

## AI Competency as a Driver of Professional Development Among Administrative and Managerial Staff in Higher Education: A Qualitative Study

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### ABSTRACT

The relationship between professional development and artificial intelligence (AI) proficiency among administrative and management workers in higher education is examined in this qualitative study. The research delves into how awareness and use of AI impact staff skills and overall institutional performance, drawing on insights from 25 professionals in various institutions. The findings reveal that incorporating AI into administrative tasks not only speeds up job completion but also reduces errors and improves decision-making based on solid evidence. Participants stressed the significance of ethical frameworks for responsibly integrating AI, while also bringing up valid worries about data privacy and transparency. As a result, the study determined that continuous training is essential for maintaining workforce relevance. Six distinct domains were delineated through a comprehensive thematic analysis: (1) Operational Performance and Task Efficiency; (2) Evidence-Based Professional Judgement; (3) Governance and Ethical Accountability; (4) Lifelong Learning and Professional Upskilling; (5) Institutional Growth and Innovation Culture; and (6) Professional Advancement and Career Relevance. A word cloud and thematic diagram illustrating the collective perspectives of all 25 participants were generated to corroborate these findings. The paper ends with specific suggestions for institutional HR policies, stressing the need to combine AI capabilities with human know-how, maintain transparent governance, and create a strong training system. Being at ease with AI is key to ongoing professional growth and the overall efficiency of an organization

**Keywords:** AI competency; professional development; administrative staff; higher education management; ethical AI; continuous upskilling

### INTRODUCTION:

The recent working environment has experienced a paradigm shift because the advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) has multiplied significantly, which necessitates a paradigm shift in the core competences required to succeed in a career. The systems that are driven by AI actively transform the way individuals collaborate, process information, and perform the challenging administrative duties, placing the institutional workforces in a situation where they are under constant pressure to evolve in their abilities. The focus of the current study is that institutional effectiveness and long-term professional relevance are currently demanding dynamic, technology-oriented skills and not only basic credentials or static experience knowledge. One core focus of bibliometric analysis in employability research involves identifying trends in skillsets valued by employers (Garg, Dangi and Kumar., 2025). Nowadays, career people must be agile enough to operate within the complex digital environments, to critically examine data, and to combine AI solutions comfortably. In these shifting labour dynamics, scholars and human resource strategists note that the importance of high levels of digital preparedness, ethical foresight and technological flexibility by employees is critical (Ersanli et al., 2025; Morandini et al., 2023). This prompts a drastic review of the equipping of administrative and management professionals to meet the requirements of an increasingly

automated organisational environment, especially in the higher education sector.

The existing professional development frameworks offered to administrative staff are incompatible with the advanced needs of AI-based environments, even though the need to implement the technological change is admittedly very urgent. There is still an ongoing disparity in workforce capability. Recent studies indicate that such weaknesses lie within the institutional staff itself, and past models were primarily focused on the lack of skills among graduating student groups. The integration of artificial intelligence in the academic and administrative processes requires targeted upskilling programs outside of the traditional bureaucratic training and requires a complicated combination of technical skills and strategic leadership (Ruben et al., 2025). The deficiency of thorough training in AI literacy will become a significant liability of operation as school administrators rely increasingly on algorithmic tools to administer the institution. The capability of educational institutions to keep the competent and sustainable management practices is directly associated with their commitment to enhance the competency of the employees by means of targeted upskilling (Sahoo, 2024; Zhu and Wang, 2024). The need for employability skills extends beyond regional boundaries, with international experiences often bolstering graduates' capabilities (Garg & Punjani, 2025). As a result, institutional HR policies need to change in

order to incorporate thorough AI literacy into their fundamental frameworks.

