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Ethical Artificial Intelligence Leadership for Multilingual and Intercultural Language Education in Developing Countries: A Six-Dimension Framework

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Abstract

Artificial intelligence (AI) is entering university governance, teaching, and language education across developing countries, yet ethical-leadership scholarship remains concentrated on well-resourced, digitally mature institutions. This paper reports a PRISMA-informed, PICO-guided literature review examining how ethical AI leadership can be theorized for multilingual and intercultural language education in developing-country higher education, with a conflict-affected higher-education setting in South Asia as an illustrative case. Fifty-six sources met inclusion criteria after a staged identification, screening, and eligibility process conducted by a single reviewer using open academic search engines and publisher platforms rather than subscription-indexed databases. Thematic synthesis identified four recurring barrier domains infrastructural access, institutional governance, socio-cultural capacity, and linguistic/data equity and three leadership theories (transformational, distributed, and ethical leadership) that jointly inform a proposed six-dimension conceptual framework for ethical AI leadership. The review finds that AI tools trained predominantly on high-resource languages risk marginalizing low-resource languages such as Dari and Pashto, and that governance models assuming dedicated oversight offices do not transfer to capacity-constrained institutions. The paper contributes a context-sensitive, evidence-informed framework and a transparent, reproducible search protocol for future empirical validation in developing-country and conflict-affected higher-education settings.

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INTRODUCTION

Artificial intelligence (AI) has moved from a peripheral administrative tool to a force reshaping teaching, governance, and strategic decision-making across higher education worldwide (Wang et al., 2024; Williamson, 2024). Predictive analytics, adaptive learning platforms, and generative AI tools such as ChatGPT are being adopted for admissions, advising, assessment, and language instruction, prompting universities to develop AI governance frameworks grounded in transparency, fairness, and human oversight (UNESCO, 2021; Bond et al., 2024).

Much of this literature, however, is written from the vantage point of well-resourced, digitally mature institutions in North America, Europe, and East Asia (Khairullah et al., 2025; Obied & Haj Ali, 2026), while empirical accounts from developing countries remain comparatively scarce and fragmented across disconnected regional case studies (Henadirage & Gunarathne, 2025; Modern Diplomacy, 2025). This asymmetry is consequential precisely because AI governance advice generated in high-capacity settings tends to assume institutional resources dedicated offices, stable connectivity, continuous international partnership that are the exception rather than the norm in much of the developing world.

This gap is especially consequential for multilingual and intercultural language education. Language programmes depend on nuanced, culturally situated judgments about competence, identity, and communication (Byram, 2021; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013), yet the natural language processing (NLP) systems underlying many AI tools are trained overwhelmingly on high-resource languages, leaving languages spoken across much of the developing world comparatively under-served (Stanford HAI, 2025). When AI tools that perform unevenly across languages are introduced into multilingual instruction without deliberate ethical leadership, they risk reproducing linguistic and cultural marginalisation rather than supporting the intercultural communicative competence that language education aims to build (Baker, 2024; Fürst & Grin, 2023).

Evidence from across the developing world illustrates the scale of the challenge but remains fragmented rather than synthesised. Studies of generative AI adoption in Sri Lankan higher education identify policy absence, unreliable tool performance, and limited academic expertise as central barriers (Henadirage & Gunarathne, 2025), while broader Global South commentary points to infrastructural cost, electricity and connectivity gaps, and a shortage of locally trained AI talent as structural constraints on adoption (Modern Diplomacy, 2025). These accounts rarely engage with the intercultural-language-education literature, and the language-education literature on AI-mediated communicative competence (Baker, 2024; Eren, 2024) rarely engages with institutional AI-

governance theory. The two bodies of scholarship have therefore developed largely in parallel.

Kabul University, Afghanistan's oldest and largest public university, represents an extreme case within this spectrum: decades of conflict, a rapid 2001–2021 expansion of English-medium and multilingual instruction, and a post-2021 political environment that has banned women from higher education and narrowed international partnership combine to make generic, developed-country AI-governance advice largely inapplicable (The Diplomat, 2024; Wali & Zafir, 2022; Alamyar, 2021).

The research gaps this paper addresses are therefore threefold. First, ethical AI-leadership literature has developed largely independently of multilingual and intercultural language-education scholarship, and in particular from the concept of language intelligence the capacity of institutions, systems, and leaders to recognize, evaluate, and respond to linguistic diversity as a governance condition rather than a peripheral pedagogical concern that motivates this journal's own conceptualization of the field (Polat et al., 2025; Nguyen et al., 2023). Second, existing AI-governance frameworks assume institutional conditions stable infrastructure, dedicated data-governance units, continuous international partnership that do not hold across much of the developing world, and least of all in conflict-affected systems (Gkrimpizi et al., 2023). Third, no synthesis to date systematically maps this literature using a transparent, PRISMA-informed protocol while also situating Afghan higher education within the broader developing-country evidence base rather than treating it as an isolated case. Reading these three gaps through a language-intelligence lens is what distinguishes this review from generic AI-governance surveys and is why its findings belong specifically within this journal's scope.

