



INTEGRATING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE INTO UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATIVE PLATFORMS: USER PERCEPTIONS, EXPECTED VALUE, AND CONDITIONS FOR RESPONSIBLE USE

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Abstract

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into university administrative platforms offers opportunities to improve data management, administrative efficiency, and user services. However, its acceptance depends on users' existing platform experiences, perceived benefits, and expectations regarding trust and human accountability. This study explores how university

stakeholders perceive current platform use, desired improvements, potential AI benefits, and conditions for responsible AI integration. The study draws on responses from approximately 415 university staff (academic, administrative, and managerial), collected through a structured questionnaire addressing platform activities, design improvements, perceptions of AI, expected benefits, and trust in AI-assisted decision-making. An exploratory, qualitative-oriented thematic approach was used to organize responses into themes and subthemes. Findings show that digital platforms are embedded in routine academic and administrative processes. Participants emphasize usability, intuitive navigation, accessibility, technical reliability, and data protection. AI is perceived as potentially beneficial for saving time, automating repetitive tasks, improving communication, supporting data analysis, and enhancing information access. However, perceived benefits are not uniform, and trust remains conditional on accuracy, reliability, verification, and human oversight. The study provides an empirically informed framework for responsible AI integration in university administrative platforms.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, university administrative platforms, user perceptions, trust and human oversight, responsible AI integration

INTRODUCTION

The digital transformation of higher education has increasingly changed the way universities organize information, manage institutional processes, and deliver services to academic and administrative stakeholders. Digital platforms are now embedded in many routine university activities, including student administration, academic records, communication, reporting, scheduling, and data management. As universities generate and process growing volumes of institutional data, these platforms are becoming increasingly important not only for operational efficiency but also for the coordination and support of organizational decision-making (Tømte et al., 2019; Seres et al., 2018). Digital transformation in higher education therefore extends beyond teaching and learning and increasingly involves changes in institutional organization, data management, administrative processes, and decision-making.

The development of more advanced digital technologies, particularly AI, is creating new possibilities for extending the capabilities of these existing systems. AI has attracted increasing attention in higher education because of its potential to automate repetitive activities, analyse large volumes of data, improve information access, support decision-making, and enhance institutional services (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019; Bond et al., 2024). Although much of the existing literature has concentrated on AI applications in teaching, learning, and assessment, recent research indicates growing interest in its use for institutional administration,

management, and governance. UNESCO (2025), for example, identifies institutional administration, student administration, and institutional services as important areas in which AI may contribute to higher education transformation. Nevertheless, the organizational and governance implications of AI-enabled administrative systems remain comparatively less explored than their pedagogical applications.

The integration of AI into university administrative and data-management platforms is particularly relevant because these systems operate within organizational environments in which large amounts of institutional and personal data are continuously generated, processed, and exchanged. AI may support data analysis, prediction, information retrieval, reporting, process automation, and administrative decision-making, potentially improving efficiency and responsiveness. However, effective implementation depends not only on technological capacity but also on the availability and quality of data, appropriate infrastructure, organizational resources, data governance, and privacy and security safeguards (UNESCO, 2025). Consequently, AI integration should be considered as both a technological and organizational process rather than simply as the introduction of a new digital tool.

The potential benefits of AI also need to be considered in relation to users' existing experiences with digital platforms. University staff interact with these systems on a regular basis and are therefore directly exposed to their usability, technical performance, information accessibility, integration, and limitations. Their experiences can influence how they perceive the potential value of additional AI-enabled functionalities. An AI application may offer substantial technical capabilities, but its practical value is likely to depend on whether it addresses existing operational needs and improves rather than complicates everyday work. This supports the importance of user-centred approaches to digital transformation and AI implementation in higher education (Bond et al., 2024).

At the same time, the introduction of AI into institutional platforms raises important questions concerning trust, transparency, accountability, and human oversight. AI-supported systems may assist with data analysis, information retrieval, reporting, prediction, and administrative decisions, but their outputs may also be affected by data quality, system limitations, errors, or insufficient contextual information. The need for meaningful human oversight has consequently become an important component of responsible AI governance, particularly where AI systems generate recommendations or decisions that may affect individuals or institutional processes (Laux, 2024). UNESCO (2025) similarly emphasizes data governance, privacy, security, and ethical safeguards as important considerations for AI implementation in higher education. Trust in AI should therefore not be understood simply as

general acceptance of the technology, but in relation to the accuracy, reliability, transparency, and accountability of its use.

Despite growing research on AI in higher education, there remains a need for greater empirical attention to how university staff themselves understand the relationship between existing digital platforms, potential AI benefits, and the conditions required for acceptable AI-supported processes. Existing research has provided important insights into the technological and pedagogical applications of AI, but comparatively less attention has been devoted to how users of university administrative platforms experience current systems, what improvements they consider necessary before further technological integration, and how they define trust and appropriate human involvement in AI-assisted decision-making (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019; Bond et al., 2024). This gap is particularly relevant because the successful integration of AI into university administration depends on the interaction between technological capabilities, organizational needs, and human judgement.

