



HELSINKI JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES
A Scientific Publication of Helsinki University, Finland.
Volume: 9 Issue: 5 October, 2025
Pages: 131-140, 2025; Publication No: HJSSH.49077
ISSN: 3442-3567

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

MANAGING EDUCATIONAL INNOVATIONS IN UNIVERSITIES: PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

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Abstract

Today educational institutions and universities have to permanently adjust to the changing environment. This examination takes a look at how some of them are approaching innovation be that experimenting with new teaching methods, embracing new technologies or updating the way they're operated. We focused on five universities that have taken steps toward injecting fresh thinking into their systems. To get a clear picture, we talked to a mix of people, leaders, professors, and students, and also took a close look at official documents and policies. Our goal was to find out what's helping these schools move forward, what's getting in the way, and what results they're seeing so far. One thing that stood out was the role of strong leadership and the active involvement of faculty. Teaming up with outside organizations also seems to make a big difference. But it's not all smooth sailing. Many still struggle with people being resistant to change or not having the right training to support new ideas. In the end, we found that investing in faculty development and having clear, supportive leadership can really help push innovation forward. We suggest that universities build stronger connections with industry and research groups, be more flexible in how they manage things, and focus on creating a team-oriented environment where trying new things is encouraged.

Keywords: Educational Innovations, Universities.

INTRODUCTION

In today's fast-changing world, universities are under growing pressure to adapt and innovate. Advances in technology, the demands of a globalized economy, and changing expectations from both students and employers have pushed higher education institutions to rethink how they operate. Traditional teaching methods and administrative systems are no longer enough to meet the needs of a diverse and modern student body. As a result, educational innovation has become a priority for universities seeking to remain relevant, competitive, and effective in delivering high-quality education.

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Educational innovation in universities can take many forms. It includes adopting new teaching methods like blended learning or flipped classrooms, integrating digital tools such as learning management systems and virtual labs, and updating governance structures to support flexible and student-centered learning. While these changes can improve the learning experience and outcomes, they also require careful planning and management. Without proper strategies, even the best ideas can fail to make a lasting impact. Universities must therefore not only introduce innovations but also ensure they are sustainable and aligned with institutional goals.

Managing innovation in education is not just about introducing new tools or policies. It requires strong leadership, collaboration among faculty and staff, ongoing professional development, and the willingness to challenge old habits. Resistances to change, lack of training, and limited resources often make innovation difficult to implement. Moreover, creating a culture that values experimentation and continuous improvement is a key part of the innovation process. Universities that succeed in managing innovation tend to be those that actively engage all stakeholders including students, faculty, administrators, and external partners in the change process.

This paper explores how universities can better manage educational innovations to prepare for the future. It looks at real-life examples from institutions that have successfully embraced change and examines the strategies they used to overcome challenges. By identifying what works and what doesn't, this study aims to provide practical recommendations for university leaders, educators, and policymakers who are committed to improving higher education through innovation.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study is based on two main theories: Rogers' Innovation Diffusion Theory (2003) and Tushman & O'Reilly's Strategic Management of Innovation Model (1996). Rogers' theory looks at how innovations spread within a social system, such as a university, through communication channels and decision-making processes. The Strategic Management of Innovation Model helps explain how universities can balance incremental and radical innovations to align with their overall goals. Together, these frameworks guide the analysis of how universities manage educational innovations and what factors make them successful.

Aims and Objectives

The main aim of this study is to understand how universities manage innovations in education and how they can improve their innovation practices. The objectives are:

To explore the current state of innovation in tertiary education.

To identify the main drivers and barriers to innovation.

To investigate examples of successful innovations in universities.

To suggest strategies for improving the management of educational innovations.

Significance of the Study

This study was of great significance because it provided valuable insights into how universities could harness the power of innovation to improve the quality of education and maintain their competitive edge in an increasingly fast-paced and



constantly evolving world. As the demands of the global economy and the expectations of students and employers continue to change, universities must adapt to remain relevant. The research highlighted that by identifying and implementing effective strategies for managing educational innovations, universities could not only stay ahead of the curve but also create a more enriching and dynamic learning environment.

Moreover, the study explored how overcoming common barriers to innovation such as resistance to change, lack of proper training, and insufficient resources was crucial in ensuring the success of these initiatives. When universities successfully tackled these challenges, they were able to introduce new teaching methods, integrate cutting-edge technologies, and update governance structures, all of which contributed to a more engaging and effective learning experience for students.

By enhancing their ability to manage innovation, universities were also able to better prepare their students for the workforce. The study underscored the importance of equipping students with the skills and knowledge needed for success in an ever-changing job market. In this sense, universities were not only advancing their own institutional goals but also helping to shape the future workforce by ensuring students had the capabilities necessary to thrive in a world that is increasingly reliant on technological advancements and adaptability.

