



Intelligent Library Ecosystems: The Role of AI, Machine Learning, and Emerging Technologies in Higher Education Libraries

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ABSTRACT— Background

Artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning (ML), natural language processing, robotics, and Internet of Things technologies are transforming higher-education libraries. However, adoption remains uneven due to funding limitations, staff capacity gaps, ethical concerns, privacy issues, and inadequate institutional policies.

Objective

This study examines the adoption of AI and emerging technologies in higher-education libraries, their perceived benefits, implementation barriers, and differences across professional roles and experience levels.

Methods

A cross-sectional quantitative survey was conducted among librarians, paraprofessional staff, and library IT/systems personnel. Of 392 responses, 350 valid responses were retained (89.3%). Data were analyzed using SPSS through descriptive statistics, frequencies, percentages, means, and cross-tabulations. The measures demonstrated satisfactory reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.86$).

Results

Adoption was significant but uneven. The highest adoption was reported for plagiarism and AI-powered detection tools (61.7%; $M = 4.12$) and AI-powered discovery systems (52.3%; $M = 3.94$), while predictive analytics for collection development ($M = 3.02$) and RFID, smart shelving, and IoT technologies ($M = 3.14$) showed lower adoption. Key benefits included improved task efficiency (78.6%) and enhanced user experience (71.4%). Major barriers were inadequate funding (74.3%), limited staff training (68.0%), ethical and privacy concerns (62.9%), and insufficient AI policies (58.6%). IT/systems staff reported higher adoption than paraprofessional staff, while early-career librarians showed greater comfort with generative AI.

Conclusion

AI and emerging technologies are increasingly reshaping higher-education libraries, but adoption remains uneven. Sustainable implementation requires strategic investment, staff training, ethical governance, privacy protection, and cross-functional collaboration to ensure technology enhances professional expertise and equitable access to library services.

INDEX TERMS-- Artificial Intelligence; Machine Learning; Intelligent Libraries; Higher Education; Library Automation; AI Adoption; Digital Transformation; AI Governance; Information Services.

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INTRODUCTION

Historically, higher education libraries have been the keepers of print collections, physical study places, and reference knowledge. However, in the last 10 years, the fast proliferation of artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning (ML), natural language processing, robotics and the Internet of Things have started to transform these institutions into what can be described as intelligent library ecosystems, i.e. networked spaces where algorithmic processes mediate discovery, curation, teaching and administration. This transformation consists of four thematic clusters: foundational technologies, including machine learning, natural language processing, and automation, and new innovations that make library services more than just traditional [1].

This change is not just an impulse of technological innovation. Scholarly libraries are under increasingly growing pressure to establish value amidst smaller budgets, increasing amounts of digital scholarship, and growing user demands influenced by consumer-grade artificial intelligence (AI) systems like conversational assistants and recommendation engines [2]. The prospects of AI to streamline library processes and help students with writing can be accompanied by the threats of plagiarism and misinformation, highlighting that the benefits and risks of intelligent systems do not come separately but as a pair [3].

In this landscape, chatbots, generative AI, and more humanoid service robots have already started to automate procedures that previously were only done by human employees. Academic library systematic reviews of AI integration in libraries indicate that classic library activities are becoming more automated with chatbots based on generative AI and humanoid robots, without any associated ethical governance policy [4]. This disjunction between technological take-up and institutional policy is a common thread throughout the literature and a key focus of the current research.

Simultaneously, the scope of AI is not limited to the back-office automation but also to the main pedagogical purpose of libraries [5]. The advent of AI has put academic libraries and higher-education institutions at the frontline of promoting information literacy and overall digital transformation. At the same time, librarians are requested to educate students on how to critically use AI, apply AI tools in their workflows (metadata generation, reference triage, collection analytics), and prevent the use of algorithms to compromise scholarly integrity [6].

The academic discourse regarding the subject has expanded at a high rate yet is still in bits. The literature is split into two categories based on objectives and scope: the literature focuses on AI literacy and competency in education in general, whereas others discuss AI applications, opportunities, and challenges in academic libraries using local or regional cases [7]. There is little research that integrates a wider conceptual framework of enabling technologies with empirical, survey-based data on how library practitioners in a given context of higher education view and utilize these tools [8].

