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Psychological Traits of Academic Leaders toward Artificial Intelligence Integration in Inclusive Education

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Abstract
The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has transformed educational leadership by introducing new opportunities and challenges in promoting inclusive education. As educational institutions increasingly adopt AI-enabled technologies, academic leaders are expected to demonstrate psychological traits that support ethical decision-making, innovation, collaboration, and learner-centered leadership. This study explored the psychological traits of academic leaders toward Artificial Intelligence integration in inclusive education. A qualitative interpretive descriptive research design was employed involving 14 purposively selected academic leaders from higher education institutions in the Philippines. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis. The findings generated six major themes: Adaptive Leadership, Empathetic Decision-Making, Ethical Responsibility, Collaborative Leadership, Continuous Learning, and Strategic Innovation. Participants emphasized that successful AI integration extends beyond technological adoption and depends on leaders who possess adaptability, empathy, ethical responsibility, and a commitment to continuous professional growth while fostering collaborative and inclusive educational environments. The findings further revealed that responsible AI implementation requires institutional strategies that balance technological innovation with equity, accessibility, and learner-centered educational practices. The study contributes to the growing literature on educational leadership by demonstrating that psychological traits serve as critical drivers of responsible Artificial Intelligence integration in inclusive education. The findings provide practical implications for leadership development, institutional AI governance, and policy initiatives that support the ethical and sustainable adoption of AI in higher education...
Keywords artificial intelligence, psychological traits, academic leaders, inclusive education, educational leadership, qualitative research..

Introduction

Psychological traits play a fundamental role in educational leadership by influencing how academic leaders respond to organizational change, make informed decisions, and foster inclusive learning environments. Traits such as empathy, adaptability, resilience, openness to innovation, ethical responsibility, and collaborative leadership enable academic leaders to effectively address the diverse academic and socio-emotional needs of learners. As educational institutions continue to experience rapid technological advancement, these psychological characteristics have become increasingly important in guiding leaders through digital transformation while maintaining inclusive, learner-centered educational practices. The emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in education has further expanded leadership responsibilities, requiring academic leaders to balance technological innovation with ethical decision-making, inclusivity, and educational equity (Avolio et al., 2014; Fullan et al., 2020; UNESCO, 2023).

Artificial Intelligence has become an influential component of contemporary education by supporting personalized learning, adaptive instruction, intelligent tutoring systems, automated assessment, learning analytics, and administrative decision-making. AI technologies provide opportunities to improve instructional effectiveness, increase accessibility for diverse learners, and enhance institutional efficiency. Within inclusive education, AI has the potential to address individual learning needs by providing differentiated instruction, assistive technologies, real-time feedback, and data-informed interventions for students with diverse abilities and backgrounds. However, the successful integration of AI depends not only on technological infrastructure but also on the psychological

readiness, leadership values, and decision-making capacities of academic leaders responsible for implementing educational innovations (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019; Holmes et al., 2022; UNESCO, 2023).

Recent studies have emphasized that effective AI integration requires educational leaders who demonstrate openness to innovation, emotional intelligence, adaptability, ethical leadership, and collaborative decision-making. These psychological traits enable leaders to manage technological change, support faculty development, address ethical concerns related to AI, and promote inclusive educational practices that prioritize student well-being and equitable learning opportunities. As AI continues to reshape educational systems worldwide, academic leaders are increasingly expected to cultivate organizational cultures that encourage responsible technology adoption while ensuring that digital innovations remain aligned with the principles of inclusive education (OECD, 2023; Selwyn, 2019; Luckin & Cukurova, 2019).

Despite the growing implementation of Artificial Intelligence across educational institutions, limited qualitative research has examined how the psychological traits of academic leaders influence AI integration within inclusive education settings. Existing studies have largely focused on technological adoption, digital readiness, or the effectiveness of AI applications in teaching and learning, while providing less attention to the personal characteristics that shape leadership decisions regarding responsible AI implementation. Understanding these perspectives is essential because academic leaders serve as key decision-makers who influence institutional policies, faculty engagement, ethical governance, and the successful integration of AI in inclusive educational environments.

Addressing this gap, the present study explores the psychological traits of academic leaders toward Artificial Intelligence integration in inclusive education. By examining academic leaders' perspectives, the study seeks to provide insights into how psychological characteristics influence AI adoption, ethical leadership, and inclusive educational practices. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of leadership strategies, institutional policies, and professional development initiatives that support responsible Artificial Intelligence integration while promoting equitable, accessible, and inclusive education for all learners (UNESCO, 2023; Holmes et al., 2022).

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative interpretive descriptive research design to explore the psychological traits of academic leaders toward Artificial Intelligence (AI) integration in inclusive education. Interpretive description was selected because it facilitates an in-depth examination of participants' experiences, perspectives, and leadership practices within real educational contexts while generating findings that are applicable to educational leadership and institutional decision-making. This approach enabled the study to capture how academic leaders' psychological characteristics influence their perceptions, decisions, and readiness to integrate AI in promoting inclusive education (Thorne, 2016).