The ability to develop socio-technical skills alongside technical expertise is very important in facilitating successful professional development within the present-day higher education administration. To achieve success in the implementation of AI within an institutional setting, professionals who are able to balance automated efficiency with complex human judgement, interpersonal communication and critical thinking are required. To leverage artificial intelligence to promote sustainable operations in higher education, a labor force capable of evaluating the operational and ethical implications of the algorithms used is necessary (Khan et al., 2025). Companies face the risk of a vast difference between the theoretical performance of AI technologies and the everyday reality of institutional management in case they do not have such socio-technical skills. Therefore, besides technical training, the strategic frameworks of building AI competences should focus on cooperative problem-solving (Raskovitch and Babashahi, 2025). To make sure that the adoption of technology does not harm the integrity of higher education management but positively influences it, it is also important to develop transparent institutional rules and best practices that can guide the staff to overcome the difficulties of adopting AI (Azevedo and Mallinson, 2025).

Therefore, colleges and universities have two responsibilities: to train students, and to actively promote AI literacy and continuous professional growth among the administrative staff. Traditional approaches to professional development are seen as less and less effective in preparing staff to cope with the challenges of the digital workplace. In spite of the fact that basic educational structures have always struggled to include the changing technologies in an efficient way (Yim, 2024), the transformational possibilities of big language models generate unprecedented opportunities of on-the-job skill training (Preiksaitis et al., 2024). To take advantage of such an opportunity, institutions need to adopt new, technology-enriched professional development strategies. The use of adjusted educational models can significantly enhance the efficacy of artificial intelligence upskilling programs among adult students and administration workers (Lakhe Shrestha et al., 2025). These strategies will ensure that the administrative employees are digitally competent professionals who can increase institutional efficiency and innovation and not just passive consumers of new systems.

Modernization of advanced AI capabilities is one of the aspects of continuous professional growth and full institutional formation. In the modern professional development, the systematic contact with emerging technologies and flexible learning conditions plays a vital role in the process (Kanar and Heinrich, 2024; Kovačević et al., 2024). According to more recent empirical research, continuous AI upskilling facilitates advanced problem-solving, organisational creativity and significantly enhances critical thinking among educators (Richmond & Nicholls, 2025). Additionally, gaining a solid understanding of generative AI empowers the administrative team with the transformative skills needed

to tackle complex problems and enhance operational efficiency (Avsec & Rupnik, 2025; Kong et al., 2025). These technologies facilitate independent professional growth and allow employees to make accurate evidence-based decisions when used strategically (Carrasco-Sáez et al., 2025). In today's digital age of higher education, it's essential to train administrative staff in AI literacy to boost their professional skills, performance, and overall competence (Dringo-Horvath et al., 2025).

## Literature Reviews

Research on professional development routinely shows that there has been a consistent gap between available workforce capacity and the developing needs of the digital work place in relation to the existing institutional training provision. Studies indicate that there are significant gaps in the preparedness of professionals, and particularly in achieving the congruence of administrative capabilities with technical expertise. Such discrepancies prove that the outdated training techniques are not adequate to address the current needs. Thus, the urgent need to improve the quality of standard administrative skills through particular reskilling and upskilling courses based on artificial intelligence to continue to maintain the effectiveness of institutions (Ersanlili et al., 2025; Morandini et al., 2023).

This lack of competency is observed across the knowledge-intensive sectors across the globe, which indicates a structural problem in the administration of higher education. Research shows that existing gaps exist between the existing competencies of the personnel and the strategic needs of educational administration. Poor digital literacy among the institutional employees tends to plague the execution of the administrative functions. The mismatches of technical capabilities and workforce skills clearly reveal the need to have comprehensive institutional strategies. It is essential to realign the human resource structures to integrate AI-related skills into the processes of administrative workers (Azevedo and Mallinson, 2025; Ruben et al., 2025).

Besides technical shortcomings, literature acknowledges socio-emotional and cognitive competencies as crucial elements that shape career development. Major shortcomings are common in managerial staff with regard to critical thinking, interpersonal communication, and diversity management, although there is adequate basic training. These multifaceted competencies are becoming important in organisational leadership. These capabilities allow school administrators to conduct sustainable leadership practice based on the ability to reconcile technical AI integration with advanced human judgment (Zhu and Wang, 2024). In this respect, the professional competence demands the developmental strategies that pay attention not only to the cognitive, interpersonal, and technological skills but also to the accomplishment of the organisational efficacy (Sahoo, 2024).