The objective of this paper is to conduct a PRISMA-informed, PICO-guided review of ethical AI leadership scholarship and to propose, from that synthesis, a conceptual framework for multilingual and intercultural language education in developing-country higher education, illustrated through the Kabul University context. In pursuit of this objective, the review addresses five research aspects: what barrier and enabler themes recur across the developing-country AI-in-higher-education literature; which leadership theories have been applied to AI governance in higher education, and how they complement one another; how the Kabul University case extends or challenges the barrier profile identified in the wider developing-country literature; what conceptual framework can integrate linguistic equity, distributed governance, and ethical leadership for capacity-constrained institutions; and what theoretical, methodological, and contextual gaps remain, together with the research agenda that follows from them.

This review contributes theoretically by treating linguistic equity as a governance criterion rather than a downstream pedagogical concern; methodologically by documenting a transparent, reproducible open-access search protocol suitable for researchers without subscription-database access; contextually by situating Afghan higher education within the broader developing-country evidence base; and practically by offering a six-dimension framework that institutional leaders in capacity-constrained settings can use as a starting point for governance design.

METHODS

This paper adopts a PRISMA-informed, PICO-guided literature review design (Page et al., 2021; Richardson et al., 1995). It should be described precisely: it follows PRISMA reporting logic (identification, screening, eligibility, inclusion) and structures its search question using the PICO heuristic, but it draws on open academic search engines rather than subscription-based indexed databases (e.g., Scopus or Web of Science), and its aim is conceptual synthesis rather than statistical meta-analysis or bibliometric mapping. This limitation is stated explicitly here, consistent with PRISMA's own transparency requirement, rather than presented as a fully database-indexed systematic review.

The review question used in this study was: In developing-country higher education, how should ethical AI leadership be theorized to support multilingual and intercultural language education? Table 1 operationalizes this question using the PICO framework, adapted from its clinical origin (Richardson et al., 1995) for an educational-leadership synthesis, following precedent for PICO adaptation outside clinical medicine (Richardson et al., 1995; Page et al., 2021).

Table 1. PICO Framing of the Review Question

PICO Element	Operationalization in This Review
Population / Setting	Higher education institutions in developing and conflict-affected countries offering multilingual and intercultural language education (illustrative case: Kabul University, Afghanistan)
Interest (in place of Intervention)	Adoption and governance of AI tools and systems in institutional leadership, administration, and language teaching
Comparison	Higher education institutions and governance literature from high-resource, digitally mature contexts, used as a contrast case
Outcome	Ethical, equitable, and linguistically inclusive AI leadership and governance practices

Framing the review through PICO, rather than a looser keyword description, makes explicit what would otherwise remain implicit: that the Comparison element deliberately holds high-resource-context literature constant as a contrast case rather than excluding it, which is what allows the synthesis below to identify gaps by absence rather than by assumption alone.

Sources were identified through structured searches of open academic search engines and publisher platforms, combining terms for "artificial intelligence," "ethical leadership," "AI governance," "higher education," "multilingual education," "intercultural competence," "developing countries" or "Global South," and "Afghanistan" or "conflict-affected higher education." Table 2 sets out the concept blocks and the sources searched.

Table 2. Search Concept Blocks and Sources Searched

Concept Block	Representative Terms	Sources Searched
AI in institutions	artificial intelligence; AI governance; AI adoption	Frontiers, ScienceDirect, Taylor & Francis Online, MDPI, SAGE, Springer, Wiley, Google Scholar
Leadership / ethics	ethical leadership; strategic leadership; distributed leadership	Same as above
Language education	multilingual education; intercultural competence; plurilingual	Same as above
Context	developing countries; Global South; Afghanistan; conflict-affected higher education	Same as above; institutional/grey sources (UNESCO, Stanford HAI, The Diplomat) for contextual evidence

The four concept blocks in Table 2 were combined with Boolean "AND" logic across blocks and "OR" logic within each block, so that a source needed a plausible match to every block rather than any single one; this combination step, more than the individual terms themselves, is what kept the search focused on the intersection of AI governance, leadership, language education, and developing-country context rather than returning a broader and less relevant AI-in-education literature.