Participants and Sampling

The study involved 14 purposively selected academic leaders from higher education institutions in the Philippines. Participants included deans, program chairs, department heads, campus administrators, and academic coordinators who held leadership responsibilities related to curriculum implementation, faculty supervision, instructional management, or institutional planning. The inclusion criteria required participants to: (1) occupy an academic leadership position; (2) possess experience in implementing or supervising inclusive education initiatives; (3) demonstrate familiarity with the use or planned integration of Artificial Intelligence or other digital technologies in educational settings; and (4) voluntarily agree to participate in the study. Purposive sampling was employed to ensure that participants possessed relevant knowledge and leadership experiences aligned with the research objective (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Instrument

Data were collected using a researcher-developed semi-structured interview guide consisting of three open-ended questions aligned with the research objective. The interview questions explored participants' perspectives regarding the psychological traits that influence AI integration, the leadership characteristics necessary for responsible AI implementation in inclusive education, and recommendations for strengthening AI-enabled

inclusive educational leadership. Follow-up questions were asked when necessary to encourage participants to elaborate on their experiences and provide richer descriptions.

Table 1. Interview Guide Questions

Research Objective	Interview Question
To explore the psychological traits of academic leaders toward Artificial Intelligence integration in inclusive education.	How do your personal psychological traits influence your perspectives on integrating Artificial Intelligence into inclusive education? What psychological traits do you believe are essential for academic leaders to effectively implement Artificial Intelligence while ensuring that inclusive education remains equitable, ethical, and learner-centered? Based on your leadership experience, how can academic leaders strengthen the responsible integration of Artificial Intelligence to support inclusive education for diverse learners?

Data Gathering Procedure

Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants after explaining the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the measures implemented to protect confidentiality. Individual interviews were conducted through face-to-face meetings or secure online video conferencing platforms, depending on participants' availability and institutional arrangements. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes and was audio-recorded with participants' permission. The recordings were transcribed verbatim, reviewed for accuracy, and anonymized by assigning participant codes to protect individual identities.

Data Analysis

The interview transcripts were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis following the six-phase framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2021): (1) familiarization with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) constructing themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the final report. This analytical approach enabled the systematic identification of recurring patterns and shared meanings related to the psychological traits of academic leaders and their perspectives on AI integration in inclusive education. To strengthen the trustworthiness of the findings, themes were continuously refined to ensure that they accurately represented participants' experiences and were grounded in the interview data.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to established ethical principles for qualitative research involving human participants. Participation was entirely voluntary, and all participants provided informed consent before the interviews. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without consequence. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by removing personally identifiable information from the interview transcripts and presenting findings using participant codes. All collected data were securely stored and used exclusively for academic and research purposes in accordance with institutional ethical guidelines.

RESULTS

Research Objective. To explore the psychological traits of academic leaders toward Artificial Intelligence integration in inclusive education.

Interview Question 1. How do your personal psychological traits influence your perspectives on integrating Artificial Intelligence into inclusive education?

Theme 1. Adaptive Leadership

Ten participants described adaptability as one of the most important psychological traits that influence their perspectives toward Artificial Intelligence integration. They explained that educational leaders must remain open to innovation, embrace technological change, and continuously learn emerging digital tools while maintaining

their commitment to inclusive education. Participants viewed adaptability as essential for responding to evolving educational needs and ensuring that AI enhances rather than disrupts inclusive teaching and learning.

"As educational leaders, we need to adapt because technology continues to evolve. If we remain open to learning AI, we can better support both teachers and students." (Participant 2)

"Being adaptable allows us to embrace AI while ensuring that it complements inclusive educational practices rather than replacing human interaction." (Participant 4)

These responses indicate that adaptive leadership enables academic leaders to approach AI integration with flexibility, openness, and a commitment to continuous improvement.

Theme 2. Empathetic Decision-Making

Four participants emphasized that empathy remains a fundamental psychological trait when integrating Artificial Intelligence into inclusive education. They believed that AI should support diverse learners without compromising individualized attention, equity, and student well-being. Participants stressed that educational decisions involving AI should continue to prioritize learners' unique needs and ensure that technology serves as a tool to enhance—not replace—human-centered educational practices.

"AI should never replace empathy because every learner has different needs that require understanding and compassion." (Participant 8)

"Inclusive education means considering every student's situation, and AI should always be implemented with empathy and fairness." (Participant 6)

The findings suggest that empathetic leadership guides responsible AI implementation by balancing technological innovation with learner-centered educational values.

