

Assessing Influencing Factors for AI Adoption in a SIDS Public University: Contextual Challenges and Opportunities

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Abstract

Artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly shaping higher education, yet its adoption in Small Island Developing States (SIDS) remains underexplored from the learners' perspective. This study assesses the influencing factors that affect learners' readiness for AI adoption in a public university in the Maldives, focusing on digital competence, AI literacy, and contextual challenges and opportunities.

A mixed-methods design was employed, integrating survey data from 262 lifelong learners with semi-structured interviews to capture both quantitative indicators and qualitative insights. Findings reveal that learners demonstrate moderate levels of digital competence but limited AI literacy, particularly in ethical awareness, data interpretation, and adaptive use of AI tools. Interviews highlight enabling factors such as learner motivation, peer collaboration, and openness to technology, while barriers include resource constraints, limited exposure to AI applications, and insufficient training opportunities.

By situating learners' readiness within the broader discourse on AI adoption in SIDS higher education, this study contributes empirical evidence on how contextual realities shape learner engagement with emerging technologies. The findings emphasize the need for learner-centered frameworks that integrate digital competence, AI literacy, and contextual support to empower lifelong learners in resource-constrained environments.

Keywords

Artificial Intelligence, Learners' Readiness, Digital Competence, AI Literacy, Lifelong Learning, Small Island Developing States, Higher Education.