Active learning and on the job training have been identified as important in the development of these essential competencies. Contextualisation of professional development methods contributes considerably to agility in the context of collaboration, flexibility in operations, and generative technologies awareness among the employees of the higher education sector (Kong et al.,

2025). To successfully navigate through an AI-driven institutional environment, it is important to transcend the theoretical knowledge studied in the academia and move to the practical side of it. The combined frameworks that make use of models including TPACK are essential in enabling a holistic acquisition of skills in adult learners. These systematic approaches highlight the need to use competency-based experiential learning in institutional upskilling programs (Lakhe Shrestha et al., 2025).

Innovative assessment methods and structural reforms in human resources have become crucial for closing the gap in workforce capabilities. By integrating competency indicators into performance assessment frameworks, institutional employees can demonstrate their readiness for modern digital tasks, while managers can conduct targeted evaluations (Dyki, 2020). Additionally, fostering collaboration between departments and promoting collective governance within institutions are vital for improving professional outcomes through sustainable administrative practices (Garrido-Yserte & Gallo-Rivera, 2020). If we want to genuinely improve staff development, it's essential to completely rethink our performance assessments and integrate organizational governance, rather than simply relying on standalone training workshops.

Some researchers have introduced some really interesting frameworks that showcase how professional growth can flourish in technology-driven settings, particularly as digital transformation changes the landscape of administrative tasks. Today's competency models highlight the necessity of being digitally adaptable and having AI skills as key attributes for remaining relevant in the industry (Suartha, 2021). When we talk about tech frameworks, effective digital governance in higher education plays a crucial role in improving operational transparency and enabling administrative staff to develop their digital skills. This ultimately strengthens the overall capabilities of the workforce (Deutsch et al., 2021). This is a shift that motivates professionals to embrace ongoing adaptability and actively manage their own skill growth (Khuziakhmetov, 2022).

Recent studies have shown that the structure and management of organizations are essential in shaping professional development. Factors such as the resources available in departments, the size of the institution, and the current digital landscape have a significant impact on how equitably training opportunities are provided to staff. This really underscores the systemic inequalities in access to quality training (Froese, 2022). This research indicates that merely fine-tuning policies here and there won't be enough to close the professional competence gap. For us to make significant strides, we must confront the deeper structural challenges and resource inequalities that are preventing continuous learning and the effective use of technology in education.

The rapid growth of artificial intelligence has really put a spotlight on the importance of AI literacy as a key part of today's professional skills. It's crucial to implement thorough AI frameworks during employee onboarding to tackle the long-term skill gaps we see in the digital economy (Yim, 2024). Moreover, cutting-edge language

models are leading the charge in creating tailored professional development and skill-building opportunities, fundamentally altering how we get our workforce ready (Preiksaitis et al., 2024). Regular interaction with digital tools boosts administrative leadership and communication abilities (Kanar & Heinrich, 2024). The strategic alignment of training with digital reality is crucial for enhancing staff capabilities (Kovačević et al., 2024).

Recent study broadens professional development to incorporate psychological preparedness and transformational agency in AI-mediated environments. Formulating explicit strategies for cultivating AI competencies forecasts improved performance and career flexibility among institutional personnel (Raskovitch & Babashahi, 2025). The intentional use of generative AI enhances critical thinking and hones advanced problem-solving skills in professionals (Richmond & Nicholls, 2025). Developing AI literacy promotes transformative agency, enabling workers to demonstrate reflective flexibility (Avsec & Rupnik, 2025). The implementation of these technologies enhances autonomous professional development (Carrasco-Sáez et al., 2025), highlighting that institutional digital preparedness is essential for cultivating competence (Dringó-Horváth et al., 2025).

The literature we've looked at shows a clear shift from traditional training methods to more adaptive, AI-driven developmental models. While there has been significant progress in identifying key socio-technical skills and launching new HR initiatives, there are still gaps in how effectively AI technologies are being integrated to support the growth of administrative staff. The ongoing challenge of institutional inequalities that limit access to upskilling resources remains a significant issue. These enduring obstacles point to the urgent need for scalable and comprehensive policies that can effectively integrate AI into the professional development of those working in higher education management.