Against this background, this study examines the potential integration of AI into university administrative and data-management platforms from a user-centered perspective. Drawing on responses from approximately 415 university staff (academic, administrative, and managerial), the study explores three interconnected dimensions: current experiences and operational requirements associated with digital platforms; perceived benefits and opportunities arising from AI integration; and trust, human oversight, and the conditions considered necessary for responsible AI-supported decision-making. The study uses an exploratory, qualitative-oriented thematic approach to identify recurring themes and subthemes within participants' responses.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The integration of digital platforms into higher education has accelerated considerably in recent years, yet their role in university administrative and data-management systems remains comparatively underexplored. Digitalization can be understood as the application of digital technologies to transform, streamline, and enhance existing processes, activities, and outputs (Tømte et al., 2019). Within the education sector, digitalization encompasses a broad range of dimensions, including institutional organization, technological infrastructure, and teaching and learning practices (Bates, 2015; Selwyn, 2016). Importantly, digitalization in higher education is therefore not limited to the introduction of technologies into teaching and learning, it also involves changes in the ways institutions organize information, coordinate activities, deliver services, and make decisions. From this broader perspective, digital transformation increasingly requires universities to reconsider how institutional data and digital systems are used to support

everyday operations. Seres et al., (2018) argue that digital transformation in higher education requires more user-centered practices and data-informed decision-making, with analytics helping institutions convert existing data into actionable insights for admissions, enrolment, advising, and other administrative functions. This shift is particularly relevant to university administrative platforms, where large volumes of student, academic, financial, and organizational data are continuously generated, processed, and exchanged. Consequently, digital platforms are becoming not simply technological infrastructures but important organizational environments through which institutional processes are coordinated and administrative decisions are supported (Alenezi et al., 2023). The growing importance of data-driven systems also provides an important context for understanding the emergence of AI in higher education. AI is increasingly becoming a central component of contemporary technological development, with significant implications for both educational delivery and university administration (Jiang & Abdullah, 2026). The adoption of artificial intelligence in university management is developing within a broader neoliberal context in which efficiency, productivity, and performance have become central organizational priorities (Williamson, 2018). This transformation is contributing to a reconfiguration of conventional bureaucratic arrangements toward more networked and hierarchical forms of governance. Within such settings, data increasingly functions not merely as an informational resource but also as an instrument for monitoring, coordinating, and governing institutional activities (Williamson, 2018). At the same time, universities are becoming important environments for the development and implementation of educational technologies, creating closer connections between academic knowledge production, technological innovation, and entrepreneurial activity (Abreu & Grinevich, 2024). These developments suggest that the organizational implications of AI extend beyond the introduction of isolated technological applications. Ugur et al., (2024) argue that the expanding capabilities of AI may affect managerial functions across different organizational levels, encompassing both strategic decision-making and routine supervisory activities. The resulting transformation may reduce reliance on strictly hierarchical structures and facilitate more distributed forms of communication and coordination. Nevertheless, Gellai (2023) highlights a critical dimension of this transformation, arguing that institutional reforms are frequently justified through broad notions of performance and effectiveness whose meanings remain insufficiently specified in formal policy frameworks. Thus, while AI-driven management may introduce greater flexibility and efficiency, it also raises questions about how these objectives are defined, measured, and translated into university governance practices. These considerations are particularly important when AI is incorporated into systems that influence institutional decisions, because the technological capacity to process and interpret data does

not, by itself, determine how such information should be used within a particular organizational context (Wittens, 2026). Within the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, the adoption of AI in higher education has consequently moved beyond a prospective scenario and is increasingly shaping institutional practices, particularly through the use of data-driven and computational systems to support decision-making. These developments illustrate the growing role of AI in supporting complex administrative activities, automating routine processes, and informing institutional decisions. Xu and Ouyang (2021) emphasize that the role of AI in education extends beyond a single technological application, encompassing its emergence as a distinct field, a mediating mechanism, and a supportive tool within educational systems. From this perspective, AI can be understood not only as a technological instrument but also as a mechanism that mediates interactions between users, institutional data, administrative processes, and organizational decisions (Jiang and Abdullah, 2026). The increasing integration of AI into institutional systems also creates a need for appropriate governance arrangements. Ally & Mishra (2024) emphasize the increasing need for higher education institutions to establish appropriate guidelines and standards as technological developments progressively narrow the distinction between human and machine capabilities. At the same time, important questions remain concerning the governance and organizational implications of AI adoption. As Gellai (2023) argues, existing scholarship has paid comparatively limited attention to the theoretical and critical dimensions of governance, particularly to the ways in which AI-enabled technologies may reshape institutional authority, decision-making processes, and existing power relations within higher education. Consequently, the discussion of AI integration needs to extend beyond technological capability and efficiency toward questions of institutional responsibility, human involvement, transparency, and accountability. These issues are closely connected to the broader digital transformation of higher education. Digitalization supports the internationalization of higher education by facilitating the development and delivery of more accessible, flexible, and digitally mediated educational programmes (Conole, 2014; O'Connor, 2014). Beyond teaching and learning, digital technologies have increasingly been integrated into university administration and academic support services, including data-security mechanisms, plagiarism and academic-integrity tools, research-data management, library services, and access to digital learning resources. They can also facilitate communication and collaboration among students, academics, and administrative staff across different campuses and institutional settings (Khalid et al., 2018). These developments demonstrate that digital technologies have become embedded in multiple dimensions of institutional activity, creating a foundation upon which more advanced forms of data-driven and AI-enabled functionality can subsequently be developed. Despite this expansion, existing research has primarily examined the contribution of