After that, records were screened in three stages, consistent with PRISMA reporting logic (Page et al., 2021): (1) title/abstract screening for topical relevance; (2) full-text or full-content eligibility assessment against the PICO criteria in Table 1, requiring an explicit connection to AI governance, leadership, multilingual/intercultural education, or developing-country/conflict-affected higher education; and (3) final inclusion of sources that met all criteria and offered peer-reviewed, institutional, or otherwise authoritative content. Foundational leadership-theory sources predating the ten-year window (e.g., Bass, 1985; Spillane, 2005; Brown & Treviño, 2006; Richardson et al., 1995) were retained as an explicit

exception because they represent the primary theoretical statements the newer literature itself cites. Figure 1 reports the resulting flow of records.

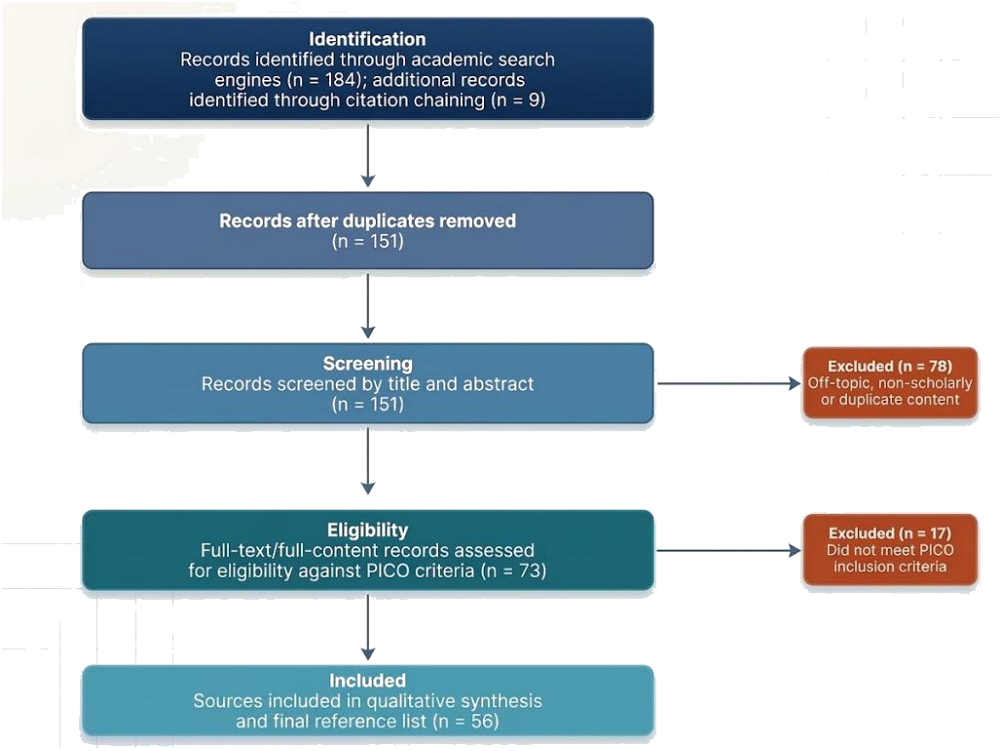


Figure 1. PRISMA-Informed Flow Diagram of the Literature Search Process

The largest single reduction occurs at the eligibility stage, where sources that mentioned AI or higher education only in passing, without an explicit governance, leadership, or language-education link, were excluded, indicating that topical adjacency to AI-in-education is common in the wider literature but a substantive connection to ethical leadership specifically is comparatively rare. Next, for the eligibility criteria, it can be seen in the following table.

Table 3. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Relevance	Explicit connection to AI governance, leadership, multilingual/intercultural education, or developing-country/conflict-affected higher education	Topically unrelated sources; passing mentions of AI with no governance or education link
Publication window	Published within the last ten years (2015–2026)	Older sources, except foundational leadership theory retained as an explicit, stated exception
Source type	Peer-reviewed journal articles; institutional/authoritative reports (e.g., UNESCO, Stanford HAI); credible current-affairs reporting used only for contextual/political facts about Afghanistan	Opinion pieces without evidentiary basis; non-authoritative blogs
Language	English-language sources	Non-English sources not available in translation

The publication-window criterion in Table 3 is deliberately asymmetric: it excludes recent but topically peripheral sources while explicitly retaining older foundational leadership theory, which means the ten-year window functions here as a relevance filter for empirical and applied literature rather than as a blanket recency requirement, and the exception is stated openly rather than left for the reader to infer from the reference list.

Next, fifty-six sources met all eligibility criteria and were retained for thematic synthesis and citation in this paper (see References). Sources were coded across four analytic categories: (1) leadership theory applicable to institutional change; (2) AI governance and ethics principles in higher education; (3) multilingual and intercultural language-education theory; and (4) structural conditions of higher education in developing and conflict-affected countries. Coding was performed by the author through iterative reading and thematic tagging; because a single coder conducted the review, inter-rater reliability could not be calculated, which is reported as a limitation below. The four categories were then synthesized abductively, moving between the literature and the Kabul University context, to derive the conceptual framework presented in Results and Discussion.