### 3. Research Methodology

This study took a deep dive into how artificial intelligence (AI) is being integrated into the professional development of staff in higher education, using a qualitative research approach. This method was chosen because it's the best way to gather the rich, context-specific experiences and personal insights of administrative staff—details that more rigid quantitative methods often miss. The main goal of this research was to closely explore the lived experiences of participants, specifically looking at how they understand and actually use generative AI technologies in their everyday administrative tasks.

#### 3.1 Research Design

The study used a descriptive qualitative research approach, which provided the necessary flexibility for a detailed and systematic exploration of the participants' perspectives. This method allowed for a thorough examination without being restricted by rigid theoretical frameworks, aside from the core research questions. It was particularly effective in identifying and outlining themes that emerged organically from the data. This inductive approach shed light on how administrative staff viewed the implementation of AI and its immediate effects on

their professional skills and the overall effectiveness of their institutions. This framework provided the flexibility needed to thoughtfully assess the ethical implications of embracing new technologies, as well as the ongoing skill development that's essential for career growth.

### 3.2 Participants and Sampling

For this study, we utilized purposive sampling to select participants who were notably engaged in operational management and institutional governance. The final sample comprised twenty-five managers, department heads, and administrative officials from a higher education institution. This carefully curated group provided an essential combination of institutional representation and rich practical experience, which was crucial for assessing the effects of AI technologies on administrative processes. The 25 participants shared rich insights regarding their comprehension of AI, the ways they implement it in their work, the benefits they observe, and the professional skills they consider vital. A close look at all 25 responses confirmed that we reached significant topic saturation, as no new ideas or themes emerged in the later stages of our analysis.

### 3.3 Data Collection

Primary data collection was conducted using a structured, open-ended electronic questionnaire. Participants used this digital tool to thoughtfully document their hands-on experiences, sharing their thoughts on the benefits, challenges, and shifts in workflow that artificial intelligence has introduced. Opting for an open-ended format was a smart choice, allowing participants to provide detailed and meaningful insights, which led to rich qualitative data perfect for thorough theme analysis. To maintain ethical research standards, all digitally recorded responses were kept confidential and securely stored in encrypted systems. The data collection process was completely anonymized; no personally identifiable information was requested or retained at any stage of the study.

### Data Analysis

Insights from 25 professionals in the fields of administration and management reveal that in our fast-moving digital age, being knowledgeable about AI is key to ongoing professional development. The participants consistently highlighted that staff with AI expertise manage administrative tasks more effectively, make fewer errors, and greatly enhance the overall quality of their work. They also noted that artificial intelligence can greatly speed up complex decision-making, ensuring that administrative choices are based on data and align well with the organization's strategic goals. While acknowledging the operational perks, there was a strong agreement on the necessity for strict ethical governance. Respondents expressed concerns about the unchecked use of AI systems, highlighting the crucial need for data protection, transparency in algorithms, and fairness within institutions. They underscored the urgent requirement for ongoing training programs to help employees keep up with the rapid technological advancements. Without consistent upskilling opportunities, administrative staff may end up lagging, finding it tough to meet the challenges of modern management. At the end of the day,

this thorough investigation demonstrates that being proficient in AI is more about being a smart professional than merely having technical skills. By integrating personal expertise, a passion for lifelong learning, and a strong ethical foundation, we can boost the overall effectiveness of the organization, inspire creativity, and promote the long-term growth of our employees.