digital technologies to teaching and learning, with less attention devoted to the ways in which digital platforms are reshaping administrative practices and institutional processes (Coates, 2020). Although several studies highlight their potential to improve efficiency, accessibility, communication, and service delivery within higher education, other scholars have raised concerns about the implications of the growing influence of the Education Technology sector and the extent to which market-oriented approaches may affect the public mission, values, and principles of universities. The digital transformation of higher education is also constrained by institutional resource limitations. Some institutions may be unable to afford access to multiple externally provided digital services, while simultaneously lacking the financial, technical, and organizational capacity required to design and maintain their own digital solutions for administrative as well as teaching and learning activities (Coen & Kelly, 2007). Therefore, the adoption of digital platforms cannot be considered independently from the institutional resources, organizational capabilities, and strategic priorities that shape their implementation and use.

The user perspective is particularly important in this context because the value and success of digital platforms depend not only on their technological capabilities, but also on how users perceive, experience, and use these systems (DeLone & McLean, 2003). Evidence indicates that academics associate the use of digital platforms with several potential benefits, including greater visibility for both universities and individual scholars, opportunities to expand international academic networks, and improved communication and knowledge sharing across academic communities, potentially facilitating interdisciplinary collaboration (Kehm & Barlösius, 2021). From an institutional perspective, digital platform technologies have also been identified as having the potential to streamline higher education processes by improving operational efficiency and usability, while supporting greater transparency in the monitoring and management of performance (Leišytė, 2022). These findings reinforce the importance of examining digital platforms from the perspective of their users, particularly when institutions seek to introduce additional technological capabilities such as AI.

The transition from conventional digital platforms toward AI-enabled systems, however, requires institutional preparedness as well as technological capacity. Johnson et al., (2024) report that more than three-quarters of faculty members and university administrators perceive their institutions as insufficiently prepared to establish comprehensive frameworks for governing the integration of AI. In response to this institutional preparedness gap, Ally and Mishra (2024) propose a structured, phased approach to policy development, encompassing fourteen critical domains, such as data protection, algorithmic accountability, and equitable access to technology. Similarly, Qiang (2025) emphasizes that the effective implementation of AI in higher

education requires strong digital leadership alongside appropriately designed professional development initiatives. Such efforts should seek to reconcile technological advancement with ethical considerations and institutional responsibility. In this sense, institutional readiness for AI integration involves not only the availability of technology but also the capacity of university staff to understand, use, evaluate, and govern AI-supported systems.

Against this background, the potential contribution of AI to university data management can be considered from two closely connected directions. The first concerns the transformative role of AI in institutional data management, while the second concerns the automation of high-volume administrative activities. These two directions are analytically distinct but complementary: AI can enhance the ways in which institutional data are interpreted and used for decision-making, while it can also reduce the amount of repetitive manual work associated with the processing and management of that data.

The first direction concerns the transformative role of AI in institutional data management. In this context, AI can transform diverse institutional data into actionable information that supports forecasting, strategic planning, and performance monitoring in higher education. AI-based analysis of student demand, programme performance, and resource utilization can support institutional planning and enrolment-management decisions, while AI-driven academic knowledge management is becoming increasingly important for organizing and applying academic information in research and teaching (Singh & Ragi, 2025). AI-supported performance monitoring can also help university leaders identify emerging deviations across institutional functions and enable more proactive corrective actions. Through these capabilities, AI may contribute to moving institutional data management from a primarily descriptive function toward a more analytical and potentially predictive one. However, the availability of AI-generated information does not eliminate the need for human interpretation and institutional judgement. Although AI can strengthen evidence-based decision-making, its recommendations should be interpreted alongside data quality, institutional context, leadership judgement, transparency, and human accountability. Institutional data may contain inconsistencies, omissions, historical biases, or contextual information that cannot be adequately represented through automated analysis alone. Consequently, the effectiveness of AI-supported data management depends not only on analytical capacity but also on the quality of the underlying data, the transparency of the processes through which recommendations are generated, and the extent to which institutional users remain able to review and question AI-supported outputs.

The second direction concerns the capacity of AI-supported technologies to automate high-volume administrative activities in higher education, including admissions, student records, scheduling, financial operations, and document management. Robotic Process Automation

(RPA) is particularly relevant for repetitive, rule-based activities because it can interact with existing information systems to perform data entry, routine requests, reporting, and other administrative functions (Khan et al., 2022). Such applications can improve the speed and consistency of processes while reducing errors associated with repetitive manual work and enabling routine student enquiries or transactions to be handled more efficiently. Rather than simply reducing administrative labor, automation can redirect staff effort toward activities requiring professional judgement, problem-solving, and direct interaction with students and other stakeholders.

Nevertheless, the automation of administrative processes also introduces conditions that need to be considered before such systems can be meaningfully integrated into university platforms. Effective implementation requires standardized processes, appropriate human oversight, and continuous system monitoring to prevent automated procedures from reproducing existing weaknesses or failing when exceptional situations arise. This is particularly relevant in higher education, where administrative processes frequently involve individual circumstances that may not conform to predefined rules. Therefore, automation should not necessarily be understood as the replacement of human involvement, but rather as a potential reconfiguration of the relationship between routine technological processing and human judgement.

