

EDITORIAL

Beyond Digital Transformation: Human-Centred Innovative Practices in Education

Higher education is moving beyond a narrow focus on digital transformation towards approaches that place the human dimension at the centre of innovation. Digital technologies including artificial intelligence, online learning platforms, and data-driven systems, have created new opportunities for teaching and learning. However, technology alone cannot transform education. Lasting progress depends on how these tools support meaningful learning, strengthen human relationships, promote inclusion, and address diverse needs of students. Digital transformation should therefore be guided by a human-centred approach that enhances rather than replaces human capabilities and fosters educational innovations that are inclusive, ethical, and responsive to learners as well as teachers (OECD, 2024; Tawil & Miao, 2024; UNESCO, 2025).

Human-centred innovative practices extend beyond the mere adoption of emerging technologies. They encompass pedagogical practices, learning environments, institutional approaches, and collaborative partnerships that position learners and teachers at the centre of educational change. Such approaches are most effective when they enrich learning experiences, strengthen pedagogical practice, foster collaboration, and promote student well-being. A strong commitment to human values and educational purpose is essential to ensure that educational change remains inclusive, ethical, and responsive to the diverse needs of learners, teachers, and the society (OECD, 2024; UNESCO, 2025).

The articles featured in this issue of the *Journal of Innovative Practices in Education (JIPE)* illustrate the diverse ways in which human-centred innovative practices contribute to contemporary education. They highlight approaches that support student well-being and academic success, promote metacognitive learning, enhance digital learning experiences, and adapt teaching strategies to meet the needs of emerging generations of learners. While the articles address different educational contexts and various challenges, they share a common commitment to improving educational experiences through thoughtful and evidence-informed approaches. Collectively, these contributions reinforce the view that meaningful educational progress occurs when change is guided by human needs, inclusive practices, and a commitment to enhancing learning for all.

The first article by Nath et al. titled *Mind over marks: Emotional well-being and academic success among first-generation university students in higher education*, draws attention to the often-overlooked emotional dimensions of learning, by examining the academic and personal experiences of first-generation learners. Its findings reveal that challenges such as impostor syndrome, anxiety, financial hardship, family expectations, social isolation, and a limited sense of belonging constantly influence their academic experiences. The study highlights the protective role of mentorship, social support, academic engagement, and effective coping strategies in fostering resilience and academic success. These findings emphasise the need for universities to develop comprehensive support systems that recognise learners' interconnected psychological, social, and educational requirements and provide equitable opportunities for success. By adopting student-centred approaches that respond to these diverse needs, institutions can

strengthen academic outcomes while supporting learners' overall well-being. Such approaches reflect a human-centred orientation that places learners' experiences and well-being at the heart of educational practice (UNESCO, 2025).

The next article titled *Mindful reading: A Moodle-based approach to metacognitive strategy use in English for Specific Purposes* by Karunarathne illustrates how digital learning environments can be designed to promote deeper learning rather than simply facilitate content delivery. Although the Moodle-based continuous assessments generated consistently high achievement scores, the findings revealed limited differentiation among learners, highlighting the need for assessment designs that better capture variations in learning progress. More importantly, students' reflective responses provided valuable insights into their metacognitive processes, demonstrating the role of planning, monitoring, evaluation, summarising, and note-taking in supporting meaningful and self-regulated learning. The mismatch between high assessment scores and students' confidence levels further suggests that effective assessment should capture not only performance outcomes but also learners' cognitive engagement and self-regulatory abilities. By recommending more challenging assessment tasks and structured reflection within the Moodle LMS, the study demonstrates how digital learning practices can strengthen metacognitive development and enhance learning experiences. These approaches reflect a human-centred perspective by using digital tools to promote deeper engagement, meaningful reflection, and learner growth.

A scoping review titled *Recent trends in utilizing Moodle LMS for digital learning in higher education* presented by Senadheera et al. provides a broader perspective on the role of learning

management systems (LMS) in contemporary education. Synthesising evidence from 67 studies, the review confirms that Moodle LMS can support educational objectives and contribute to high levels of student satisfaction. However, it also identifies ongoing challenges, including limited learner interaction, reduced opportunities for collaborative and peer engagement, and insufficient use of learning analytics to support teachers and students. Importantly, the review highlights that the effectiveness of digital learning depends not only on technological capabilities but also on students' self-regulation, teachers' digital competence, and institutional investment in professional development. These findings emphasise the importance of integrating technology with pedagogical innovation and capacity building to create meaningful, inclusive, and sustainable digital learning environments.

The final article in this issue, a narrative literature review titled *Teaching strategies suitable for Generation Alpha students* presented by Rathnayake and Siriwardena (in Sinhala language), examines how pedagogy can evolve to respond to the changing characteristics, expectations, and needs of contemporary learners. The review highlights that, despite their high digital literacy, Generation Alpha students face challenges related to attention, life skills, and emotional well-being, requiring educational approaches that go beyond traditional teaching methods. It emphasises the need for teachers to develop digital competencies, adopt flexible pedagogies, and integrate innovative approaches such as blended learning, gamification, and learning models that foster critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity alongside social-emotional development. The study also highlights the importance of supportive roles among parents and educational leaders in creating learning environments that balance digital

engagement with student well-being and personal development. By advocating a holistic approach that integrates technology, pedagogy, and human values, the article demonstrates how innovative educational practices can be designed to prepare learners for an increasingly complex future.

Collectively, the articles in this issue of *JIPE* demonstrate that meaningful educational change requires a balance between technological advancement, effective pedagogy, and attention to the diverse experiences of learners (Fullan, 2021; OECD, 2023). They highlight different pathways for improvement, from strengthening support structures for first-generation students and enhancing metacognitive engagement through digital assessment to improving learning management system implementation and adapting teaching approaches for emerging generations of students. Despite their varied contexts, these studies share a commitment to developing more responsive, equitable, and engaging educational experiences.

These contributions reinforce the view that educational innovation is a dynamic process that brings together technological advancements, pedagogical knowledge, and a deep understanding of learner needs (OECD, 2023; UNESCO, 2025). As education continues to respond to technological developments and changing expectations, sustainable progress will depend on practices that are inclusive, ethical, and purposeful. Ultimately, meaningful educational change is most impactful when it strengthens the human dimensions of learning and creates conditions in which all learners can thrive.

We invite you to explore the contributions in this issue and encourage researchers, educators, and practitioners to continue advancing innovative practices that enrich education and respond to the evolving needs of learners.

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