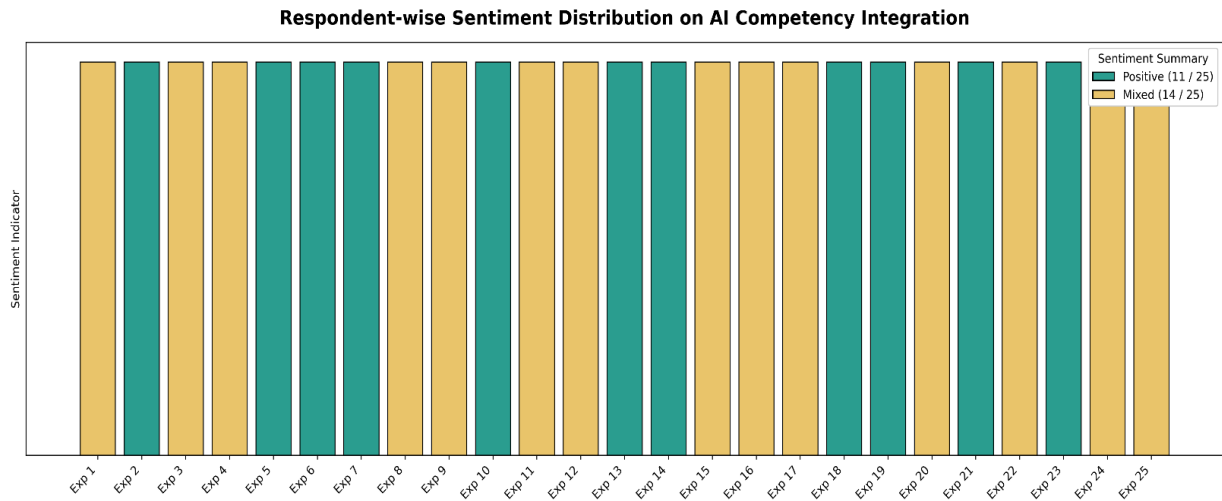
Figure 1: Word Cloud

The AI Competency Word Cloud depicts the most prevalent concepts and reveals the major priorities articulated by the participants, underscored by the importance of terms such as professional, efficiency, staff, capability, institutional, and data. The large number of these key terms suggests that participants see the integration of AI as closely tied to the overall performance of the institution and the skills of the administrative staff. The enormous volume of data and the application of evidence-based techniques in decision-making demonstrate that using AI to make organized and analytical decisions is still a primary operational goal. Participants agree that AI capabilities immediately improve administrative productivity and task execution by associating concepts like efficiency, performance, workflow, and operations. The emphasis on concepts like governance, accountability, ethics, privacy, and responsibility shows a deep comprehension of the need for robust legal frameworks and the judicious deployment of AI in higher education administration. Furthermore, as responders adapt to the rapid advancements in technology, terms like upskilling, training, continuous education, and progress truly highlight the need of lifelong learning. From the word cloud, it's clear that respondents view AI competency as a thorough mix of ethical governance, professional growth, and continuous skill improvement. These factors collectively enhance the administrative team and benefit the organization overall.

**Table 1. Sentiment Analysis**

<b>Expert</b>	<b>Sentiment</b>	<b>Supporting Excerpts from Transcript</b>	<b>Demographic / Background Information</b>
<b>Expert 1</b>	Mixed	Employees with strong AI competency turn institutional data into foresight, but human oversight remains necessary.	Admissions Coordinator, Female, Age 25–35, Experience <5 yrs
<b>Expert 2</b>	Positive	It helps the administrative workforce adapt to new technologies, improve productivity, and innovate faster.	Operations Analyst, Female, Age 25–35, Experience <5 yrs
<b>Expert 3</b>	Mixed	AI at times provides vague answers... errors affect final departmental outputs if not strictly checked.	Financial Aid Officer, Male, Age 25–35, Experience <5 yrs
<b>Expert 4</b>	Mixed	Continuous AI training is extremely important for staff to remain competent; otherwise, the skill gap widens.	Employee Relations Manager, Female, Age 35–50, Experience 10–20 yrs
<b>Expert 5</b>	Positive	It's improved operational efficiency by reducing manual effort and minimizing errors.	Executive Assistant, Female, Age 25–35, Experience 5–10 yrs
<b>Expert 6</b>	Positive	Key benefits include improved productivity, administrative cost reduction, and enhanced data accuracy.	Procurement Officer, Female, Age 25–35, Experience 5–10 yrs.
<b>Expert 7</b>	Positive	Improved efficiency, data-driven institutional decisions, enhanced accuracy, and faster workflow automation.	Institutional Research Analyst, Female, Age 35–50, Experience 10–20 yrs
<b>Expert 8</b>	Mixed	I use AI to benchmark institutional policies... but junior staff are becoming too dependent on it.	Policy Coordinator, Male, Age 25–35, Experience <5 yrs
<b>Expert 9</b>	Mixed	AI improves operational efficiency by streamlining processes, though the transition period is highly disruptive.	Student Affairs Manager, Female, Age 25–35, Experience 5–10 yrs
<b>Expert 10</b>	Positive	AI improves efficiency by automating repetitive scheduling tasks and increasing overall office productivity.	Records Administrator, Female, Age 25–35, Experience <5 yrs
<b>Expert 11</b>	Mixed	Work is done easily and quickly, provided we strictly follow ethical data protocols.	Compliance Officer, Female, Age 35–50, Experience 10–20 yrs
<b>Expert 12</b>	Mixed	AI tools improved the efficiency and depth of institutional reporting, but data privacy remains a concern.	Data Management Specialist, Female, Age 25–35, Experience <5 yrs
<b>Expert 13</b>	Positive	AI offers faster administrative decision-making, higher productivity, and improved record accuracy.	Facilities Manager, Female, Age 25–35, Experience <5 yrs