Taken together, these two directions demonstrate that AI integration into university data management platforms has both a technological and a human dimension. On the technological side, AI can enhance data analysis, prediction, automation, and operational efficiency. On the organizational side, however, its implementation depends on how university staff understand its value, how they experience existing digital systems, and what conditions they consider necessary for its responsible use. This distinction is important because technological functionality alone does not establish whether AI-enabled systems will be perceived as useful, trustworthy, or acceptable by the people who interact with them.

Accordingly, a user-centered perspective provides an appropriate basis for examining AI integration within university data management platforms. Such a perspective shifts attention from what AI is technically capable of doing toward how institutional users experience existing platforms, what problems they encounter, what improvements they expect, and under what circumstances they are willing to accept AI-supported processes and decisions. This approach is particularly relevant in university environments, where academic and administrative staff interact with digital platforms as part of their everyday work and consequently possess practical knowledge of existing system strengths, limitations, and operational requirements.

This study therefore aims to examine the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into university data management platforms from a user-centered perspective, with particular emphasis on how university staff experience existing digital systems, perceive the potential value of AI-enabled functionalities, and define the conditions under which AI-supported decision-making is considered acceptable. Rather than approaching AI integration solely as a technological or organizational transformation, the study focuses on the perspectives of platform users and the relationship between existing system experiences, anticipated AI-enabled improvements, and expectations concerning trust and human oversight.

The study is structured around three interrelated objectives. First, it seeks to examine university staff's current experiences with digital platforms and identify the operational needs and system requirements emerging from their everyday use. This objective considers patterns and types of platform use, users' experiences and encountered difficulties, as well as their expectations regarding system design, functionality, and performance.

These issues constitute the first analytical dimension, Current Platform Experience and System Requirements, corresponding to:

RQ1: How do university staff describe their current use of digital platforms and the operational needs they associate with their use?

Second, the study explores how university staff perceive the value and potential opportunities associated with integrating AI into existing university data management platforms. Particular attention is given to anticipated improvements in automation, operational efficiency, accuracy, data analysis, decision support, and service provision. These aspects form the second analytical dimension, Perceived Value and Opportunities of AI Integration, addressing the second research question

RQ2: What benefits and improvements do university staff expect from the integration of AI into digital platforms for university data management?

Third, the study investigates how university staff conceptualize trust and human oversight in relation to AI-assisted decision-making. The analysis focuses on perceived reliability and accuracy, transparency, privacy, accountability, and human control, while also examining participants' preferences regarding human-led, AI-assisted, or combined forms of decision-making. This constitutes the third analytical dimension, Trust, Concerns and Human Oversight. It addresses the third research question.

RQ3: How do university staff conceptualize trust, human oversight and the conditions for acceptable AI-supported decision-making in university digital platforms?

Taken together, these three dimensions provide an integrated analytical framework for examining AI integration as a user-centered process. The framework moves logically from the

experience of existing platforms, through the perceived value and opportunities of AI-enabled functionalities, to the trust-related and governance conditions that shape their acceptable use. The study develops a user-centered conceptual framework (Figure 1) that brings together three dimensions of AI integration in university data management platforms: current platform experience and system requirements, perceived value of AI integration, and trust in AI-assisted decision-making.