Interview Question 2. What psychological traits do you believe are essential for academic leaders to effectively implement Artificial Intelligence while ensuring that inclusive education remains equitable, ethical, and learner-centered?

Theme 1. Ethical Responsibility

Eight participants consistently identified ethical responsibility as an essential leadership characteristic for successful AI integration. They emphasized that academic leaders must ensure transparency, fairness, accountability, and responsible decision-making when adopting AI technologies. Participants recognized concerns related to data privacy, algorithmic bias, and equitable access, highlighting the importance of ethical leadership in protecting learners and maintaining institutional integrity.

"AI should always be implemented responsibly because educational decisions affect students' learning opportunities and personal information." (Participant 3)

"Leaders must ensure that AI is used ethically and fairly for all learners." (Participant 1)

These findings demonstrate that ethical responsibility strengthens trust and accountability in AI-supported inclusive education.

Theme 2. Collaborative Leadership

Six participants highlighted collaboration as a crucial psychological trait that supports effective AI implementation. They explained that successful integration requires continuous collaboration among administrators, faculty members, information technology specialists, students, parents, and other stakeholders. Participants believed that collaborative leadership encourages shared decision-making, promotes acceptance of AI innovations, and facilitates collective responsibility for inclusive educational outcomes.

"AI implementation should involve everyone because inclusive education requires collaboration among teachers, administrators, and families." (Participant 5)

"Working together helps ensure that AI addresses the needs of all learners rather than focusing only on technology." (Participant 11)

The findings indicate that collaborative leadership promotes shared ownership and strengthens institutional readiness for AI integration.

Interview Question 3. Based on your leadership experience, how can academic leaders strengthen the responsible integration of Artificial Intelligence to support inclusive education for diverse learners?

Theme 1. Continuous Learning

11 participants recommended continuous professional development to strengthen leaders' readiness for AI integration. They emphasized the need for ongoing training, workshops, seminars, and leadership development programs that enhance AI literacy, digital competencies, and ethical decision-making. Participants believed that continuous learning would enable academic leaders to make informed decisions regarding emerging AI technologies while effectively supporting faculty and students.

"Educational leaders should continue learning because AI technologies change rapidly, and we need updated knowledge to guide our institutions." (Participant 13)

"Professional development helps leaders understand both the opportunities and challenges of Artificial Intelligence." (Participant 12)

These responses suggest that lifelong learning strengthens leaders' confidence and competence in managing AI-supported educational transformation.

Theme 2. Strategic Innovation

Three participants further recommended developing clear institutional strategies that integrate Artificial Intelligence with inclusive education policies and practices. They emphasized establishing implementation guidelines, investing in technological infrastructure, encouraging innovation, and maintaining regular evaluation of AI initiatives to ensure they remain ethical, accessible, and beneficial to diverse learners.

"AI implementation should be supported by clear institutional policies that protect inclusion and educational quality." (Participant 7)

"Innovation becomes meaningful when technology is aligned with the needs of students and teachers." (Participant 10)

The findings demonstrate that strategic innovation enables educational institutions to integrate Artificial Intelligence responsibly while preserving the principles of equity, accessibility, and inclusive education.

DISCUSSION

The findings revealed that adaptive leadership is a fundamental psychological trait that shapes academic leaders' perspectives toward Artificial Intelligence (AI) integration in inclusive education. Participants emphasized that openness to change, flexibility, and a willingness to continuously learn enable leaders to respond effectively to technological advancements while maintaining learner-centered educational practices. These findings suggest that AI integration is influenced not only by technological infrastructure but also by leaders' psychological readiness to embrace innovation and manage organizational change. Academic leaders who demonstrate adaptability are more capable of navigating uncertainty, encouraging faculty engagement, and creating institutional environments that support responsible AI adoption. These findings support Avolio et al. (2014), who argued that leadership in digital environments requires flexibility and the ability to guide organizations through technological transformation. Similarly, Fullan et al. (2020) emphasized that sustainable educational innovation depends on leaders who foster continuous improvement while maintaining collaborative and inclusive learning cultures. The present study extends these perspectives by demonstrating that adaptive leadership functions as a psychological foundation that enables academic leaders to integrate AI while preserving the values of inclusive education.

Another important finding highlighted empathetic decision-making and ethical responsibility as essential psychological traits for the responsible implementation of AI in inclusive education. Participants consistently emphasized that AI should complement rather than replace human judgment and that educational decisions should continue to prioritize learners' diverse needs, equity, accessibility, and well-being. They also recognized the importance of protecting learner privacy, ensuring transparency, and minimizing potential bias associated with AI technologies. These findings are consistent with UNESCO (2023), which emphasized that AI implementation in education should be guided by human rights, ethical governance, transparency, and learner protection. Likewise, Holmes et al. (2019) argued that educational leaders should ensure that AI technologies enhance rather than diminish meaningful teaching and learning experiences. Supporting these perspectives, Floridi and Cowls (2019) proposed that ethical AI governance should be grounded in principles of beneficence, non-maleficence, justice, autonomy, and explicability, ensuring that AI systems promote human well-being and social responsibility. Furthermore, Kasneci et al. (2023) emphasized that educational institutions should establish responsible governance frameworks that encourage critical oversight of generative AI while safeguarding fairness, inclusivity, and academic integrity. Unlike previous studies that primarily focused on AI ethics from technological or policy

perspectives, the present findings demonstrate that empathy and ethical responsibility are psychological characteristics that directly influence leadership decisions regarding AI integration within inclusive educational settings.