<b>Expert 14</b>	Positive	Staff with good AI skills work smarter and make faster, evidence-based managerial decisions.	IT Support Manager, Female, Age 35–50, Experience 10–20 yrs
<b>Expert 15</b>	Mixed	Ease and fastness of work... speed and multitasking are great, but it requires constant policy updates.	Events Coordinator, Female, Age 35–50, Experience 5–10 yrs
<b>Expert 16</b>	Mixed	It provides a detailed understanding of complex compliance guidelines in a short time.	Alumni Relations Officer, Female, Age 25–35, Experience 5–10 yrs
<b>Expert 17</b>	Mixed	Getting help with routine tasks is such a relief... but we should see AI as a helpful assistant rather than something we rely on completely.	Department Head, Male, Age 35–50, Experience 10–20 yrs
<b>Expert 18</b>	Positive	AI simplifies campus workflows, cuts down on costs, improves accuracy, and boosts productivity.	Campus Director, Male, Age 50+, Experience 10–20 yrs
<b>Expert 19</b>	Positive	By reducing the time spent on everyday admin tasks, AI allows us to shift our focus to more strategic work for the organization.	Admin Manager, Female, Age 35–50, Experience 10–20 yrs
<b>Expert 20</b>	Mixed	AI tools are helpful but require significant, structured training before administrative staff can use them effectively.	Department Coordinator, Male, Age 25–35, Experience 5–10 yrs
<b>Expert 21</b>	Positive	AI-driven reporting has improved our institutional decision-making at every managerial level.	Senior Administrator, Female, Age 35–50, Experience 10–20 yrs
<b>Expert 22</b>	Mixed	However, there are significant worries about data privacy and confidentiality when it comes to using AI tools for HR management.	HR Officer, Female, Age 25–35, Experience 5–10 yrs
<b>Expert 23</b>	Positive	With the help of AI, our team has been able to work smarter and achieve consistently better operational results.	Operations Manager, Male, Age 35–50, Experience 10–20 yrs
<b>Expert 24</b>	Mixed	AI can be incredibly helpful, but we definitely need to establish clearer ethical boundaries for its application in staff assessments.	HR Specialist, Female, Age 35–50, Experience 5–10 yrs
<b>Expert 25</b>	Mixed	It's crucial for our staff to continuously upskill in AI, but rolling out these training programs across different departments can be quite a challenge.	Associate Dean (Admin), Male, Age 50+, Experience 20+ yrs