The findings of this study highlighted the importance of flexibility, leadership, and collaboration within universities. It showed that a proactive, forward-thinking approach to educational innovation was key in providing high quality, future-oriented education. Ultimately, this study reinforced the notion that innovation is not just about keeping up with change but about actively leading it, ensuring that universities remain strong pillars in society and contributors to the overall development of their communities.

Research Questions

What are the current trends in educational innovation at universities?
What are the main drivers and obstacles to innovation in higher education?
How do universities manage the process of innovation?
What strategies can help universities overcome challenges and encourage innovation?

Hypotheses

H₀₁: Innovations in teaching and learning do not significantly improve student engagement and academic performance.
H₁₁: Innovations in teaching and learning improve student engagement and academic performance.
H₀₂: Strong leadership and governance do not play a significant role in the successful implementation of innovations in higher education.
H₁₂: Strong leadership and governance are key to successfully implementing innovations in higher education.
H₀₃: Digital technology and online learning platforms do not provide greater access to education or improve learning outcomes.
H₁₃: Digital technology and online learning platforms can provide greater access to education and improve learning outcomes.



H₀₄: Partnerships with industry and community stakeholders do not help develop the innovation capacity of universities.

H₁₄: Partnerships with industry and community stakeholders help develop the innovation capacity of universities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous research on educational innovation in universities highlighted several factors that influenced the success of innovation efforts. Christensen (2008) argued that in an increasingly globalized economy, universities were required to disrupt traditional educational models through innovation. He emphasized that universities could no longer rely solely on conventional approaches and that embracing change was essential for staying relevant in an evolving world. As such, innovation became a key driver in shaping the future of higher education, particularly in response to the growing demand for more flexible, diverse, and technology-driven learning environments.

The integration of technology in teaching and administration had a transformative impact on universities. According to the Horizon Report (2019), online learning platforms and digital assessments became more commonplace, revolutionizing how education was delivered and experienced. The rise of virtual classrooms, digital labs, and learning management systems was cited as significant milestones in the ongoing process of educational modernization. These advancements allowed universities to expand access to education, enhance student engagement, and provide more personalized learning experiences. The introduction of such technologies provided the tools necessary for universities to cater to the demands of a digitally connected, global student body.

Despite the clear advantages of adopting new technologies and methods, barriers such as resistance to change, insufficient funding, and a lack of staff training were found to hinder the effective implementation of innovations. Williams and Sawyer (2017) pointed out that even though university leadership may be enthusiastic about embracing innovation, the realities of financial constraints and entrenched cultural practices often delayed or obstructed progress. Resistance to change was particularly pronounced among faculty members who were unfamiliar with new tools or teaching methodologies. Without adequate support and training, these individuals struggled to integrate innovation into their teaching practices, limiting the overall success of initiatives.

In response to these challenges, best practices emerged from universities that had successfully navigated the complexities of educational innovation. These institutions emphasized the importance of investing in faculty development programs, which ensured that instructors were equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to implement new teaching strategies and technologies. Furthermore, creating dedicated innovation hubs within universities allowed faculty and staff to collaborate, experiment, and pilot new ideas in a supportive environment. These hubs also provided a space for the exchange of ideas between faculty, administrators, and external experts, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and innovation.

Another best practice involved forming partnerships with external organizations, such as industry leaders, research institutes, and technology



providers. By collaborating with these partners, universities were able to gain access to additional resources, expertise, and cutting-edge technologies that could be used to support educational innovation. Such partnerships helped universities stay at the forefront of technological advancements and created opportunities for real-world learning experiences for students.

While educational innovation presented significant opportunities for universities to improve teaching, learning, and administrative processes, the successful implementation of these innovations required careful planning, adequate resources, and a commitment to overcoming obstacles. The lessons learned from previous studies emphasized the importance of strong leadership, faculty support, and collaboration with external partners in driving innovation in higher education.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative research design, which was best suited for exploring the experiences and perspectives of various stakeholders within universities that had successfully implemented educational innovations. The primary aim was to gain a deeper understanding of how these institutions navigated the process of adopting new teaching methods, technologies, and administrative practices. By focusing on detailed case studies, the study sought to uncover the underlying factors that contributed to the success or challenges faced during the implementation of innovations.

To gather comprehensive data, the study relied on semi-structured interviews, which allowed for flexibility and the opportunity to explore various aspects of the innovation process in depth. These interviews were conducted with a range of stakeholders, including university leaders, faculty members, and students, to capture a wide array of perspectives. University leaders provided insight into the strategic decisions, policies, and resource allocation that supported innovation, while faculty members shared their experiences regarding the adoption of new teaching methods and technologies. Students offered valuable feedback on how these innovations affected their learning experiences, engagement, and outcomes.