A formal, instrument-based quality-appraisal exercise (e.g., MMAT, CASP, or JBI critical appraisal checklists) was not applied to the 56 sources in the current review, and no numerical quality scores are reported. This is stated explicitly rather than omitted, consistent with the review's broader transparency commitment. Source credibility was instead managed through the eligibility criteria in Table 3 restricting inclusion to peer-reviewed journal articles and clearly authoritative institutional or reporting sources which functions as a coarse quality filter but is not equivalent to a scored appraisal.

Further, synthesis proceeded thematically and abductively rather than through statistical meta-analysis or bibliometric software (e.g., VOSviewer, Bibliometrix), consistent with the conceptual-synthesis aim stated in Section 2. One quantitative element that can be reported without fabrication is the temporal distribution of the cited evidence base itself, since publication years are a verifiable property of the reference list rather than a modelled or estimated statistic; this is reported in Figure 2 below.

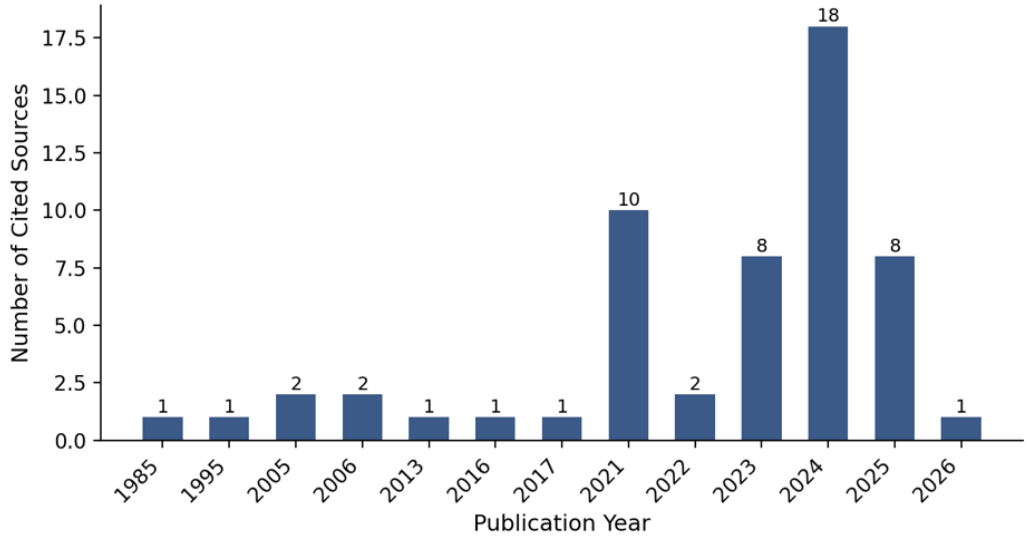


Figure 2. Publication-Year Distribution of the 56 Cited Sources

The distribution is heavily weighted toward 2021–2026 (46 of 54 dateable references, or roughly 85%), consistent with the review's framing of AI-in-higher-education governance as a recently intensifying research area; the small cluster of pre-2015 sources (1985, 1995, 2005, 2006, 2013) corresponds to the foundational leadership-theory citations retained under the exception described in Section 2.3.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The findings show that the adoption of AI in higher education in developing countries is shaped by several interconnected challenges. The most frequently discussed barriers are limited infrastructure and technology, followed by gaps in institutional policies, limited AI literacy, and resistance to technological change. However, the review also highlights an important issue that receives less attention in the broader AI literature: linguistic and data equity, which is particularly important for multilingual education. To address these challenges, the study proposes a framework for ethical AI leadership based on three complementary theories: transformational, distributed, and ethical leadership. The framework consists of six dimensions: institutional vision and values, distributed governance and stakeholder participation, multilingual and cultural access, bias and data-ethics safeguards, culturally responsive pedagogy, and continuous evaluation and trust-building. Overall, the findings suggest that successful AI integration requires more than access to technology; it also depends on ethical leadership, inclusive decision-making, respect for linguistic and cultural diversity, and ongoing evaluation to ensure that AI serves the needs of diverse higher education communities.