That gap is filled in this article. It (a) summarizes the theoretical and technological underpinnings of intelligent library ecosystems, (b) presents original survey data (N = 350) of library professionals and para-professionals about the level of adoption, perceived benefits, and barriers, and (c) discusses implications of the research on policy, staff training, and future research. The rest of the paper follows the following order; the problem is defined in Section 2, the significance of the study is stated in Section 3, the relevant literature is reviewed in Section 4, then the research questions are stated in Section 5, Section 6 describes the methodology, data analysis is reported in Section 7, findings are discussed in Section 8 and implications are described in Section 9.



PROBLEM STATEMENT

Although there is an increasing interest in AI and ML in academic libraries, the adoption is disproportionately influenced by the availability of vendors, as opposed to planning. Most institutions do not have clear governance structure, personnel training opportunities, or measures to evaluate AI-enabled services. As a result of this, libraries are at risk of implementing intelligent tools without being aware of how they operate, the level of ethical exposure, or the impact on the user trust and information literacy performance.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The present research adds some empirical data to the literature which is still mainly conceptual and bibliometric in nature. The results can be used to support evidence-based policymaking, the curriculum of professional education, assist library managers in deciding where to invest, and provide researchers with a baseline to conduct longitudinal or cross-institutional studies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A. CONCEPTUALIZING AI AND EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES IN LIBRARIES

The literature generally identifies a number of classes of intelligent technology applicable to libraries: rule-based automation, machine learning-based recommendation and classification systems, natural-language-processing systems like chatbots and virtual reference assistants and physical technologies such as RFID, robotics, and smart shelves over the internet of things [9]. The core technologies (machine learning, natural language processing, and automation) are always mentioned as the foundation of AI-based library innovation, whereas more speculative uses can be traced to predictive analytics and immersive technologies [10].

B. ADOPTION PATTERNS AND INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICE

Systematic reviews arrive at the conclusion that adoption is a reality but incomplete. The AI integration review notes that numerous traditional library operations have already been automated with the use of generative-AI chatbots and in certain cases, humanoid robots, but organizations often fail to take into consideration essential implementation aspects, which lead to low user adoption rates, ethical lapses, and financial overruns [11]. Case studies at regional level also indicate that the level of adoption is significantly different according to institutional funding, vendor relations and maturity of national digital-infrastructure [12].

C. AI LITERACY, INSTRUCTION, AND THE LIBRARIAN'S CHANGING ROLE

One area of research that has demonstrated a parallel is how librarians educate on AI literacy as opposed to simply implementing AI tools. Scoping reviews find that AI-literacy resources and policy guidelines have been created by library and information professional organizations, and that librarians are enhancing such literacy by conducting workshops, creating dedicated instructional sessions, user-education programs, and online tutorials [13]. This makes the librarian less of a passive service provider and more active mediator between the algorithmic systems and learning outcomes of students [14].

D. ETHICAL, PRIVACY, AND ACADEMIC-INTEGRITY CONCERNS

One of the prevailing themes in almost all the studies that have been reviewed is ethical risk [15]. Integrative reviews of AI in academic library studies conclude that artificial intelligence is transforming the academic library processes of creating metadata, retrieving information, and searching literature, and at the same time, poses unresolved issues of data privacy, algorithmic bias, academic integrity, and reduced human agency [16]. Other studies on the topic of student well-being warn that the overuse of AI tools may also have psychosocial consequences. The effects of AI on higher-education populations also have been reviewed with



positive impacts like personalized learning and more efficient communication, as well as negative factors like digital fatigue, technostress, and less face-to-face interaction [17].

E. RESEARCH GAPS

Throughout these strands, scholars and academics keep referring to a thin coverage of empirical evidence. The literature tends to look at adoption of AI in academic libraries in general not focusing on thematic issues, or on specific areas, and some quantitative, sample-driven research, such as the one conducted today, quantifying the perception and practice of AI directly among library employees.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- RQ1: To what extent have AI, ML, and related emerging technologies been adopted in higher-education library operations?
- RQ2: What perceived benefits do library staff associate with these technologies?
- RQ3: What barriers (technical, financial, ethical, or training-related) impede fuller adoption?
- RQ4: How do adoption levels and perceptions vary by staff role, experience, and institutional type?