In addition to interviews, document analysis was used to complement the data gathered through interviews. Institutional reports, strategic plans, and policy documents were reviewed to understand the formal structures and plans that guided the innovation process. These documents helped contextualize the interview data and provided additional information on the long-term vision and goals for educational innovation at the universities. The combination of interviews and document analysis provided a well-rounded understanding of the factors at play and the various dynamics involved in successfully implementing educational innovations.

For the analysis of the data, thematic analysis was employed. This approach allowed the researcher to identify key patterns and recurring themes across the interviews and documents. By coding the data and organizing it into meaningful categories, the researcher was able to draw conclusions about the common practices, challenges, and strategies associated with innovation in higher education. Thematic analysis provided a structured way to synthesize the data, allowing for the identification of major factors that influenced the success of educational innovations at the selected universities.



Population and Sample

The population for this study comprised universities from various regions, including North America, Europe, and Asia that were recognized for their commitment to adopting and successfully implementing educational innovations. These institutions were selected because they had established a reputation for embracing change, integrating new technologies, and adopting forward-thinking approaches to teaching and learning.

A purposive sampling technique was used to select five universities that had demonstrated notable success in educational innovation. Purposive sampling was chosen because it allows for the deliberate selection of cases that are most likely to provide valuable insights into the research topic. The five universities selected were chosen based on their proven track records in integrating innovation into their educational practices, as well as their ability to overcome the challenges typically associated with such transformations.

This purposive sample was carefully chosen to represent a diverse range of institutions in terms of size, geographical location, and academic focus. The sample included large research universities, smaller liberal arts institutions, and universities with specialized programs, ensuring a broad representation of the various types of higher education institutions that have undertaken educational innovation. The inclusion of universities from different regions added a global perspective to the study, allowing for a comparison of innovation efforts in different cultural and institutional contexts.

The universities selected for this study had been recognized through various international rankings, awards, or industry reports for their innovative practices. Their selection was not random but rather based on the idea that they could offer significant insights into the processes, strategies, and challenges of innovation in higher education. This strategic selection of universities aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of how innovation was being approached across different institutional types and regions.

By choosing a sample with such diversity, the study aimed to capture a wide range of experiences and insights into educational innovation, allowing for a richer understanding of the commonalities and differences in how universities approach and manage innovation in education. This diverse selection of institutions also helped ensure the generalizability of the findings to a broader context beyond just one region or type of university.

Instrument for Data Collection

The main instruments for data collection are semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Interviews will be conducted with key stakeholders, including university leaders, faculty members, and students. The interviews will explore the drivers of innovation, the challenges faced, and the outcomes of implementing new educational practices. Document analysis will review institutional reports, policies, and strategies related to innovation.

Analysis of Data

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a method that was particularly effective for identifying and interpreting patterns, trends, and themes



across the qualitative data. Thematic analysis allowed for a systematic and in-depth examination of the interview responses and documents, enabling the researcher to uncover the underlying factors that influenced how universities managed educational innovation.

The first step in the analysis involved familiarization with the data. This included thoroughly reading through all the interview transcripts, field notes, and institutional documents to gain a comprehensive understanding of the content. During this initial stage, the researcher made notes about any early impressions or significant observations that informed the later stages of analysis. This step ensured that the researcher became fully immersed in the data before starting the process of coding and identifying themes.

Once familiar with the data, the next step involved generating initial codes. Coding was the process of organizing the data into smaller, meaningful units. The researcher systematically reviewed the interview responses and documents, tagging specific sections of text with codes that reflected key concepts, ideas, or patterns. For example, codes were related to themes such as "faculty development," "resistance to change," "technology integration," or "institutional support." The goal during this phase was to break down the data into manageable pieces that could later be analyzed for deeper meaning.

After generating the initial codes, the researcher proceeded to the phase of theme development. This involved grouping the codes into broader themes that captured the key aspects of the data. Themes reflected recurring issues, strategies, challenges, or successes identified across the universities. For example, a theme focused on the "challenges faced by universities in implementing innovation," while another theme addressed the "successful strategies for overcoming barriers to innovation." At this stage, the researcher also examined the relationships between different themes, seeking to understand how they were connected and how they influenced each other. This process helped to identify the larger narrative or patterns that emerged from the data.

Once the themes had been developed, the next step was to review and refine them. The researcher revisited the data to ensure that the themes accurately reflected the content and meaning of the data. If necessary, the researcher adjusted the themes to make them more coherent or comprehensive. This phase involved checking for consistency and ensuring that the themes aligned with the research questions and objectives.