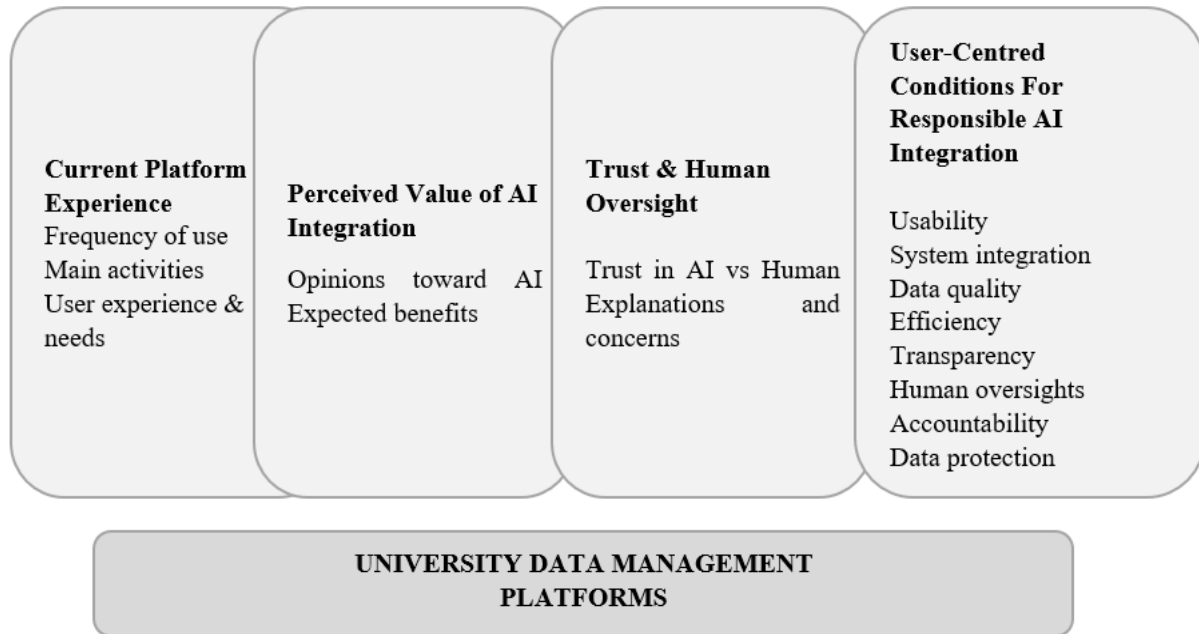


Figure 1: Conceptual Model of the study

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Research design

The study adopts an exploratory, qualitative-dominant research design, using open-ended questionnaire responses as the primary source of qualitative evidence, complemented by descriptive quantitative information. The study focuses not only on the potential functional value of AI, but also on the organizational and user-centered conditions under which AI-supported functions may be considered acceptable and trustworthy.

The research design was selected because the objective was to capture participants' experiences, expectations, concerns and perceived operational needs in their own words, rather than to test predetermined causal relationships between variables. The qualitative component therefore provides an in-depth understanding of the meanings and priorities expressed by university staff, while the structured questions describing platform use provide contextual information for interpreting the qualitative findings.

The analysis was guided by the conceptual framework presented in Figure 1. The framework consists of four interconnected analytical domains: (1) Current Platform Experience, (2) Perceived Value of AI Integration, (3) Trust and Human Oversight, and (4) User-Centered Conditions for Responsible AI Integration. These domains were used as higher-order analytical categories rather than as statistically tested constructs.

Participants and data collection

The empirical data were collected through a questionnaire administered to 415 university staff members, including academic, administrative, and managerial personnel. A convenience sampling method was employed to recruit participants who were accessible and willing to participate in the study. The inclusion of these professional groups aimed to capture diverse experiences and perspectives regarding university data-management platforms, which support a range of academic and administrative processes. This approach enabled the study to explore staff perceptions based on their different professional roles and levels of engagement with institutional digital systems.

The questionnaire combined structured questions concerning the frequency and purposes of platform use with open-ended questions addressing participants' experiences, expectations and perceptions regarding AI integration. This combination allowed the study to establish the context of existing platform use while giving participants sufficient space to articulate perceived benefits, operational needs, concerns and conditions for acceptable AI-supported decision-making. The questionnaire included questions addressing, among other aspects: frequency of platform uses; the main activities performed through the platforms; suggested improvements to platform design, usability and performance; perceptions of AI integration into existing platforms; expected benefits from AI integration; and trust in AI-supported decision-making compared with human decision-making, including concerns regarding explanations and human oversight. The use of open-ended questions was particularly important because the study sought to identify themes that might not be adequately captured through predefined response categories.

Qualitative data analysis

The qualitative responses were analysed using Nvivo 15 through a structured thematic analysis procedure. A combination of deductive and inductive coding was employed.

The deductive component was based on the four domains established in the conceptual framework, which provided the initial parent nodes in Nvivo 15. The inductive component allowed additional codes, subthemes and categories to emerge directly from participants'

responses. This hybrid approach was considered appropriate because the study was informed by an a priori conceptual structure while remaining exploratory and responsive to the empirical data (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

The coding process proceeded through several stages: First, we were familiarized with the dataset by reviewing the responses and identifying recurring concepts, expressions and issues related to platform use and AI integration.

Second, an initial coding framework was developed in Nvivo 15. The four dimensions of the conceptual framework were established as higher-order parent nodes. Relevant responses were then coded into more specific descriptive and interpretive codes.

Third, the initial codes were reviewed and grouped into subthemes. Similar codes were compared, merged where appropriate, and organized according to their conceptual similarity. This process resulted in a hierarchical coding structure consisting of parent themes, subthemes and more specific codes.

Fourth, the coding structure was iteratively refined. Responses that did not fit the initial categories were examined separately, and new codes were created where the empirical data indicated issues not sufficiently represented in the original framework. This ensured that the analysis did not force participants' responses into predetermined categories.

Finally, Nvivo 15 was used to examine relationships and patterns across themes and respondent groups. Matrix Coding Queries were used, where appropriate, to compare the occurrence and content of themes across relevant participant characteristics, particularly the distinction between academic and administrative staff and differences in platform-use patterns.

Coding structure

The Nvivo 15 coding framework was organized hierarchically. At the highest level, the coding tree reflected the four dimensions of the conceptual framework.

Table 1: Four dimensions of the study

Parent theme	Main subthemes
1. Current Platform Experience	Frequency of use; main platform activities; user experience; operational needs; system problems; suggested improvements
2. Perceived Value of AI Integration	General perceptions of AI; expected benefits; efficiency; automation; decision support; service improvement
3. Trust & Human Oversight	Trust in AI; comparison with human decision-making; concerns; human involvement; verification
4. User - Centered Conditions for Responsible AI Integration	Usability; system integration; data quality; efficiency; transparency; human oversight; accountability; data protection

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The sample comprised 415 university staff members, including 245 academic staff (59%) and 170 administrative and managerial staff (41%). In terms of professional experience, the majority of participants (60%) had more than seven years of experience at the university, followed by those with 4 - 6 years of experience (22%). Participants with 1-3 years of experience accounted for 10% of the sample, while 8 % had less than one year of experience.

