

READINESS FOR ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE ADOPTION IN DIGITAL-BASED EDUCATIONAL INFORMATION SYSTEM MANAGEMENT: A CASE STUDY AT SMK NEGERI 1 TANJUNG

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the readiness for adopting Artificial Intelligence (AI) in educational information system management at SMK Negeri 1 Tanjung, Tabalong Regency, with a focus on digital promotion and new student enrollment. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach with an instrumental case study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation involving thirteen purposively selected informants, and analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model. The findings indicate that the school is at the pre-adoption phase, characterized by platform-based digitalization but without substantive integration of algorithm-based AI systems. Three primary barriers were identified: low AI literacy among educational staff, fragmented information system data, and the absence of formal digital transformation policies. As the principal empirical and practical contribution, this study produces a contextual four-stage AI adoption roadmap tailored for vocational secondary schools, providing a realistic and evidence-based guide for progressing from pre-adoption to full AI-MIS integration.

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INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation has become a strategic agenda for educational institutions across many countries in responding to the demands of the Industry 4.0 and Society 5.0 eras. Artificial Intelligence (AI) in particular opens new opportunities in administrative process automation, predictive data analysis, and the personalization of educational services (George & Wooden, 2023; Igbokwe, 2023; Ivanashko et al., 2024; Khairullah et al., 2025). AI-based Management Information Systems (MIS) are now viewed as a primary driver of institutional transformation capable of significantly enhancing the efficiency, transparency, and competitiveness of educational institutions across various school levels and types.

Recent studies identify that AI in education, or AIEd, encompasses two primary operational dimensions. The first is proactive planning, which includes scheduling, student admissions, and the personalization of learning content (Haderer & Ciolacu, 2022; Mallik & Gangopadhyay, 2023). The second is reactive execution, encompassing automated assessment, learning outcome prediction, and chatbot services (Chang et al., 2023). More specifically, the application of machine learning in admissions systems has been proven capable of improving enrollment prediction accuracy and reducing the risk of capacity imbalances (Liu et al., 2025; Raftopoulos et al., 2024). AI-based digital promotion strategies also enable educational institutions to reach prospective students more precisely through user behavior analysis and personalized marketing content (Makrydakis, 2021). These findings demonstrate that AI not only serves as an

administrative support tool, but has also become a strategic instrument capable of enhancing the effectiveness of educational institutional management in a more adaptive, efficient, and data-driven manner.

A significant research gap has been identified regarding the application of AI-based MIS in vocational secondary schools (SMK). Lin (2026) asserts that vocational education faces specific challenges in AI adoption, namely limited AI literacy among educators, the complexity of system integration, and the absence of contextual implementation guidelines. Wu (2021) emphasizes that AI solutions for vocational schools cannot simply be transferred from studies in primary or higher education. This situation renders research at the vocational SMK level a highly open and relevant field for scholarly development.

SMK Negeri 1 Tanjung, as a public vocational school in Tabalong Regency, South Kalimantan, represents the conditions faced by many SMKs in the regions: digital technology has been utilized in daily operations, yet no integrated AI system is in place. The novelty of this study lies in the development of a contextual AI-Readiness Assessment model for vocational SMKs, using SMK Negeri 1 Tanjung as an instrumental case. Unlike previous studies that generally evaluate already-operational AI systems, this research critically maps the pre-adoption readiness conditions and formulates a realistic AI implementation roadmap based on empirical field findings. This study therefore addresses the following research question: What is the current level of AI adoption readiness at SMK Negeri 1 Tanjung, and what barriers and enabling pathways shape that readiness? The objective is to produce an empirically grounded AI-Readiness Assessment and a four-stage adoption roadmap applicable to comparable vocational schools in Indonesia.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with an instrumental case study design. SMK Negeri 1 Tanjung was selected as the research site because it represents the digital transition phase currently experienced by many public vocational schools: basic digital technology has been utilized, but algorithm-based AI systems have not yet been formally integrated. This case is instrumental because it is used to understand a broader phenomenon, namely the readiness for AI adoption in vocational SMKs.

