

Cultural resistance to digital transformation in Vietnamese higher education: Barriers and strategic responses

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Abstract:

Digital transformation in higher education is essential for enhancing teaching quality, administrative efficiency and institutional competitiveness. However, in Vietnam, cultural resistance poses a significant challenge, delaying the adoption of digital technologies in academic settings. This study employs a systematic literature review (SLR), synthesising evidence from peer-reviewed journal articles and relevant policy reports published between 2014 and 2024. The selection process was based on three key criteria: relevance to digital transformation in higher education, focus on cultural barriers and applicability to the Vietnamese or broader Southeast Asian context. Through thematic analysis, the study identifies five core dimensions of cultural resistance: (1) entrenched Confucian educational traditions, (2) hierarchical institutional structures, (3) resistance to role change among faculty, (4) disparities in digital literacy, and (5) institutional inertia. To interpret these factors, the study synthesises three theoretical frameworks - the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), Diffusion of Innovations (DOI), and Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory - into an integrated analytical model that explains how cultural and institutional norms affect digital adoption in Vietnamese higher education institutions (HEIs). The study contributes a conceptual framework for understanding resistance patterns in culturally embedded HE systems and provides strategic recommendations, including leadership engagement, faculty digital training, and culturally sensitive blended learning models. Although theoretical in nature, this research offers a foundational basis for future empirical investigations and policy development, with broader relevance for other Confucian-influenced education systems undergoing digital transformation.

Keywords: cultural resistance, digital transformation, higher education, systematic literature review, Vietnam.

Classification numbers: 2.2, 3.1, 3.3

1. Introduction

Digital transformation in higher education has become a global priority, enabling universities worldwide to enhance teaching quality, institutional efficiency, and academic innovation [1, 2]. However, HEIs face persistent resistance to digital transformation, primarily due to cultural and institutional barriers. Unlike technical challenges such as infrastructure limitations, cultural resistance stems from deep-rooted educational traditions, hierarchical faculty-student dynamics, and institutional reluctance to change [1, 2].

Vietnam's education system is shaped by long-standing educational traditions that emphasise teacher-centred instruction, structured classroom authority, and examination-oriented learning [3]. Faculty members, particularly those accustomed to traditional classroom settings, often view digital teaching methods as a threat to academic rigour, pedagogical authority, and established professional identity [4, 5]. Additionally, low digital literacy among educators, lack of structured training, uneven sharing of digital learning materials, and administrative hesitancy further slow digital adoption [4, 6]. Institutional inertia, reflected in rigid policies and slow bureaucratic

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processes, exacerbates this resistance, making large-scale transformation challenging [1, 4].

Comparative evidence from Asian contexts indicates that Vietnam's digital resistance shares common patterns with other higher education systems but also has distinctive features shaped by local institutional conditions. For example, a comparative study of Singapore and Vietnam shows that perceived usefulness, technical skills, and institutional support influence online learning preferences differently across national contexts [6]. Understanding these regional differences provides valuable insights for Vietnam's digital transformation strategy.

While numerous studies have addressed technical and infrastructural aspects of digital transformation in higher education, relatively few have systematically examined the cultural dimensions of resistance - particularly in Southeast Asian contexts such as Vietnam [4, 6]. This study addresses that gap by integrating established theoretical frameworks to explore how cultural traditions, institutional hierarchies, and digital competencies influence faculty attitudes towards digital adoption.

Given these challenges, this study aims to: Identify key cultural factors contributing to digital resistance in Vietnamese HEIs; Analyse how existing theoretical frameworks (TAM, DOI, and Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory) explain faculty hesitancy toward digital adoption; Examine international higher education experiences to identify potentially relevant lessons for Vietnam's digital transformation; Propose strategic solutions to foster digital readiness and institutional change.

By addressing these research objectives, this study contributes to the broader discussion on digital transformation in higher education, emphasising the importance of culturally responsive strategies.

2. Literature review

The digital transformation of higher education has become a central theme in contemporary educational research, with increasing attention devoted to institutional reform, pedagogical innovation, organisational readiness, and the integration of digital technologies. International studies have primarily concentrated on process optimisation, technological deployment, and institutional barriers. For instance, recent work by K. Gkrimpizi, et al. (2023) [1] systematically classified barriers to digital transformation in higher education institutions,

highlighting organisational, strategic, cultural, and technological challenges. In a similar vein, M. Bond, et al. (2018) [7] examined German higher education and showed that student and teacher perceptions and patterns of digital media use are central to digital transformation. M. Kopp, et al. (2019) [8] further argued that institutional assumptions - such as treating digital transformation as merely an IT responsibility - can prevent deeper organisational change.