Thematic Landscape of the Included Literature (RQ1)

Across the 56 included sources, four recurring barrier and enabler themes were identified through thematic coding, illustrated in Figure 3 and summarized in Table 4. Infrastructural and technological access, covering electricity, connectivity, and hardware constraints, was the most frequently discussed theme, consistent with Global South AI-adoption commentary identifying limited digital infrastructure as a primary constraint (Modern Diplomacy, 2025). Institutional governance and policy gaps were the second most common theme, reflecting findings that many universities in developing countries lack AI-specific policies altogether (Henadirage & Gunarathne, 2025; Dabis & Csáki, 2024). Socio-cultural and capacity constraints, including limited academic AI literacy and resistance to technological change, were the third most common theme (Henadirage & Gunarathne, 2025). Linguistic and data equity concerns, though least frequently discussed in the general AI-in-higher-education literature, were consistently raised within the applied-linguistics subset of the review (Baker, 2024; Eren, 2024; Stanford HAI, 2025), indicating that this dimension remains comparatively under-theorised relative to infrastructural and governance concerns despite its direct relevance to language education.

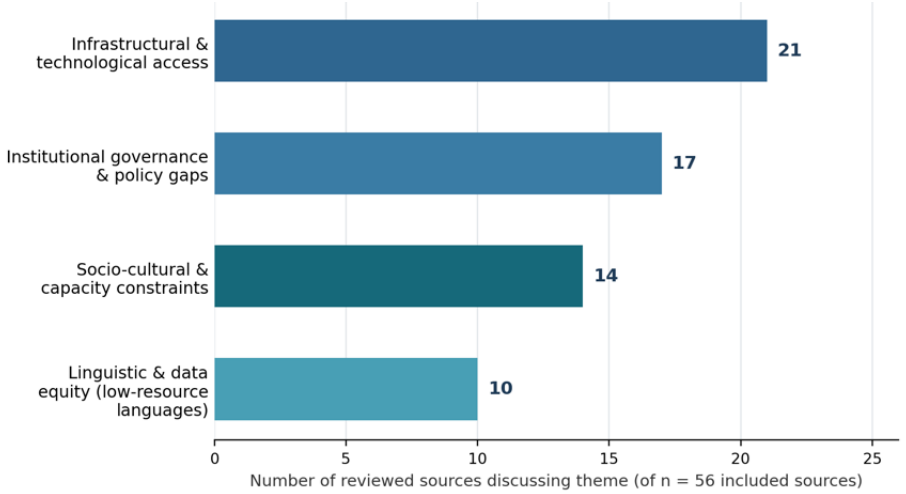


Figure 3. Thematic Distribution of Barrier and Enabler Domains Across the Included Literature (Author's Thematic Coding, n = 56)

Figure 3 shows that infrastructural and technological access is the most frequently discussed challenge to AI adoption in higher education, appearing in 21 of the 56 reviewed sources. This is followed by institutional governance and policy gaps, mentioned in 17 sources, and socio-cultural and capacity constraints, discussed in 14 sources. Linguistic and data equity, particularly issues affecting low-resource languages, receives the least attention, appearing in only 10 sources. These findings suggest that existing literature tends to focus more on practical barriers, such as limited infrastructure and the lack of institutional policies, while giving

comparatively less attention to linguistic diversity and equitable access to AI technologies. Although the latter theme appears less frequently, it remains particularly important for multilingual higher education, where AI tools may not adequately represent or support all languages and cultural contexts. This imbalance highlights the need for further research into how ethical AI leadership can promote more inclusive and culturally responsive AI adoption in developing-country universities.

Table 4. Thematic Synthesis of Barrier and Enabler Domains

Theme	Rank	Representative Evidence	Synthesized Interpretation
Infrastructural and technological access	1 (most discussed)	Modern Diplomacy, 2025	Electricity, connectivity, and hardware constraints are treated in the literature as prerequisite conditions rather than one barrier among several equals, which is why they dominate the coding.
Institutional governance and policy gaps	2	Henadirage & Gunarathne, 2025; Dabis & Csáki, 2024	Absence of AI-specific policy is reported across otherwise dissimilar national systems, suggesting a structural rather than a merely local governance deficit.
Socio-cultural and capacity constraints	3	Henadirage & Gunarathne, 2025	Limited AI literacy and change resistance recur alongside infrastructural themes, indicating the two are often mutually reinforcing rather than independent barriers.
Linguistic and data equity	4 (least discussed generally, but concentrated in applied-linguistics sources)	Baker, 2024; Eren, 2024; Stanford HAI, 2025	The comparative scarcity of this theme in the general AI-governance literature, against its prominence in the applied-linguistics subset, is itself the evidence for the review's central gap claim.

Read together, the rank ordering in Table 4 has a substantive implication rather than a merely descriptive one: the three most-discussed domains are all preconditions or enabling structures, whereas the least-discussed domain, linguistic and data equity, is the one this review treats as central. That a language-focused journal's core concern is the least visible theme in the general AI-governance literature is the empirical basis for the framework proposed later in this paper, rather than an incidental finding.