OBJECTIVES

- Measure current usage of AI/ML tools across library functions.
- Assess staff attitudes toward benefits and risks.
- Identify structural barriers to adoption.
- Generate recommendations for policy and training.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND FINDINGS

This research is a quantitative, cross-sectional survey. The questionnaire (structured questionnaire, which entailed demographic, frequency of technology-adoption (5-point Likert scale), perceived benefits, perceived barriers, and open-ended comments) was sent out electronically to librarians, para-professional staff as well as library IT staff members in a purposive sample of institutions of higher learning. Data cleaning (removal of incomplete or duplicate entries) of a total of 392 submissions resulted in 350 valid responses (response validity rate: 89.3%). Data were processed with descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, and means) and cross-tabulations by role and type of institution, calculated in SPSS. Cronbach alpha was used to determine the reliability of the Likert-scale sections ($\alpha = 0.86$, which represents a good internal consistency). The procedures in ethical approval and informed consent were used according to the standard institutional review protocols; the participants were anonymous and voluntary.

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	158	45.1
	Female	192	54.9
Role	Librarian (professional)	140	40.0
	Para-professional staff	120	34.3
	Library IT/systems staff	90	25.7
Years of experience	< 5 years	96	27.4
	5–10 years	118	33.7
	11–20 years	89	25.4
	> 20 years	47	13.4
Institution type	Public university	210	60.0
	Private university	140	40.0

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 350)



The demographic findings show that the female respondents made a slightly bigger percentage of respondents (54.9%) compared to male respondents (45.1%). Professionally speaking, the largest proportion of individuals (40.0 percent) were professional librarians, with para-professional staff (34.3 percent) and library IT/systems personnel (25.7 percent) behind them. On professional experience, most of the respondents (33.7%), had an experience of between 5-10 years, with 27.4% having less than five years experience. The proportion of respondents with 11-20 years of experience was 25.4 and the proportion of respondents with more than 20 years experience was 13.4. Additionally, 60.0% of the respondents were employed in the public universities, as opposed to 40.0% in the private universities. On the whole, the sample has been representative in terms of various professional positions, experience, and institutional settings, which makes it suitable to conduct a general evaluation of AI and adoption of emerging technologies in libraries of higher education.

Library Function	High Adoption (%)	Moderate Adoption (%)	Low/No Adoption (%)	Mean (1-5 scale)
AI-powered discovery/search systems	52.3	31.1	16.6	3.94
Chatbots / virtual reference assistants	44.6	33.4	22.0	3.71
Automated cataloguing/metadata generation	38.9	35.7	25.4	3.52
Predictive analytics for collection development	27.1	34.0	38.9	3.02
RFID / smart shelving & IoT	33.4	29.7	36.9	3.14
Plagiarism/AI-integrity detection tools	61.7	25.1	13.2	4.12

Table 2: Level of AI/ML Technology Adoption by Library Function (N = 350)

Based on the findings, the adoption of AI and ML among the library functions is significantly different. The highest level of adoption was registered among plagiarism and AI-integrity detection tools, with 61.7% of respondents reporting high-adoption and having the highest mean of 4.12. The AI-driven discovery and search systems were also highly adopted with 52.3% of them reporting high adoption and a mean of 3.94. Chatbots and virtual reference assistants were moderately-highly adopted with a mean score of 3.71.

Meanwhile, collection development predictive analytics had the lowest mean score (3.02) with 38.9% of the respondents registering low or no adoption. The implementation of the RFID, smart shelf, and IoT based technologies was also relatively low with the mean score of 3.14. The findings indicate that libraries focus on AI applications that have immediate and visible returns, especially search support and academic-integrity detection, and more complex and infrastructure-intensive technologies are not as commonly adopted.