Other scholars have addressed process-centric and organisational approaches. L.M.C. Benavides, et al. (2020) [2] reviewed digital transformation in HEIs as an institutional process involving technologies, actors, organisational structures, and change processes. These contributions reflect a growing interest in the managerial and technical dimensions of digital transformation. However, they are less explicit in explaining how socio-cultural values, academic identity, and pedagogical traditions shape resistance among faculty members.

In the Vietnamese context, existing literature remains comparatively sparse and unevenly distributed. Most studies have focused on digital infrastructure, faculty competence, LMS adoption, and institutional readiness. For example, the British Council report on digital transformation readiness in Vietnamese universities [4] provides important evidence on institutional gaps and partnership opportunities. T.S. Hoang, et al. (2022) [9] examined the digital competence of lecturers at universities of education in Vietnam, while B.T. Khoa, et al. (2020) [10] used TAM2 to analyse lecturers' adoption of LMS in Vietnamese universities. H.H. Pham, et al. (2020) [5] also discussed the transition towards e-learning in Vietnamese higher education after COVID-19. However, these works have yet to systematically theorise cultural resistance as a primary, enduring obstacle to digital transformation.

Similarly, international policy analyses have identified digital readiness gaps in HEIs, yet cultural resistance is often mentioned only tangentially, without theoretical elaboration [4, 11]. Existing studies rarely examine how traditional knowledge-transmission pedagogy, limited sharing of digital learning resources, uncertainty about AI ethics, and the digital competence of educational managers interact with faculty resistance in Vietnamese HEIs.

This study seeks to address these gaps by offering a secondary-data synthesis that foregrounds cultural resistance as a central analytical lens. Unlike existing

research that isolates technical barriers or managerial shortcomings, this paper synthesises cultural, institutional, pedagogical, and psychological factors to explain resistance behaviour among Vietnamese faculty and administrators. It contributes an integrated conceptual framework that enables a multidimensional interpretation of digital resistance within culturally embedded educational systems. This approach provides both a theoretical scaffold for future empirical work and a culturally responsive perspective that remains underrepresented in the global literature on digital transformation.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research approach

This study uses secondary data analysis based on an SLR to develop a theoretical understanding of cultural resistance to digital transformation in Vietnamese higher education. Rather than collecting new empirical data, the research synthesises insights from existing academic and policy sources to construct a conceptual framework grounded in current scholarship. The research is guided by four primary questions: What are the key cultural barriers to digital transformation in HEIs?; How do existing theoretical frameworks (TAM, DOI, and Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory) explain resistance to digital change?; What lessons can be drawn from international higher education experiences for addressing cultural resistance in Vietnamese HEIs?; What solutions have been proposed to overcome cultural resistance in higher education?

3.2. Data collection and selection criteria

The study adopts a three-stage process for selecting and analysing literature. First, data collection was conducted through academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, Springer, and ScienceDirect. In addition, reports from UNESCO, the World Bank, and Vietnamese government agencies were included to provide a contextual understanding of digital transformation efforts in Vietnam. Second, inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied to refine the dataset. The review included peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2014 and 2024 that addressed higher education, digital transformation, and cultural or institutional barriers, with particular attention to Vietnam and comparable Southeast Asian contexts. Relevant policy reports from international organisations and government agencies were also included to provide contextual evidence. Exclusion criteria comprised opinion pieces

and other non-academic sources; studies focusing solely on technical barriers without examining cultural or institutional dimensions; and literature unrelated to higher education.

Third, a qualitative content analysis was conducted to extract thematic categories related to cultural resistance. By ensuring rigorous selection criteria, this study maintains a high level of validity and reliability in its findings.

3.3. Thematic analysis and conceptual framework

To analyse the selected literature, the study employs a qualitative thematic analysis approach. This method allows for the identification of recurring patterns, key themes, and theoretical insights regarding cultural resistance to digital transformation. The thematic analysis identified five core dimensions of cultural resistance: entrenched Confucian educational traditions, hierarchical institutional structures, resistance to role change among faculty, disparities in digital literacy, and institutional inertia.

The thematic analysis followed a three-stage coding process. First, open coding was conducted to identify recurring ideas and expressions related to cultural resistance across the selected documents. Second, axial coding was used to group related concepts into broader thematic categories such as pedagogical conservatism, institutional inertia, and digital skill disparities. Finally, selective coding was applied to synthesise the identified categories into a cohesive analytical structure. This structured approach ensures analytical consistency, depth, and traceability.