The study further identified collaborative leadership, continuous learning, and strategic innovation as critical factors that strengthen institutional readiness for AI integration. Participants emphasized that successful implementation requires collaboration among administrators, faculty members, information technology specialists, students, and other educational stakeholders. They also highlighted the importance of continuous professional development and strategic planning to enhance AI literacy, support evidence-based decision-making, and establish institutional policies that promote responsible AI adoption. These findings support Zawacki-Richter et al. (2019), who concluded that successful AI implementation in higher education depends on leadership support, institutional readiness, and collaboration among educational stakeholders. Similarly, Luckin and Cukurova (2019) emphasized that educational leaders play a central role in designing AI-enhanced learning environments that integrate technological innovation with sound pedagogical principles. Dwivedi et al. (2023) further argued that organizations adopting AI require leaders who promote continuous learning, strategic innovation, and collaborative governance to maximize the benefits of emerging technologies while minimizing potential risks. Likewise, Crompton and Burke (2023) reported that effective AI integration in higher education depends on institutional leadership that strengthens faculty development, digital competence, and evidence-informed implementation strategies. Chen et al. (2020) similarly emphasized that successful AI adoption in education requires organizational preparedness, leadership commitment, digital competence, and continuous innovation to maximize educational effectiveness while addressing technological and ethical challenges. Collectively, these findings indicate that AI integration becomes more effective when supported by psychologically resilient leaders who encourage collaboration, lifelong learning, and institutional innovation.

A significant contribution of this study lies in its examination of the relationship between the psychological traits of academic leaders and AI integration within inclusive education. Previous research has largely concentrated on AI applications, technology acceptance, digital readiness, and the effectiveness of AI-supported teaching and learning, with comparatively limited attention given to the psychological characteristics that influence leadership decisions during AI implementation. In contrast, the present study demonstrates that adaptive leadership, empathy, ethical responsibility, collaboration, continuous learning, and strategic innovation collectively shape academic leaders' readiness to implement AI while safeguarding the principles of equity, accessibility, and inclusion. These findings broaden existing literature by positioning psychological traits as critical determinants of responsible AI integration rather than treating AI adoption solely as a technological or organizational process. Moreover, the study contributes qualitative evidence from academic leaders, providing a leadership-centered perspective that complements existing research predominantly focused on technological implementation and instructional outcomes.

Overall, the findings underscore that successful Artificial Intelligence integration in inclusive education depends on the interaction between technological innovation and psychologically informed educational leadership. Academic leaders who demonstrate adaptability, empathy, ethical responsibility, collaboration, and commitment to continuous learning are better positioned to guide AI implementation in ways that promote inclusive, equitable, and learner-centered educational environments. As AI continues to transform educational systems, higher education institutions should strengthen leadership development initiatives, establish ethical AI governance frameworks, and provide continuous professional learning opportunities that empower academic leaders to responsibly integrate AI while advancing the goals of inclusive education.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the psychological traits of academic leaders toward Artificial Intelligence (AI) integration in inclusive education. The findings revealed that adaptive leadership, empathetic decision-making, ethical responsibility, collaborative leadership, continuous learning, and strategic innovation are fundamental psychological traits that influence how academic leaders perceive and implement AI within inclusive educational settings. Participants recognized that successful AI integration extends beyond technological adoption and depends on leaders who can balance innovation with ethical governance, inclusivity, and learner-centered decision-making.

The study further emphasizes that responsible AI integration requires academic leaders to cultivate organizational cultures that promote collaboration, continuous professional development, and evidence-informed decision-making while safeguarding equity, accessibility, and the diverse needs of learners. Integrating AI into inclusive education should therefore be guided by strong psychological and ethical leadership to ensure that technological innovations enhance, rather than replace, meaningful human interaction and educational support.

Overall, the findings contribute to the growing body of knowledge on educational leadership and Artificial Intelligence by demonstrating that psychological traits serve as critical drivers of responsible AI integration in inclusive education. The study provides practical insights for higher education institutions in designing leadership development programs, strengthening institutional AI policies, and promoting professional learning initiatives that prepare academic leaders to lead digital transformation while advancing inclusive, equitable, and sustainable educational practices..

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