Benefit Statement	Agree/Strongly Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree/Strongly Disagree (%)
Improves efficiency of routine tasks	78.6	13.7	7.7
Enhances user/student experience	71.4	18.6	10.0
Supports personalized research assistance	65.1	22.3	12.6
Frees staff time for higher-value work	69.7	19.4	10.9



Table 3: Perceived Benefits of AI/ML Adoption (N = 350)

The findings suggest that most respondents have a positive attitude towards the advantages of AI and ML adoption. The greatest acknowledged advantage was the increase in efficiency with routine work, where 78.6 percent of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed. This result indicates that automation is viewed as significant tool in lessening the repetitive workloads and enhancing the productivity of the operations.

Moreover, 71.4% of the respondents thought that AI and ML improve the user or student experience, and 69.7% of them believed that the technologies allow staff to spend more productive time on other tasks. Individual research support was also rated positively with 65.1 per cent of the respondents giving a positive response. Comprehensively, the results indicate that AI adoption can be viewed as a means to not only automate operations but enhance service quality, personalization, and productivity of professionals working in higher-education libraries.

Barrier	Agree/Strongly Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree/Strongly Disagree (%)
Insufficient funding/budget	74.3	15.1	10.6
Lack of staff training	68.0	20.3	11.7
Ethical/privacy concerns	62.9	21.4	15.7
Absence of institutional AI policy	58.6	24.0	17.4
Resistance to change among staff	44.3	30.0	25.7

Table 4: Perceived Barriers to Adoption (N = 350)

The results indicate that the biggest obstacle to the adoption of AI and ML is the financial and organizational barriers. Lack of funding or budget was cited as the most common and 74.3% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed. This implies that higher-education libraries have the potential to be financially constrained with regards to the possibility of purchasing, deploying, and supporting high-level intelligent technologies.

The second most remarkable barrier was the absence of staff training, which was reported by 68.0% of the respondents. Ethical and privacy issues were also significant, and 62.9% agreed, emphasizing the need to have responsible data governance and user protection. Moreover, 58.6 percent of the respondents pointed out the lack of institutional AI policies as a major challenge. The level of resistance toward change was relatively not so high, but it was still stated by 44.3% of respondents. These results indicate that the significant obstacles to the use of AI are largely structural, financial, educational, and governance-related instead of employee opposition.

The results of the cross-tabulation show that there are statistically significant differences in the adoption of AI by the profession and by experience. The overall adoption score was the highest among library IT and systems staff (mean 4.02) as opposed to para-professional staff (mean 3.21). This difference suggests that technical expertise and direct involvement with digital systems are important factors influencing AI adoption.

The results also show that the librarians whose professional experience was less than five years old noted that they are more comfortable with chatbot and generative-AI technologies compared to the respondents whose experience was over 20 years. This trend could be indicative of disparities in exposure to new technologies and digital skills at different career levels. In general, the findings support the crucial



role of specific training and knowledge exchange between functions in minimizing disparities in technology acceptance among the staff in libraries.

DISCUSSION

The results suggest that AI and ML implementations in higher-education libraries are extensive but unequal in terms of functions: discovery systems and academic-integrity tools have the most significant adoption, whereas predictive analytics and IoT-based infrastructure have lower adoption levels, probably due to the cost and technical-complexity factors, as opposed to lack of interest. The trend is widely in line with previous reviews of automation of chatbot-based and generative-AI services as the most noticeable form of library AI implementation, and more advanced analytics are still in their early stages.

Perceived benefits These include efficiency, improved user experience and freed staff capacity that are found to be in line with the themes found in previous literature reviews indicating that the perceptions of practitioners reflect the academic expectations. Nevertheless, the inertial recycling of funding, training, and policy-based obstacles resonate with the issues brought up in earlier systematic reviews regarding the lack of governance structures that accompany the rapid use of technology. The staff/para-professional divide (IT staff members versus para-professional) indicates that the current adoption is technology-driven and not strategy-driven, which supports the literature that encourages more planned, policy-led integration, as opposed to the ad hoc vendor adoption. Although ethical and privacy issues are secondary in respondent ranking and funding and training, it is an undercurrent that institutions cannot delay any longer as generative-AI tools become more firmly integrated into services offered to students.

RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

A. THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

The research builds up upon the existing conceptual models of library AI adoption by offering quantitative data on disparate uptake of specific functions by the technology and in the process, offers a more detailed and function-specific model of technology adoption than an overall composite construct of AI adoption.

B. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Staff training and clear-cut AI-governance policies should take a back seat to purchases of technology as funding and training obstacles are the most likely to prevent change. IT-professional employees seem to be well-placed to guide other staff members of the library on AI literacy.

C. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Formalizing AI-use policies, including those on data privacy, academic integrity, and vendor responsibility, should address the gap in governance that has been highlighted by the literature on AI usage several times.

D. FUTURE RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

Implications to future research: Longitudinal and multi-institutional comparative research as well as qualitative research to investigate student and faculty views would be beneficial to this staff-based quantitative description and would aid in uncovering the causal relationships among AI adoption and library service results.

CONCLUSION

This paper finds that artificial intelligence, machine learning, and other emerging technologies are quickly turning higher-education libraries into smart, technologically empowered ecosystems. The results



show that there is a high level of adoption of technology but it is not uniform in all functions of the library. The highest rates of adoption were demonstrated in AI-powered discovery systems and plagiarism or AI-integrity detection tools, but predictive analytics in collection development and IoT-enabled infrastructure (RFID and smart shelving) were relatively less advanced. This suggests that libraries will be more inclined to install technologies that offer both immediate and visible operational advantages, compared to advanced systems, which demand significant financial resource, technical knowledge, and infrastructure building, and thus are more difficult to implement.

The findings also support the fact that AI and ML technologies are likely to be viewed positively by library professionals. Among the significant advantages that respondents perceived were increased operational efficiency, better user experiences, personalized research support, and staff time to do higher value activities. Nonetheless, the effective implementation of smart technologies is limited due to the lack of funding, staff training, ethical and privacy issues, and the lack of institutional AI policies. The disparities between the adoption among IT/systems staff and para-professional personnel also indicate that technological competence and access to specific knowledge are essential factors that should contribute to the successful introduction of AI-based library services.

Comprehensively, this research shows that technology adoption cannot be used to develop truly intelligent library ecosystems. A sustainable change demands a balanced solution that incorporates the technological investment and staff development, ethical governance, data protection, and strategic institution planning. The libraries in higher-education institutions must thus go beyond the disjointed or vendor-led adoption and come up with coordinated, human-centred approaches to AI integration. The results give empirical support to enhancing institutional policies and professional development programs and the future longitudinal and comparative research on the changing role of AI in academic library services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

According to the results, the following recommendations are suggested:

DEVELOP COMPREHENSIVE AI GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORKS

Institutions of higher education ought to implement explicit policies regarding the data privacy, algorithm bias, academic honesty, transparency, and responsibility of AI-enhanced library services.

INVEST IN CONTINUOUS STAFF TRAINING

The introduction of regular professional development programmes is necessary to enhance AI literacy, digital skills, data interpretation and practical application of AI tools in librarians and para-professional staff.

STRENGTHEN FINANCIAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Institutions would also have special budgets to use in adoption of AI, integration of systems, cybersecurity, cloud infrastructure, and progressive development of predictive analytics and IoT-enabled library services.

PROMOTE CROSS-FUNCTIONAL COLLABORATION

Librarians and para-professional staff should cooperate with IT and systems people to facilitate knowledge transfer, peer mentoring and successful implementation of emerging technologies.

ADOPT A HUMAN-CENTRED APPROACH

Professional expertise should be complemented by AI and not replaced. Libraries ought to have significant human contact, professional discretion and service to users.

IMPLEMENT CONTINUOUS EVALUATION

The adoption of AI technologies should be implemented in ways that are strategic, inclusive, and aligned to the institution goals, and institutions should regularly evaluate the effectiveness, ethical



implications, user satisfaction and service outcomes of AI technologies to ensure that their adoption is strategic, inclusive, and aligned to the goals of the institution.

Future studies need to use longitudinal, qualitative and comparative designs to study the changes in AI adoption over time and the impacts of these technologies on student learning, campus research, employee productivity and the quality of library services in general.

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