In addition to thematic coding, this study integrates three theoretical models - TAM, DOI, and Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Framework - to interpret the findings. These models are synthesised into an integrated conceptual framework that explains how perceived usefulness, cultural hierarchy, and peer influence interact to shape faculty attitudes towards digital transformation.

By employing this structured approach, the study provides a theoretically grounded and evidence-based analysis of cultural resistance to digital transformation in Vietnamese higher education.

The literature identification and selection process was guided by the PRISMA 2020 framework [12].

A primary limitation of this study is the absence of empirical data, as the SLR method does not involve direct data collection through surveys or interviews.

However, this approach ensures a broad synthesis of existing knowledge and identifies recurring themes across multiple studies. Future research should consider employing mixed-method approaches, incorporating both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to validate the theoretical insights presented here. Such empirical investigations could provide deeper perspectives on faculty, student, and administrative attitudes towards digital transformation in Vietnamese higher education institutions.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Cultural resistance in Vietnamese higher education institutions: Key themes

Cultural resistance remains a fundamental barrier to the successful implementation of digital transformation in HEIs [1, 2, 4]. While digital technologies promise efficiency, flexibility, and innovation in teaching and learning, their adoption is often met with scepticism and reluctance, particularly in institutions with deep-rooted educational traditions. This section explores key cultural barriers, focusing on traditional teaching methods, academic roles, institutional structures, digital literacy gaps, and cultural values.

One of the primary reasons for resistance is the adherence to traditional teaching methods, which have long been entrenched in Vietnamese higher education. Historically, Vietnamese pedagogy emphasises direct, instructor-led learning, where knowledge is transmitted from teacher to student through lectures, rote memorisation, and standardised examinations [3]. Digital learning environments, which emphasise student-centred learning, active participation, and self-directed study, are often perceived as a departure from this model [5, 13, 14]. Faculty members, particularly those who have spent decades teaching in conventional settings, may view online education and digital platforms as impersonal and less effective than face-to-face interactions. A study by N.T. Pham, et al. (2022) [13] found that lecturers' satisfaction with online teaching was shaped by technology quality, course design, perceived usefulness, and institutional support. T.X.L. Cao (2023) [14] also showed that LMS use in blended learning generates both benefits and practical challenges for teachers and students in a Vietnamese public university. Concerns that digital education compromises the authenticity and rigour of face-to-face instruction further exacerbate this scepticism [5].

Faculty resistance is largely driven by discomfort with shifting pedagogical roles. Many instructors, particularly those trained in traditional lecture-based environments, perceive digital teaching tools as impersonal or even as threats to academic authority. The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI), Learning Management System (LMS), and automated grading systems raises concerns about diminished instructional autonomy or job relevance. Without institutional reassurance and peer support, these anxieties can lead to passive or active opposition to digital initiatives.

Another significant factor influencing the pace of digital transformation in Vietnamese HEIs is institutional structures and administrative processes, which may introduce complexities in the adoption of new technologies. Many HEIs, particularly public universities, operate within hierarchical frameworks, where decision-making follows structured approval processes. While these processes help ensure quality control and policy alignment, they can also extend the time required for integrating digital tools into curricula and administrative operations. As a result, faculty and administrators may struggle to navigate these procedures, which can impact the speed of technological adoption. Institutional support for digital transformation also varies across universities, with some institutions demonstrating strong leadership commitment, while others lack structured governance frameworks and clear mechanisms for sharing digital resources across faculties and departments [4, 9].

A critical factor exacerbating resistance is the lack of digital literacy and readiness among faculty members and administrators. Many educators, particularly older generations, have limited exposure to digital teaching tools and struggle with integrating them into their pedagogy. While younger faculty members tend to be more adaptable, disparities in digital competencies create inconsistencies in technology adoption across institutions [4, 9]. A study by T.S. Hoang, et al. (2022) [9] involving lecturers, managers, training experts, and institutional leaders at universities of education in Vietnam found that digital competence remained uneven and required systematic development. Evidence on LMS adoption in Vietnam also shows that perceived usefulness, ease of use, and social influence affect lecturers' willingness to use digital platforms [10]. These findings highlight persistent disparities in digital readiness that reflect generational, disciplinary, and organisational divides within Vietnamese HEIs. This

digital skills gap not only slows down adoption but also reinforces scepticism about the effectiveness of digital learning, as instructors who struggle with technology often transfer their apprehensions to students.