Ethical Leadership Theory as an Analytic Lens (RQ2)

Three complementary leadership theories inform the proposed framework. Transformational leadership emphasizes idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration in guiding institutional change (Bass, 1985; Bass & Riggio, 2006), and has repeatedly been proposed as a foundation for ethical AI adoption because it foregrounds a shared, values-based vision rather than top-down mandate (Obied & Haj Ali, 2026). Distributed leadership treats leadership as practice constituted through the interaction of multiple formal and informal leaders rather than as a function of a single office (Spillane, 2005); this is particularly relevant where institutional capacity is thin and where a dedicated AI-governance office, common in well-resourced universities, may not exist. Ethical leadership theory adds an explicit normative dimension, emphasizing the leader's role in modelling fairness, honesty, and accountability, and in making the ethical standards of decision-making visible to followers (Brown & Treviño, 2006). Recent systematic reviews argue that these three theories are complementary lenses that, combined, can guide institutions from reactive to proactive AI governance (Obied & Haj Ali, 2026; Polat et al., 2025).

Table 5. Leadership Theories Underpinning the Proposed Framework

Leadership Theory	Core Emphasis	Application in the Proposed Framework
Transformational leadership (Bass, 1985; Bass & Riggio, 2006)	Shared vision; inspiring commitment to institutional change	Institutional Vision and Values dimension; framing AI adoption around educational mission
Distributed leadership (Spillane, 2005)	Leadership as interaction among multiple formal and informal actors	Distributed Governance and Stakeholder Voice dimension; spreading oversight where dedicated AI offices are absent
Ethical leadership (Brown & Treviño, 2006)	Modelling fairness, honesty, and accountability in decision-making	Bias and Data-Ethics Safeguards; Evaluation, Trust, and Iteration dimensions

The mapping in Table 5 matters because none of the three theories, taken alone, covers the full governance problem this review identifies: transformational leadership supplies motivation but not a mechanism for distributing scarce oversight capacity, distributed leadership supplies that mechanism but no explicit ethical standard, and ethical leadership supplies the standard but not an institutional structure for enacting it. The proposed framework's six dimensions exist because each theory alone leaves a gap that the next fills, which is the theoretical justification for treating them as complementary rather than competing lenses.

The Kabul University Context Within the Developing-Country Landscape (RQ3)

Kabul University's recent history illustrates the upper bound of the constraints identified in the wider review. Between 2001 and 2021, Afghan higher education expanded rapidly, with English-medium and multilingual programs growing alongside international partnerships and donor investment (Wali & Zafir, 2022). Since August 2021, Taliban governance has reversed much of this expansion: female participation in higher education has been banned since December 2022, international partnerships have narrowed, and many experienced faculty have left the country, straining institutional capacity precisely where distributed, multi-stakeholder governance is most needed (The Diplomat, 2024; Alamyar, 2021). Where the Sri Lankan and broader Global South evidence base describes infrastructural and policy gaps within functioning governance systems (Henadirage & Gunarathne, 2025), Kabul University's constraints are compounded by active political exclusion and institutional disruption, making it a limiting case that tests whether a developing-country AI-leadership framework can remain applicable under the most severe conditions represented in the reviewed literature.

A Conceptual Framework for Ethical AI Leadership (RQ4)

Synthesising the three strands above, this paper proposes a six-dimension framework for ethical AI leadership in multilingual, developing-country higher education, illustrated in Figure 4. The framework is presented as a set of interdependent, cyclically revisited dimensions rather than a linear sequence, reflecting the iterative character of governance emphasised in comparable higher-education AI frameworks (Obied & Haj Ali, 2026).



Figure 4. Conceptual Framework for Ethical AI Leadership in Multilingual, Developing-Country Higher Education

Institutional Vision and Values anchors AI adoption in the university's educational mission rather than treating technology as an end in itself (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Airaj, 2024). Distributed Governance and Stakeholder Voice adapt Spillane's (2005) distributed perspective to low-capacity settings, spreading oversight across available faculty, language-program leaders, and student representatives rather than assuming a dedicated AI-governance office, directly addressing the policy-absence finding from Sri Lanka (Henadirage & Gunarathne, 2025). Multilingual and Cultural Access makes linguistic equity an explicit governance criterion, requiring leaders to evaluate whether a given AI tool performs adequately in local languages before adoption (Stanford HAI, 2025). Bias and Data-Ethics Safeguards operationalizes UNESCO's (2021) fairness and human-oversight principles at a scale realistic for constrained institutions. Culturally Responsive Pedagogy positions AI as a supplement to, not a replacement for, culturally grounded teaching practices already shown to support intercultural competence (Liao & Li, 2023). Evaluation, Trust, and Iteration closes the cycle, treating institutional trust, rather than technological sophistication, as the primary measure of successful adoption (Obied & Haj Ali, 2026).