Regarding interaction methods, physical interaction represented the predominant mode (76%), while 20% reported using a hybrid approach and 3.1% interacted primarily online. Overall, the participant profile indicates substantial representation of both academic and administrative/ managerial perspectives, with most respondents having relatively extensive experience within the university environment.

The results indicate that the majority of participants use the university digital platforms on a daily basis, accounting for 71.66% of the sample. A smaller proportion reported using the platforms every week (7.8%) or every month (1.44%), while 19.1% indicated that their use occurs during certain periods or seasons. Overall, the findings suggest that these platforms are regularly integrated into the participants' academic and administrative activities.

Table 2: Participants Characteristics

Participants Characteristics	Category	N	%
The role of staff at the university	Academic Staff	245	59.0
	Administrative and managerial staff	170	41.0
Years of experience	Over 7 years	249	60.0
	4-6 years	92	22.0
	1-3 years	41	10.0
	Less than 1 year	33	8.0
Interaction methods	On-site	315	76.0
	Online	13	4.0
	Hybrid	83	20.0
Frequency	Every day	348	71.66
	Every week	38	7.80
	Every month	7	1.44
	During certain periods/seasons	93	19.10

Thematic Analysis of University Staff Perspectives

Theme 1 - Current Platform Use and Operational Context.

The findings indicate that university digital platforms are used across a broad range of academic and administrative activities rather than being limited to a single institutional function. Participants most frequently referred to academic assessment management, particularly the entry and management of grades, examination and re-examination

procedures, absences, and the preparation of examination records. Platform use also extends to student administration and documentation, including student registration, certificates, diplomas and administrative records, as well as to scheduling and financial administration, such as timetabling and payment-related processes. In addition, participants highlighted the role of platforms in communication and information access, including communication with students, access to institutional information, and dissemination of notifications. Overall, the findings suggest that digital platforms are embedded in routine university operations and provide a broad operational context in which opportunities for AI-supported functions may emerge.

Theme 2 - Desired Platform Improvements and User-Centred Design

This theme captures university staff's expectations regarding the improvement of existing digital platforms and the development of more user-centred digital environments. The analysis identified seven interconnected sub-themes. Simplicity and intuitive navigation reflects participants' demand for simpler interfaces, clearer menus, more intuitive navigation, and fewer unnecessary steps when performing routine tasks. System performance and speed concerns the need for faster loading times, improved system responsiveness, timely data updates, and reduced technical delays. Mobile accessibility highlights the importance of enabling platform access through smartphones and tablets, thereby providing greater flexibility in accessing university services. Functional integration refers to the integration of different university systems and the improved interoperability and exchange of data across platforms. Search and information retrieval encompasses expectations for more efficient search functions, filtering options, better organisation of information, and faster access to relevant data. Technical support and error prevention includes the need for accessible technical assistance, clearer guidance and notifications, as well as system functions that can identify and prevent user errors. Finally, additional digital services reflects expectations for an expanded range of digitally delivered services, including online diplomas and certificates, automated notifications, statistical information, and reporting functions.

Overall, the theme indicates that participants' expectations extend beyond technical performance alone. They envision digital platforms that are simpler, faster, more integrated, accessible across devices, and responsive to the practical needs of their everyday work. The findings therefore position user-centred design as an important dimension of future platform development, with improvements expected to enhance both usability and the accessibility of university data and services.

Theme 3 - Perceived Value of AI Integration

This theme captures how university staff perceive the potential value and expected benefits of integrating artificial intelligence (AI) into existing digital platforms for university data management. The responses concerning the expected benefits of AI integration can be grouped into five main categories: administrative efficiency, data processing and accuracy, information access and communication, service improvement and personalization, and decision support and analytics.

The first category, Administrative Efficiency, reflects participants' expectations that AI could streamline administrative processes and reduce the time and effort required to complete routine tasks. Participants frequently associated AI integration with time savings, the reduction of manual work, automation of administrative processes, and the faster completion of routine tasks. These responses suggest that AI is perceived as a mechanism through which repetitive and time-consuming administrative activities could be simplified and performed more efficiently.

The second category, Data Processing and Accuracy, concerns the perceived capacity of AI to improve the processing, organization, and accuracy of university data. Participants highlighted the potential to process large volumes of data, reduce human errors, accelerate reporting, conduct statistical analyses, and enable real-time data updating. In this context, AI was viewed not only as a tool for handling large quantities of institutional information but also as a means of improving the reliability and timeliness of data-related activities.

The third category, Information Access and Communication, reflects expectations that AI could facilitate faster access to institutional information and enhance communication between the university and its students. Participants referred to faster information retrieval, easier access to relevant information, improved communication with students, automated notifications, and the use of virtual assistants or chatbots. These responses indicate that AI is perceived as having the potential to make information and communication processes more accessible, immediate, and responsive to users' needs.

The fourth category, Service Improvement and Personalization, focuses on the potential contribution of AI to the development of more personalized and user-oriented university services. Participants identified possible benefits such as more personalized services, improved student support, better guidance and orientation, assistance for students with disabilities, and an overall improvement in the user experience. These expectations suggest that AI integration is perceived not only in terms of internal administrative efficiency

but also in relation to the quality and responsiveness of services provided to students and other platform users.