Beyond institutional and pedagogical factors, Vietnamese cultural values and social norms play a defining role in shaping attitudes towards digital transformation. Vietnam's educational culture emphasises respect for authority, hierarchical relationships, and structured learning. In this context, educational innovation that challenges established norms is often met with scepticism. Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Framework (2001) [15] identifies Vietnam as a country with high power distance, meaning that deference to authority figures is deeply ingrained in academic settings. As a result, faculty members may hesitate to experiment with digital tools unless formally endorsed or mandated by institutional leaders.

4.2. Theoretical perspectives on resistance to digital transformation

Resistance to digital transformation in HEIs can be understood through various theoretical frameworks that explain how individuals and organisations respond to technological change. Among these, the TAM, DOI Theory, and Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Framework provide critical insights into why faculty members and institutions hesitate to embrace digital technology. Each framework highlights different aspects of resistance, ranging from personal attitudes toward technology adoption to broader cultural and institutional influences.

The TAM, developed by F.D. Davis (1989) [16], suggests that an individual's willingness to adopt new technology depends primarily on perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEU). Later developments of TAM also emphasise social influence, facilitating conditions, and intervention mechanisms [17]. From a TAM perspective, faculty members may resist digital technologies when they perceive them as difficult to use or of limited usefulness. Recent empirical work applying TAM in Vietnamese universities found that perceived usefulness significantly influenced faculty members' intention to adopt LMS tools [10]. Additionally, some faculty members believe that digital tools do not necessarily improve student engagement or learning outcomes, further reducing motivation to adopt new technologies. Without proper training and institutional incentives, digital transformation efforts are likely to face continued resistance. International evidence on faculty perceptions of online teaching also shows that perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness are central to technology adoption [18].

Evidence from Germany further highlights that teacher and student perceptions are decisive in shaping digital transformation in higher education [7].

The DOI Theory by E.M. Rogers (2003) [19] explains how technology adoption occurs within organisations. According to DOI, individuals adopt innovations at different rates, classified into five categories: innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards. In Vietnamese higher education, faculty members who are early adopters may readily integrate digital tools, while the late majority and laggards require significant persuasion and institutional support. DOI also emphasises the role of social influence and perceived relative advantage, meaning that if faculty members observe peers successfully utilising technology, they may be more inclined to follow. However, many Vietnamese universities lack structured mentoring programmes to encourage peer adoption, slowing the overall diffusion process.

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Framework provides another perspective on resistance, particularly in the Vietnamese context, where relatively high power distance may shape faculty attitudes towards institutionally endorsed change [15]. In hierarchical academic environments, faculty members may hesitate to experiment with digital teaching methods unless explicitly endorsed by senior administrators.

The interaction between these three frameworks highlights that digital resistance in Vietnamese HEIs cannot be attributed to a single factor. Faculty members may resist due to individual perceptions of usefulness (TAM), lack of peer influence (DOI), or broader cultural norms (Hofstede). Addressing these barriers requires targeted interventions that align with institutional culture while leveraging faculty training, leadership support, and structured policy changes to facilitate a smoother transition into digital education.

4.3. Lessons from global digital transformation in higher education

Examining global experiences in digital transformation provides valuable insights for addressing cultural resistance in HEIs. Many countries have successfully integrated digital technologies into their higher education systems by implementing strategic policies, investing in faculty training, and fostering a digital culture among educators and students. By learning from these examples, Vietnamese HEIs can develop more effective approaches to overcoming institutional and cultural barriers to digital transformation.

One of the key lessons from international HEIs is the role of government policies and national strategies in driving digital transformation. International evidence suggests that digital transformation requires more than technology procurement; it also requires governance, equity, teacher preparation, and evidence-based policy design [11]. In the United Kingdom (UK), frameworks such as the Jisc digital capabilities model have helped higher education institutions systematically conceptualise digital capability in terms of digital proficiency, information and media literacies, communication and collaboration, digital creation, digital learning, and digital identity [20]. These cases highlight the importance of structured policies, government support, and long-term strategic planning in fostering digital adoption in HEIs.

Another important lesson from global experiences is the emphasis on faculty training and digital literacy development. Resistance to digital transformation often stems from faculty members' lack of confidence in using digital tools and their perception that technology undermines traditional teaching methods. Professional development should therefore include hands-on training, peer mentorship, and sustained pedagogical support rather than one-off technical workshops. The Jisc framework is useful for designing tiered digital capacity programmes [20], while Beetham and Sharpe's work on digital pedagogy emphasises that technology integration must be grounded in learning design rather than tool adoption alone [21]. For Vietnamese HEIs, a structured approach to continuous professional development and faculty support will be essential in overcoming digital scepticism.