Discussion

Two findings recur robustly across otherwise heterogeneous sources: first, that infrastructural constraints (electricity, connectivity, hardware) function as a precondition for AI governance rather than one barrier among many in developing-country settings (Modern Diplomacy, 2025; Henadirage & Gunarathne, 2025); second, that AI-governance models built for well-resourced institutions assume organizational capacities dedicated offices, stable staffing, continuous partnership that are frequently absent in the reviewed contexts (Khairullah et al., 2025; Gkrimpizi et al., 2023).

The clearest disagreement is not a direct empirical contradiction but a divergence in emphasis: the general AI-in-higher-education-governance literature centers infrastructural and policy gaps (Henadirage & Gunarathne, 2025; Modern Diplomacy, 2025), while the applied-linguistics literature centres linguistic and data equity (Baker, 2024; Eren, 2024; Stanford HAI, 2025). Neither literature treats the other's central concern as a governance priority, which is precisely the fragmentation this review's framework is designed to close.

This divergence plausibly reflects disciplinary origin rather than a substantive disagreement about facts: AI-governance scholarship tends to originate in higher-education-management and educational-technology fields, where infrastructure and policy are the natural unit of analysis, while intercultural-communication scholarship treats language and identity as the natural unit of

analysis. Neither field's dominant methodology (institutional case study versus discourse-oriented analysis) is designed to capture the other's central variable, which helps explain why linguistic equity remains, in the review's own thematic coding, the least-discussed of the four domains despite its direct relevance to language education.

This synthesis extends AI-governance leadership theory in three ways. First, it treats linguistic equity as a governance criterion rather than a downstream pedagogical concern, addressing the gap between intercultural-competence scholarship and AI-ethics scholarship (Baker, 2024; Eren, 2024). Second, it adapts distributed leadership (Spillane, 2005) specifically to capacity-constrained institutions, whereas most existing AI-governance models assume dedicated committees and offices (Khairullah et al., 2025). Third, it positions institutional trust, not technological capability, as the outcome variable of interest, consistent with Obied and Haj Ali's (2026) finding that governance quality, not technology level, determines whether AI adoption strengthens or diminishes institutional trust.

A comparison with prior frameworks is instructive: Obied and Haj Ali's (2026) five-phase model was synthesized predominantly from well-resourced institutions and does not address language equity or the structural effects of conflict and gender exclusion; the framework proposed here retains that model's cyclical, trust-centered logic while substituting linguistic and access equity for capacity-building assumptions that do not transfer cleanly to the most constrained developing-country contexts. The comparison can be made more precise on two of Obied and Haj Ali's (2026) core assumptions. First, their model presumes a dedicated AI-governance office as the locus of institutional oversight; the framework proposed here instead adapts Spillane's (2005) distributed-leadership logic directly into that role, spreading oversight functions across existing faculty, language-programmed leaders, and student representatives rather than positing a new specialist unit, which their model does not accommodate. Second, their model treats institutional capacity as a variable that constrains implementation speed but not governance design itself; the present framework refutes that assumption for the most constrained settings, treating capacity limits as a starting condition that governance design must be built around from the outset, rather than an obstacle to be resourced away. In this sense, the six-dimension framework does not simply extend Obied and Haj Ali's (2026) model to a new setting but adapts its underlying institutional-capacity and oversight assumptions to remain workable where those assumptions do not hold.

Theoretical, Methodological, Contextual, and Practical Implications

Theoretically, the review suggests that ethical-leadership and distributed-leadership theory need an explicit linguistic-equity construct when applied to multilingual institutions, since neither Bass's (1985) nor Spillane's (2005) original formulations anticipated language-model performance disparities as a governance variable. Methodologically, the fragmentation identified in Section 4.2 points to a need for research designs that deliberately bridge institutional case study and discourse/linguistic analysis, rather than treating them as separate literatures. Contextually, Kabul University demonstrates that developing-country AI-governance frameworks must be stress-tested against conflict-affected and politically constrained conditions, not only against resource-constrained but otherwise stable institutions. Practically, institutional leaders in comparable settings can use the six-dimension framework as a starting checklist for AI-adoption decisions even before dedicated governance infrastructure exists.

