences in the characteristics of digital transformation implementation between institutions which are influenced by the context of their respective organizations. Colleges with visionary leadership and a planned digital strategy show higher rates of technology adoption compared to institutions that do not have a clear policy direction. This shows that institutional leadership and policy factors have an important role in driving digital transformation (Qin, 2026). In addition, the active involvement of students as users of digital systems is also a factor that affects the success of implementation, where the level of satisfaction and ease of use of the system are important indicators in assessing the effectiveness of digital services (Wong & Hoskins, 2022).

The results of this study also identify that digital transformation in higher education management shows a tendency towards more comprehensive and data-driven system integration. Universities that have developed integrated digital systems show increased efficiency in academic management and administrative services. However, this integration process still faces challenges in terms of system interoperability and organizational readiness to adapt to technological changes. These findings are consistent with studies showing that digital transformation requires a strategic approach that includes technology development, HR competency improvement, and organizational culture change simultaneously (Toșa et al., 2024).

Discussioin

The results of this study confirm that the level of readiness for digital transformation in higher education varies greatly and directly affects the effectiveness of the implementation of technology-based education management, which is in line with the research objectives in analyzing readiness, determinant factors, and dynamics of digitalization implementation. The findings show that multidimensional readiness, including technological infrastructure, human resources, and organizational culture, is the main factor in determining the success of digital transformation. This linkage shows that digital transformation is not just a technological process, but a systemic phenomenon that involves complex interactions between organizational elements (Carmo et al., 2025). In addition, the variation in readiness between institutions reflects the digital divide in higher education, which has implications for disparities in the quality of academic services (Nguyen, 2026). Thus, the results of this study directly answer the formulation of problems related to the level of readiness and implementation of digital transformation in higher education.

The interpretation of the findings in the theoretical framework shows that the technology readiness dimension, as described in the Technology Readiness Index (TRI), plays a significant role in shaping individual attitudes towards technology, especially in terms of optimism and

innovativeness that drive the adoption of digital systems (Toșa et al., 2024). On the contrary, the dimension of discomfort and insecurity is seen in the form of resistance to change and distrust of the digital system. In the perspective of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), findings related to the use of LMS and academic systems show that the perception of usefulness and ease of use is a key factor in determining the level of technology adoption by lecturers and students (Aung et al., 2026). In addition, Change Management theory explains that the success of institutions with high readiness is inseparable from leadership that is able to manage change strategically through a clear vision and effective communication (Hammarén et al., 2026). The Resource-Based View (RBV) perspective also reinforces the finding that internal resource management, such as HR competencies and organizational culture, is key in creating a digital-based competitive advantage (Bouteraa et al., 2026).

When compared to previous studies, the results of this study show compatibility with the findings that the readiness of digital infrastructure and competence are the main determinants in the success of digital transformation (Chapman et al., 2026). In addition, the findings regarding the importance of organizational culture are in line with research that emphasizes that digital innovation can only thrive in an adaptive and collaborative organizational environment (Jain et al., 2025). However, the study also found that resistance to change is still a significant barrier, which in some cases is more dominant than technological factors, as also reported by (Hareem et al., 2026). The divergence of findings arises in the context of system integration, where this study shows that suboptimal integration is still a major problem, while some previous studies have placed more emphasis on general technology adoption without examining integration between systems in depth (Matthews et al., 2021).

The scientific contribution of this research lies in strengthening the multidimensional approach in analyzing the digital transformation of higher education, which integrates technological, human, and organizational aspects in one comprehensive conceptual framework. In contrast to previous research that tended to be partial, this study provides a holistic perspective that is able to explain the causal relationship between readiness and implementation of digital transformation (Irikefe et al., 2026). In addition, the use of a qualitative approach to case studies makes a methodological contribution by presenting a deeper contextual understanding of the dynamics of digital transformation in the field (Nguyen, 2026). This contribution enriches the literature by providing empirical evidence supporting the integration of digital transformation theory, TRI, TAM, Change Management, and RBV in the context of higher education.

From a practical perspective, the findings of this study provide important implications for university managers in designing more effective and sustainable digital transformation strategies. Institutions need to develop an integrated approach by paying attention to infrastructure readiness, improving human resource competencies, and strengthening organizational culture that supports innovation (Qin, 2026). Additionally, it is important for institutions to manage resistance to change through training, socialization, and participatory leadership (Wong & Hoskins, 2022). This implication is also relevant for policymakers in formulating digital-based higher education policies that are inclusive and adaptive to technological developments.

Although it makes a significant contribution, this study has limitations that need to be proportionately acknowledged. First, the use of a qualitative approach of case studies limits the generalization of findings to a broader context, although it provides a high depth of analysis (Treve, 2021). Second, the limited number of informants and the scope of institutions can affect the representativeness of the data, so that the results of this study are more contextual. Third, data analysis carried out manually has the potential to cause a biased subjectivity of researchers, even though it has been minimized through triangulation techniques (Nguyen, 2026).

The implications for further research show the need to develop studies with a mixed methods approach that can integrate qualitative and quantitative analysis to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the digital transformation of higher education (Jain et al., 2025). In addition, longitudinal research is also needed to examine the dynamics of digital transformation in the long term, including its impact on institutional performance and learning quality (Irikefe et al., 2026). Further research can also explore the role of new technologies such as artificial intelligence and big data in supporting digital transformation in higher education (Becchi et al., 2026).

In the context of policy, the results of this study show that digital transformation requires a systemic approach that involves collaboration between educational institutions, government, and other stakeholders. Policies that support the development of digital infrastructure, improve human resource competence, and strengthen the culture of innovation are key to accelerating the digital transformation of higher education (Carmo et al., 2025). In addition, it is important to ensure that digital transformation is carried out in an inclusive manner so as not to widen the digital divide between higher education institutions (Nguyen, 2026).

CONCLUSION

This research shows that digital transformation in higher education management is highly determined by the level of institutional readiness which is multidimensional, including technological infrastructure, human resources, and organizational culture. Institutions with high readiness in these three aspects tend to be able to implement digital systems in a more integrated, effective, and sustainable manner, while institutions with low readiness face various obstacles such as budget limitations, low digital competence, and resistance to change. In addition, the implementation of digital transformation in higher education still shows significant variation between institutions, both in terms of the level of system integration and the optimization of the use of technology in academic services. These findings confirm that the success of digital transformation depends not only on the adoption of technology, but also on the ability of organizations to manage change strategically and systematically.

The main contribution of this research lies in strengthening multidimensional perspectives in understanding the digital transformation of higher education, by integrating technological, human, and organizational aspects in one comprehensive analytical framework. Theoretically, this research enriches the development of the concept of digital transformation by empirically linking it to institutional readiness and implementation dynamics in the field. Practically, the results of this study provide a basis for policy makers and university managers in designing digital transformation

strategies that are more adaptive, directed, and sustainable, especially through strengthening human resource capacity, developing digital infrastructure, and forming an organizational culture that is innovative and responsive to change.

The implications of this study show the need for a more integrated and sustainable approach in managing digital transformation in higher education, including strengthening collaboration between stakeholders and developing policies that support the acceleration of digitalization in an inclusive manner. For further research, it is recommended that exploration be carried out with more diverse methodological approaches, such as mixed methods or longitudinal studies, in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of digital transformation in the long term and its impact on the quality of higher education.

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