Global best practices also emphasise the importance of student-centred digital learning environments. Digital transformation is most effective when students are actively involved in shaping their digital learning experiences rather than treated as passive recipients of technology. Comparative evidence from Singapore and Vietnam shows that students' and educators' online learning preferences are influenced by perceived usefulness, digital skills, and contextual support [6]. Broader research on students' everyday engagement with digital technology in universities also cautions that usefulness depends on how technologies are embedded in authentic learning practices [22]. Vietnamese universities can adopt similar strategies by incorporating interactive digital content, fostering student collaboration on

digital platforms, and encouraging feedback-driven improvements in digital learning environments.

A frequently overlooked aspect of digital transformation research is the student perspective. While much of the literature focuses on faculty and administrative challenges, students play a critical role in either accelerating or resisting digital adoption. Vietnamese evidence on students' adoption of e-learning during COVID-19 shows that behavioural intention and facilitating conditions shaped students' acceptance of e-learning in an emergency context [23]. At the same time, international policy analysis warns that digital technology can widen inequality if access, affordability, privacy, and teacher support are not adequately addressed [11]. To ensure an inclusive transition, universities should implement policies such as providing affordable digital devices, offering free campus-wide internet access, and developing user-friendly digital learning platforms. Addressing student concerns is essential to creating a more comprehensive and sustainable digital transformation strategy.

A critical factor in successful digital transformation is the development of a robust technological infrastructure. Evidence from German higher education indicates that digital transformation depends on how students and teachers perceive and use digital media, not simply on whether infrastructure exists [8]. International guidance also stresses that infrastructure planning must be aligned with pedagogical purpose, equity, data governance, and system-level support [11]. Vietnamese HEIs can learn from these insights by advocating for government-supported IT infrastructure investments, ensuring stable internet access, and using AI-driven tools only where they demonstrably enhance digital pedagogy and academic integrity.

By drawing on these international lessons, Vietnamese HEIs can accelerate digital adoption and address cultural resistance more effectively. Key takeaways include the importance of national digital policies, faculty training programmes, student-centred digital learning, and investments in technological infrastructure. These insights highlight the need for a systematic, well-supported approach to digital transformation, ensuring that universities in Vietnam can adapt to global trends while maintaining educational quality and accessibility. A summary of key cultural barriers and corresponding strategies is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of cultural barriers and strategic responses.

Cultural barrier	Strategic response
Confucian-rooted traditional pedagogy	Blended learning models that respect existing teaching norms
Hierarchical institutional structures	Top-down leadership commitment and change management frameworks
Faculty role anxiety and fear of loss of authority	Faculty autonomy, digital innovation grants, and peer mentoring
Digital literacy disparities	Tiered digital training programs and microcredentials
Institutional inertia and fragmented policy environment	Institutional digital strategies, infrastructure investment

Source: Author's synthesis based on the reviewed literature.

4.4. Overcoming cultural resistance: Proposed solutions

To address cultural resistance to digital transformation in Vietnamese HEIs, a comprehensive strategy is required, incorporating leadership commitment, faculty training, student engagement, and infrastructural improvements. Lessons from international best practices suggest that a multi-dimensional approach is essential to overcoming institutional inertia and fostering digital adoption.

4.4.1. Fostering leadership commitment and change management

Institutional leadership plays a critical role in digital transformation. Universities that demonstrate strong leadership commitment experience higher rates of faculty engagement and smoother transitions to digital education. HEI leaders must clearly articulate a digital vision, ensuring that faculty and staff understand the long-term benefits of technology integration. To facilitate change, institutions should adopt structured change management frameworks such as Kotter's Eight-Step Model [24]. This includes creating a sense of urgency, building guiding coalitions, and institutionalising change through policy and practice. In high power-distance cultures like Vietnam, visible support from senior leadership is especially crucial for reducing cultural hesitancy [15].

4.4.2. Developing digital literacy and capacity - Building programs

A key barrier to digital adoption is insufficient digital literacy among faculty members. To ensure sustainable digital capacity-building, universities should adopt

a phased faculty training strategy over a three-year period. In Year 1, pilot digital pedagogy programmes can be implemented in digitally mature faculties (e.g., STEM departments). In Year 2, the training should be expanded university-wide with tiered tracks (basic-intermediate-advanced), tailored by age group and department needs. In Year 3, institutions should conduct impact assessments and refine training content based on feedback and evolving technologies. Training content should go beyond technical operation to include digital pedagogy, learning-material sharing, data privacy, academic integrity, and ethical use of AI in teaching and assessment [20, 25].