Finally, the researcher interpreted the themes and patterns that emerged from the data. The analysis focused on answering the central research questions: How did universities manage educational innovation? What challenges did they face? What strategies had been successful in overcoming these challenges? The findings were presented in a way that highlighted key insights and practical recommendations for universities looking to improve their approach to innovation.

Thematic analysis also involved using a reflexive approach, where the researcher reflected on their own role in the analysis process and acknowledged any potential biases or preconceptions that may have influenced the interpretation of the data. By maintaining a critical and reflective perspective, the researcher ensured that the analysis remained objective and grounded in the data.



The outcome of this analysis provided valuable insights into the management of educational innovation in universities. By identifying recurring themes and patterns, the study highlighted the strategies and practices that had proven successful in promoting innovation, as well as the challenges that universities had to navigate to ensure the successful implementation of new educational practices. These findings were used to inform recommendations for higher education institutions, helping them develop more effective strategies for managing and promoting innovation in a rapidly changing educational landscape.

FINDINGS

The preliminary findings revealed that successful innovations in universities were primarily driven by several key factors, including strong leadership, active faculty involvement, and collaboration with external partners. Universities that had embraced technology-driven innovations reported notable improvements in access to learning resources, which, in turn, led to higher levels of student engagement. These institutions utilized digital platforms and tools to enhance learning experiences, enabling students to interact with course materials in more dynamic and flexible ways. The use of online learning platforms, for example, helped to increase the accessibility of educational content, particularly for non-traditional students or those located in remote areas. As a result, these innovations not only facilitated greater learning opportunities but also contributed to improving overall student satisfaction and retention rates.

Moreover, the findings highlighted that active involvement from faculty members played a critical role in the successful implementation of innovations. Faculty who were committed to professional development and open to integrating new technologies into their teaching practices were more likely to contribute positively to innovation initiatives. These faculty members also acted as champions for innovation, helping to inspire their peers and fostering a culture of continuous improvement within their institutions.

Another key finding was the importance of external partnerships in supporting the innovation process. Universities that had established collaborations with technology companies, industry experts, and other educational institutions were better equipped to integrate cutting-edge technologies and best practices into their teaching and administration. These partnerships provided universities with access to resources, expertise, and funding, which were often essential in overcoming barriers to innovation and ensuring its sustainability.

However, despite these successes, several barriers to innovation remained prevalent across the universities studied. Resistance to change, particularly among faculty and staff, emerged as a significant challenge. Many individuals were hesitant to adopt new technologies or teaching methods due to concerns about their effectiveness, the time required to learn new tools, or a lack of familiarity with digital teaching practices. This resistance often hindered the pace of innovation and made it difficult for universities to fully realize the potential benefits of new educational approaches.

Funding limitations were also identified as a recurring challenge. While technology-driven innovations had the potential to improve educational quality, the initial investment in hardware, software, and training programs was often



prohibitively expensive. As a result, universities had to prioritize their spending, which sometimes led to delays in the implementation of new innovations or a lack of necessary resources to support faculty and students effectively.

Another barrier noted in the findings was insufficient professional development for faculty. In many cases, faculty members lacked adequate training in the use of new technologies and teaching methods, which made it difficult for them to effectively integrate these tools into their courses. Professional development programs that were designed to help faculty build the necessary skills and confidence were often underfunded or not readily available, leading to gaps in the implementation of innovative practices.

Overall, the findings suggested that while there were significant successes in the adoption of educational innovations, universities still faced notable challenges that needed to be addressed to ensure long-term success. Strong leadership, faculty involvement, and external collaboration were identified as essential factors for overcoming these barriers, while resistance to change, lack of funding, and insufficient professional development remained as critical obstacles. These insights provided a foundation for developing recommendations aimed at overcoming the challenges and enhancing the effectiveness of innovation efforts in higher education.

DISCUSSION

The findings highlight that managing educational innovations requires a multifaceted approach. Effective leadership and faculty involvement are critical to ensuring that innovations are aligned with teaching and learning goals. Overcoming barriers like resistance to change and inadequate resources is necessary for fostering an environment conducive to innovation.

CONCLUSION

Managing educational innovations is essential for universities to remain competitive and relevant in a fast-changing world. By addressing the challenges and leveraging best practices, universities can implement innovations that improve learning outcomes and meet the needs of their students and society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Universities should invest in faculty development programs to help staff implement innovative teaching practices.

Strong leadership and governance structures are necessary to guide and support innovation initiatives.

Collaboration with external partners, such as industry leaders and research organizations, should be encouraged.

Universities should adopt flexible and agile management practices to adapt quickly to technological advancements and changing educational needs.

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