The fifth category, Decision Support and Analytics, concerns the perceived role of AI in supporting institutional decision-making through data analysis and the identification of relevant patterns. Participants referred to decision-support capabilities, pattern identification, automated report generation, prediction of future needs, and performance analysis. These responses indicate that AI is perceived as potentially valuable for transforming institutional data into information that can assist university staff in monitoring activities, identifying trends, and supporting evidence-based decision-making.

The responses suggest that university staff perceive AI integration as having value across both operational and strategic dimensions of university data management.

Theme 4 - Trust, Human Oversight and Conditions for AI Adoption

The fourth theme captures how university staff perceive trust, human oversight, and the conditions under which AI can be appropriately integrated into digital platforms for university data management. The responses suggest that trust in AI is neither entirely positive nor negative, but rather functional and conditional. Participants appear more comfortable with AI when it is used to support routine tasks, process data, retrieve information, and provide administrative assistance, while greater caution emerges when AI is involved in decisions with significant institutional or human consequences.

The theme includes five interconnected sub-themes: functional trust, referring to confidence in AI for routine data processing and administrative support; conditional or moderate trust, where acceptance depends on data quality, system testing, accuracy, and the type of task; human oversight, emphasizing that final and critical decisions should remain under human responsibility; accuracy and reliability concerns, focusing on potential errors, inaccurate information, and the need to verify AI-generated outputs; and privacy, ethics and accountability, addressing data security, responsibility for AI-supported decisions, and limits on automated decision-making.

This theme indicates that AI adoption is perceived as more acceptable when AI functions as a decision-support mechanism rather than an autonomous decision-maker, with transparency, verification, human control, and responsible data management acting as important conditions for its use.

The findings provide a more nuanced understanding of how university staff perceive the potential integration of AI into digital platforms used for data administration and institutional processes. Across the four themes, AI adoption emerges not simply as a

technological issue, but as a process shaped by existing platform experiences, expectations regarding system improvement, perceived organizational value, and conditions of trust and human oversight. This interpretation is consistent with research emphasizing the need to examine AI in higher education within its institutional, ethical, and organizational context rather than as a purely technological innovation (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019; Bond et al., 2024).

The first theme shows that digital platforms are already embedded in routine academic and administrative activities. Consequently, staff perceptions of AI appear to be grounded in their everyday interaction with existing systems and their awareness of both their strengths and limitations. The second theme further demonstrates the importance of user-centred design. Participants emphasized simpler interfaces, improved functionality, better system performance, and more efficient processes, suggesting that AI is valued primarily when it responds to concrete operational needs. Rather than technological sophistication being an end in itself, participants appear to associate the value of AI with its capacity to improve systems that they already use in their daily work. This perspective is consistent with recent research calling for greater attention to contextual and user-oriented approaches to AI implementation in higher education (Bond et al., 2024).

The third theme highlights the perceived organizational value of AI. Participants associated AI integration with time savings, reduced repetitive work, process automation, faster completion of administrative tasks, and improved access to information. Similar benefits have been identified in recent research examining higher-education stakeholders' perceptions of generative AI, particularly in relation to productivity, workflow support, and automation of routine tasks (Humble and Mozelius, 2026). Importantly, the findings suggest that staff primarily perceive AI as a tool for supporting and enhancing their work rather than automatically replacing human decision-making.

The fourth theme introduces an important condition for AI adoption: trust. Participants emphasized human oversight, transparency, reliability, and clearly defined boundaries for AI-supported decisions. This is particularly relevant in university administration, where digital platforms may process information affecting students, academic staff, and institutional processes. Recent research similarly demonstrates that AI use can coexist with limited trust in AI outputs, highlighting the importance of institutional governance, transparency, and accountability (Kringen et al., 2026). Thus, successful AI integration requires more than technical implementation; it also requires organizational arrangements that clarify responsibility and preserve meaningful human involvement. Table 4 presents the main themes, subthemes, and their supporting citations identified through the thematic analysis.

Table 4. Themes, key findings and representative quotes

Theme	Subtheme	Main finding	Illustrative quotation
1. Digital Platforms as Embedded Administrative Infrastructures	Administrative activities and functional integration	Digital platforms are embedded in routine university administration and are used across multiple academic and administrative activities, including student records, grades and examinations, data management, registration, documentation, finance, and scheduling. This indicates that platforms function as interconnected infrastructures rather than isolated digital tools.	<i>"[We use it to record students' grades and absences and to generate students' assessment records (grade reports/minutes)]"</i>
	Usability, accessibility, and intuitive design	Participants predominantly call for practical improvements that make existing platforms simpler, more intuitive, and easier to access. The emphasis on minor improvements, clearer navigation, and mobile access suggests a preference for user-centered refinement rather than disruptive system replacement.	<i>"[A simpler and more intuitive design, higher platform speed, and customization according to users' needs.]"</i>
2. User-Identified Priorities for Platform Improvement	Technical performance, reliability, and data protection	Although usability is more frequently mentioned, participants also identify technical reliability, system integration, performance, and data security as important conditions for effective platform use. These concerns indicate that improvements must address both the user interface and the underlying digital infrastructure.	<i>"[The design should be user-centred. This should involve creating simple, intuitive, and easy-to-use interfaces through which students and staff can quickly find the information or service they need without confusion.]"</i>
	Service enhancement, efficiency, and automation	AI is primarily perceived as a potential means of improving communication and user services, reducing repetitive work, saving time, and simplifying administrative processes. Its perceived value therefore extends beyond automation to the improvement of service delivery and user experience.	<i>"[The main design improvements should focus on enhancing ease of use, system security, and overall efficiency.]"</i>
3. Perceived Organizational Value of AI Integration	Data processing, information access, and decision support	Participants associate AI with faster data processing, analysis, reporting, and information retrieval. AI is thus perceived as a potential support mechanism for transforming institutional data into more accessible and actionable information.	<i>"[AI is perceived as a useful tool for faster data processing, analysis, reporting, and information retrieval, helping to transform institutional data into more accessible and actionable information.]"</i>