**Figure 2: Sentiment Analysis**

Figure 2 illustrates the sentiment distribution of the 25 higher education administrative professionals concerning the integration of AI tools. The bar chart categorizes the general opinions of each expert into two groups: Positive, represented by 11 respondents (44% of the total), and Mixed, which has 14 respondents (56%). The bars in the graph represent various managerial or administrative experts, indicating that there were no purely negative opinions among the group. This pattern shows a trend of cautious optimism within the institutional workforce. Many employees are keenly aware of the immediate benefits that AI can bring to operations and productivity, as illustrated by the Positive bars. On the other hand, some take a more careful approach, as reflected in the Mixed bars. This clear mix of sentiments suggests that professionals have a well-rounded view: they recognize that while AI can significantly boost administrative efficiency, its effective and sustainable use hinges on strict ethical standards, thorough data privacy practices, and ongoing skill enhancement within the organization. This distribution reveals a workforce that is generally open to digital transformation, as long as responsible and supportive HR practices are in place.

**Table 2. Thematic Analysis**

Theme	Codes	Evidence from Responses
<b>Operational Performance &amp; Task Efficiency</b>	efficiency, faster, accuracy, workflow, tools, performance	Administrative staff are turning to AI to tackle everyday tasks more efficiently, cutting down on manual labor and boosting accuracy.
<b>Evidence-Based Professional Judgement</b>	data, decisions, reporting, evidence, analytics	This integration of AI enables managers to move away from instinctual decision-making and embrace a more structured, data-informed approach to administration.
<b>Governance and Ethical Accountability</b>	privacy, ethical, compliance, responsible, governance,	Still, many respondents highlighted serious concerns about data security, privacy, and the need for strong institutional policies to guide these changes.
<b>Lifelong Learning &amp; Professional Upskilling</b>	training, awareness, capacity, continuous, upskilling,	Participants stressed the urgent need for structured and ongoing HR training programs to keep administrative staff equipped to handle the swift changes in technology.
<b>Institutional Growth &amp; Innovation Culture</b>	innovation, growth, transformation, organization, strategic,	Fostering AI expertise not only streamlines workflows but also promotes a culture of innovation in higher education management.
<b>Professional Advancement &amp; Career Relevance</b>	professional, career, advancement, staff, capability,	Mastery of AI tools is directly linked to enhanced professional standing, sustained workforce relevance, and administrative career progression.

The codes were methodically extracted from the qualitative data obtained from the extensive written narratives of the 25 participating administrative professionals. This dataset was meticulously examined using an inductive thematic analysis method, revealing recurring language, conceptual themes, and operational patterns among the responses. The word cloud served as a key visual tool to pinpoint the most frequently mentioned terms, which played a crucial role in shaping the coding process that followed. You can really see where the respondents' attention lies through the size of the words in the visualization. Some of the standout terms included data, personnel, capacity, efficacy, and institutional. These qualitative insights were then organized around these common themes, forming cohesive clusters of related codes that support each theme presented in the analysis table.

**Operational Performance & Task Efficiency** was formulated from recurring keywords such as efficiency, workflow, tools, and accuracy, indicating the extent to which participants correlate AI utilization with enhanced administrative execution and institutional productivity.

**Evidence-Based Professional Judgement** was deduced from the prominent repetition of data, decisions, reporting, and analytics, underscoring the deep emphasis participants place on utilizing AI to transition from intuition-based choices to structured, data-informed administrative management.

**Governance and Ethical Accountability** was synthesized from terms including governance, privacy, responsible, and ethical, reflecting the critical concerns of the cohort regarding data security, compliance, and the establishment of robust institutional policy frameworks.

**Lifelong Learning & Professional Upskilling** emerged from the consistent use of upskilling, training, continuous, and capacity, illustrating the participants' conviction that professional capability requires ongoing, structured HR interventions to keep pace with technological evolution.

**Institutional Growth & Innovation Culture** was derived from descriptors such as institutional, innovation, growth, and transformation, demonstrating how respondents link individual AI competency directly to the systemic advancement and strategic modernization of the broader academic organization.

**Professional Advancement & Career Relevance** was constructed from the repetition of words like professional, capability, career, and staff, highlighting the respondents' perception that mastery of digital tools is inextricably linked to sustained workforce relevance and administrative career progression.