Table 6. Research Gaps and Future Research Agenda

Gap Type	Evidence From This Review	Research Priority	Recommended Method	Expected Contribution
Theoretical	Leadership theories (Bass, 1985; Spillane, 2005; Brown & Treviño, 2006) were not developed with linguistic-equity constructs	Extend ethical/distributed leadership theory to include language-model performance as a governance variable	Conceptual/theoretical development, informed by NLP fairness literature (Stanford HAI, 2025)	A revised leadership-theory vocabulary applicable to multilingual institutions
Methodological	Review relied on open-access search and single-coder thematic analysis (Section 2)	Replicate the search using subscription-indexed databases and a second independent coder	Database-indexed PRISMA search with dual screening and κ agreement statistic	A fully database-indexed SLR with reproducible inter-rater reliability
Empirical	Proposed six-dimension framework has not been tested against primary data (Limitations)	Test framework dimensions with faculty and administrators at Kabul University and comparable institutions	Survey or mixed-methods validation study	Empirical validation or revision of the proposed framework
Contextual	Only Kabul University examined in depth; Sri Lanka and general Global	Extend comparative analysis to additional conflict-affected	Multi-site comparative case study	A generalizable, cross-context account of AI governance under severe

Gap Type	Evidence From This Review	Research Priority	Recommended Method	Expected Contribution
	South commentary used as comparison (Section 3.3)	and low-resource institutions beyond Afghanistan and Sri Lanka		capacity constraints
Practical/Policy	Governance models assuming dedicated AI offices do not transfer to capacity-constrained settings (Section 3.4)	Develop lightweight, low-capacity governance toolkits usable without dedicated offices or specialist staff	Applied policy design in collaboration with institutional leadership	Deployable governance guidance for under-resourced institutions

The four gap types in Table 6 are ordered from theoretical to practical deliberately, so that the table itself argues for a sequence: the theoretical gap around under-tested constructs must be addressed before the methodological gap around primary validation can be closed, and both precede the contextual and practical work of extending and deploying the framework beyond a single illustrative case. Read this way, Table 6 functions as a research agenda rather than a list of isolated limitations.

Theoretically, it reframes linguistic equity as a first-order governance criterion within ethical and distributed leadership theory, rather than treating it as a secondary pedagogical implementation detail. Methodologically, it documents a transparent, reproducible open-access search and coding protocol, explicitly distinguished from a database-indexed systematic literature review, that other researchers without subscription access can replicate or extend. Empirically, it consolidates a fragmented evidence base into four barrier and enabler domains and shows, through the relative frequency of the linguistic-equity theme, where the current literature under-attends to language-specific risks. Contextually, it situates Afghan higher education within, rather than apart from, the broader developing-country evidence base, identifying it as a combined empirical, contextual, and policy gap. Practically, it offers a six-dimension framework usable by institutional leaders before dedicated AI-governance infrastructure exists.

Limitations

Several limitations follow from the review's design. Because open web-based academic search rather than subscription-indexed databases (e.g., Scopus, Web of Science) was used, the identification stage in Figure 1 may not capture the complete population of relevant literature, and the review should be read as PRISMA-informed rather than as a fully database-indexed systematic review.

Screening and coding were conducted by a single reviewer, so inter-rater reliability could not be calculated. No instrument-based quality-appraisal tool (e.g., MMAT, CASP, JBI) was applied, and eligibility criteria functioned as the primary quality filter. The review is a conceptual synthesis rather than a meta-analysis or bibliometric mapping, and the proposed framework has not been tested against primary data from Kabul University or other developing-country institutions; its applicability should be treated as a set of propositions for future empirical validation. Finally, the rapidly evolving and politically sensitive character of Afghan higher-education policy means specific institutional details may change quickly, and readers should treat the Kabul University discussion as illustrative rather than as a current institutional audit.

CONCLUSION

This study reviews scholarship on ethical AI leadership using a PRISMA-informed, PICO-guided approach, drawing from 56 sources across four key thematic areas. Using Kabul University as an illustrative case of a conflict-affected environment, we propose a six-dimension framework to guide AI adoption in developing-country higher education: institutional vision, distributed governance, multilingual and cultural access, bias and data-ethics safeguards, culturally responsive pedagogy, and evaluation and trust. While infrastructural, governance, socio-cultural, and linguistic barriers are common across developing regions, linguistic and data equity remain surprisingly under-researched compared to infrastructure and oversight. To address this gap, our framework positions linguistic equity and practical, distributed governance as core requirements of ethical AI leadership rather than secondary details. Moving forward, researchers should test these six dimensions with faculty and administrators across diverse institutions and expand future literature searches to subscription databases to build a stronger evidence base for policy discussions.

For university leaders in similar settings, three practical steps should take priority right now—without waiting for formal governance structures to be built: evaluate AI tools in local languages *before* adopting them, share oversight across existing faculty and department heads rather than delaying action for a specialized office, and measure success by institutional trust rather than technical complexity. Ultimately, ethical AI leadership in resource-constrained, multilingual institutions isn't about acquiring sophisticated new tools or massive infrastructure; it's about governing deliberately and thoughtfully with the resources already at hand.

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