4. Trust, Accountability, and Human Boundaries in AI Use	Uncertainty and limited benefit recognition	Despite generally positive orientations toward AI, a substantial proportion of respondents did not identify a specific benefit. This suggests that perceived value is not uniform and may depend on users' familiarity with AI, their understanding of its applications, and the relevance of proposed use cases to their work.	<i>"[I see potential in AI, but I am not sure what specific benefits it would bring to my daily work. It would depend on how familiar users are with AI and whether its applications are actually relevant to their tasks.]"</i>
	Conditional and task-dependent trust	Trust in AI is conditional rather than automatic. Participants' responses indicate that confidence depends on the accuracy and reliability of AI outputs, the nature of the task, and the possibility of verification. AI may be more readily accepted for routine or structured activities than for decisions requiring professional judgement.	<i>"[I would trust AI to handle routine and structured tasks, especially when the information it provides is accurate and reliable. However, when a task requires professional judgement, I would still want a person to verify the result and take responsibility for the final decision.]"</i>
	Human oversight and accountability	Participants emphasize that AI should support, rather than replace, human judgement and responsibility. The preference for human decision-making, particularly in consequential matters, highlights accountability and professional oversight as central boundaries of AI integration.	<i>"[I believe AI should support our work, but it should not replace human judgement. Especially when decisions have important consequences, there must always be a person responsible for the final decision and for verifying the AI's output]"</i>
	Security, privacy, and responsible AI use	Concerns about data security and privacy indicate that AI integration is also understood as a matter of responsible institutional data governance. The legitimacy of AI use depends not only on its functionality but also on safeguards protecting sensitive university information.	<i>"[I would be more comfortable with AI integration if I knew that the security and privacy of university data were fully protected. For me, it is not enough for the system to work efficiently; there must also be clear safeguards to prevent sensitive institutional information from being misused or exposed.]"</i>

The study contributes to the literature by bringing together four interconnected dimensions that are often considered separately: existing platform use, user-centred improvement needs, perceived organizational value, and trust in AI-supported processes. The qualitative perspective is particularly valuable because it shows how staff can simultaneously recognize the practical benefits of AI while identifying conditions under which its use should occur. In this respect, the findings extend the discussion of AI in higher education beyond its

dominant focus on teaching and learning toward the comparatively less explored context of university administration and data-management platforms (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019; Bond et al., 2024). The findings suggest that AI adoption in university administration is better understood as a contextual and organizational process in which technological benefits, user needs, and governance conditions interact.

This study has several limitations. First, the findings are based on university staff perceptions and self-reported experiences rather than direct observation of AI implementation or objective performance measures. Second, the findings are context-specific and may not be transferable to other higher education institutions or national contexts. Third, the qualitative design provides exploratory insights but does not establish causal relationships. Finally, the study primarily reflects staff perspectives, leaving the views of students, senior institutional decision-makers, and IT specialists insufficiently explored.

Future research could build on these findings by examining how the identified expectations and concerns change when AI-based functions are actually introduced into university platforms. Comparative studies across universities or countries could investigate how institutional context, digital maturity, governance arrangements, and organizational culture shape perceptions of AI.

CONCLUSIONS

This study highlights that digital platforms have become embedded administrative infrastructures within universities, supporting a wide range of routine academic and administrative activities. The findings indicate that users' primary concerns are not necessarily related to replacing existing systems, but rather to improving their usability, accessibility, technical performance, reliability, and data protection. This emphasizes the importance of maintaining a user-centered perspective when developing and upgrading university data management platforms.

The findings further suggest that artificial intelligence is perceived as having considerable potential to enhance university administrative processes. Participants particularly associate AI integration with greater efficiency, automation of repetitive tasks, faster data processing, improved information retrieval, reporting, communication, and more accessible services. However, the perceived value of AI is not uniform, as some participants remain uncertain about its specific benefits and relevance to their daily tasks. This indicates that successful AI integration depends not only on technological capability but also on users' understanding of practical applications and their alignment with organizational needs.

Importantly, trust in AI emerges as conditional and task-dependent rather than automatic. Participants appear more accepting of AI for routine and structured activities, while professional judgement, consequential decisions, and accountability remain strongly associated with human involvement. Human oversight, verification, and responsibility therefore represent important boundaries for AI-supported decision-making. Concerns regarding privacy, security, and responsible data governance further demonstrate that AI adoption must be accompanied by appropriate safeguards for sensitive institutional information.

Overall, the findings support a gradual, user-centered approach to AI integration in university data management platforms, in which technological innovation is combined with usability, transparency, human oversight, accountability, and responsible data governance.

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