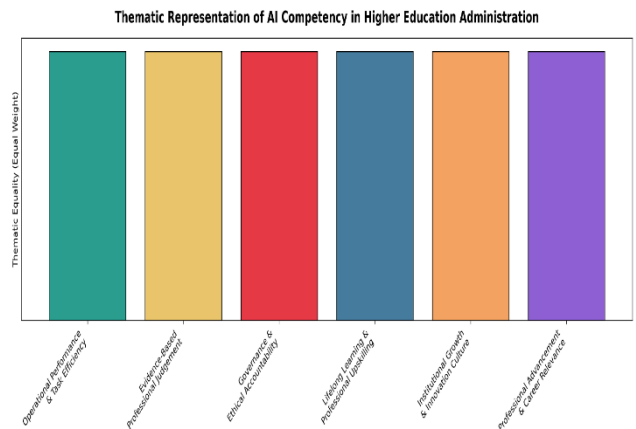


Figure 3: Thematic Analysis Graph

The thematic bar graph illustrates how the qualitative data from participant stories is structured. Each bar represents one of the six key themes that emerged from the analysis: Operational Performance & Task Efficiency, Evidence-Based Professional Judgement, Governance and Ethical Accountability, Lifelong Learning & Professional Upskilling, Institutional Growth & Innovation Culture, and Professional Advancement & Career Relevance. The uniform height of the bars illustrates a balanced distribution of emphasis across the 25 administrative participants' responses. This equity indicates that the respondents didn't limit their focus to just one aspect of AI integration, like its technical utility. They shared a detailed and insightful take on the impact of AI in higher education administration. The graph clearly illustrates that becoming proficient in today's AI is no simple feat. It involves not only executing tasks efficiently but also grasping ethical guidelines, taking part in strategic planning, and being dedicated to ongoing education. This visual representation emphasizes that all six main areas are equally crucial for those working in educational institutions. Together, they form the vital framework needed to transform professional development and enhance administrative excellence in our digital age.

## Conclusion

This qualitative study explored how artificial intelligence skills greatly impact the job advancement of employees in educational institutions and human resource management practices in higher education. The research looked into the level of AI awareness and use among 25 administrative and management professionals via detailed open-ended narratives. The sentiment analysis of this group showed a slightly optimistic outlook, with no entirely negative views. Out of all the participants, 11 (44%) clearly supported the integration of AI, while the remaining 14 (56%) had mixed or conditional opinions. A thorough thematic analysis highlighted six key areas that define modern AI competency: Operational Performance and Task Efficiency, Evidence-Based Professional Judgment, Governance and Ethical Accountability, Lifelong Learning and Professional Upskilling, Institutional

Growth and Innovation Culture, and Professional Advancement and Career Relevance.

Many participants stressed that when administrative professionals are skilled in AI, they can take on tough institutional roles with greater accuracy and make quicker, well-informed decisions. They noted that achieving these results relies heavily on having clear guidelines for implementation. People must take the time to assess the results of algorithms, protect the privacy of institutional data, and embrace upskilling as a continuous part of their professional growth rather than something that happens just once. These insights underscore that AI systems are powerful allies that enhance human administrative capabilities instead of replacing them. To reap these benefits while maintaining ethical standards, institutional HR strategies should focus on three key actions: (1) implementing specialized AI training programs to boost the skills of administrative personnel; (2) developing comprehensive frameworks that guarantee algorithmic transparency, ethical responsibility, and data privacy; and (3) restructuring workflows to ensure that AI tools

support, rather than replace, human judgment in management situations.

While these findings provide valuable insights into the modernization of institutions, the study does have some methodological limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results and guiding future academic research. The participant group mainly included administrative officials, department heads, and managers. However, the findings miss out on the unique working conditions and professional growth needs of frontline academic staff. For future research, it's essential to include these frontline academic workers in the analysis and to use comprehensive quantitative follow-up methods to assess the long-term effects of specific AI-related professional development programs. Ultimately, the evidence suggests a cautiously optimistic outlook: when higher education institutions proactively tackle ethical risks while fostering continuous staff development, they can significantly improve both individual career trajectories and the overall resilience of the organization.

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