Faculty deans should oversee programme implementation, supported by IT departments and Centres for Teaching and Learning. Funding should be secured through a blended model involving Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) grants, private EdTech partnerships, and international donors (e.g., World Bank, ADB). Incentives such as internal certification or salary progression can encourage participation.

4.4.3. Aligning digital strategies with cultural norms

Cultural alignment is crucial in overcoming resistance to digital transformation. In Vietnam, where Confucian values emphasise hierarchy and structured learning, institutions must gradually introduce digital changes while respecting existing academic traditions. Blended learning is particularly effective, allowing continuity of face-to-face interaction while integrating digital enhancements. Furthermore, universities can leverage collectivist cultural values by promoting teamwork in digital projects, encouraging departmental digital committees, and creating shared learning goals.

4.4.4. Enhancing institutional policies and infrastructure support

A clear digital policy framework is essential to guide universities through transformation. Institutions should establish comprehensive digital policies that outline standards for technology integration, faculty support mechanisms, and student engagement strategies. Financial and infrastructural constraints are among the most cited obstacles in Vietnamese HEIs [4]. International policy evidence also highlights that

digital technology in education must be appropriate, equitable, scalable, and sustainable rather than adopted for its own sake [12]. Universities can pursue a hybrid investment strategy combining public funding, private EdTech partnerships, and international development assistance. To ensure feasibility, a phased implementation model is recommended - starting with pilot programmes in digitally ready faculties or urban universities, then gradually scaling nationwide based on lessons learned. A preliminary cost-benefit analysis (CBA) for each proposed intervention can assist institutional planners in prioritising investments.

A clear implementation roadmap is also required for infrastructure upgrades. Short-term actions (within 12-18 months) may include expanding campus-wide internet access and adopting cloud-based LMS platforms. Mid-term investments (within 3-5 years) should prioritise smart classrooms, AI-driven learning analytics, and cybersecurity. Infrastructure planning should be led by Vice Rectors for Administration, in consultation with IT units and Finance departments, and coordinated with national digital education initiatives.

4.4.5. Encouraging faculty autonomy and pedagogical flexibility

Providing educators with autonomy in technology adoption can reduce perceptions of forced change. Research suggests that faculty members who have the flexibility to choose digital tools that align with their teaching preferences are more likely to adopt them. Offering a range of digital teaching options - rather than mandating a one-size-fits-all approach - allows educators to explore technology at their own pace. Encouraging faculty-driven digital innovation by supporting action research projects and digital teaching experiments can further empower educators. Universities should create technology incubators where faculty members can pilot digital initiatives, share best practices, and refine digital pedagogies in a low-risk environment.

5. Conclusions

The digital transformation of higher education institutions (HEIs) in Vietnam represents a critical step towards modernisation, improving teaching quality, administrative efficiency, and institutional

competitiveness. However, cultural resistance remains a significant challenge, rooted in traditional pedagogical practices, hierarchical institutional structures, digital literacy gaps, and broader socio-cultural values. Addressing these barriers requires a strategic, well-integrated approach that aligns technological advancements with institutional culture and educational norms.

This study identifies five core dimensions of cultural resistance in Vietnamese HEIs: (1) entrenched Confucian teaching traditions, (2) hierarchical authority structures, (3) resistance to faculty role change, (4) digital skill disparities, and (5) institutional inertia. These barriers are shaped by both cultural norms and organisational dynamics, complicating the implementation of digital initiatives.

By integrating the TAM, DOI, and Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory, the study contributes a conceptual framework for understanding how these resistance patterns operate in culturally embedded educational systems. This framework offers a theoretically grounded lens through which future empirical research can be conducted.

Strategically, the study recommends multi-level interventions, including leadership-driven change management, tiered faculty development programmes, culturally adaptive digital pedagogy, and infrastructure investment. These approaches must be supported by financial planning and phased implementation to ensure feasibility in resource-constrained contexts.

Although this study is conceptual in nature, it lays the groundwork for future empirical validation. Subsequent research should employ mixed-methods designs, including large-scale faculty and student surveys, semi-structured interviews, and institutional case studies, to examine how cultural resistance manifests across different university contexts.

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