Data collection was carried out through three primary techniques. First, in-depth semi-structured interviews with thirteen informants, consisting of the principal, the vice principal for public relations, two student enrollment operators, three teachers managing digital media, and six prospective students and parents selected purposively until data saturation was achieved. The number thirteen was determined through purposive sampling guided by role-based representativeness: each stakeholder category directly implicated in digital promotion or enrollment was included, and sampling continued until no new themes emerged across two consecutive interview sessions, confirming theoretical saturation (Miles et al., 2014). Second, systematic observation of digital promotion activities and new student enrollment services conducted directly at the school and through monitoring of the school's official digital channels. Third, documentation covering the school's social media archives, enrollment data records, and information system usage reports from the past two years.

Data analysis used the interactive analysis model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), which includes data condensation, data presentation, and drawing and verifying conclusions. During the condensation phase, open coding was applied to interview transcripts to generate initial categories; these were subsequently grouped into focused codes aligned with the four AI-Readiness dimensions, enabling systematic comparison across informant groups. Research validity was enhanced through source triangulation and method triangulation—cross-checking interview data with observation and documentation results. Reliability was maintained through an audit trail and member checking with key informants, conducted twice during the research process.

The AI adoption readiness analysis specifically referenced the AI-Readiness framework adapted from the Technology Readiness Index (Parasuraman, 2000) and the AI Maturity Model (Alsheibani et al., 2018). This framework encompasses four assessment dimensions: technological infrastructure, human resource competency, data and information system readiness, and institutional and policy support. These four dimensions were used in an integrated manner as a guide for developing instruments, analyzing data, and interpreting research findings.

Table 1. AI-Readiness Analysis Framework

AI-Readiness Dimension	Indicators	Data Collection Instrument
Technological Infrastructure	Internet connectivity, hardware, digital platforms	Observation and Documentation

AI-Readiness Dimension	Indicators	Data Collection Instrument
Human Resource Competency	Digital literacy, AI usage skills, prior training attended	Interview and Observation
Data and IS Readiness	Data quality, system management, platform integration	Documentation and Interview
Institutional Support	Digital policy, ICT budget, leadership commitment	Principal Interview

Sumber: (Adapted from Parasuraman, 2000; Alsheibani et al., 2018)

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Digitalization Conditions at SMK Negeri 1 Tanjung

The research findings indicate that SMK Negeri 1 Tanjung has been actively running platform-based digitalization in two primary areas: educational promotion and new student enrollment. In the area of promotion, the school simultaneously utilizes four digital channels—Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and WhatsApp—as the main communication channels with prospective students and the wider community. Published content includes student achievements, flagship skills programs, school facilities, extracurricular activities, as well as schedules and procedures for new student enrollment.

The vice principal for public relations explained that social media content management is carried out in a planned manner, with a publication schedule agreed upon by the public relations team. Each piece of content is designed to reach different target groups, ranging from ninth-grade junior high school prospective students, parents, to the general public in Tabalong Regency and its surroundings. This management is conducted entirely manually, from content selection, editing, and uploading to monitoring responses from social media users.

In the area of new student enrollment, the digitalization process has covered several important stages. Initial registration is conducted through an online form based on Google Forms, accessible from any device. Document verification is carried out in a hybrid manner—partly through digital uploads and partly still requiring physical attendance at the school. Announcement of selection results is communicated via the school's official WhatsApp group and publications on social media. The entire process is managed by two operators working alternately during the enrollment period.

The new student enrollment operators reported that the current digital system is far more efficient than the manual system previously used. As one operator noted, “Now we can compile all applicant data in just a few hours, whereas before it would take us two or three days to sort through the physical forms.” Long queues of prospective students and parents arriving directly at the school have been significantly reduced since digital registration was implemented. The time required to compile applicant data has also shrunk from several days to a matter of hours, although this process is still carried out by entering data one by one into a digital spreadsheet.

Prospective students and parents who served as informants in this study generally expressed satisfaction with the ease of accessing enrollment information through social media and WhatsApp. Several parents stated that they first learned of the existence of SMK Negeri 1 Tanjung through a video shared on TikTok by their acquaintances. This suggests that social media channels have been functioning as a fairly effective promotional medium in reaching prospective students from a wider area.

Table 2. AI-Readiness Mapping of SMK Negeri 1 Tanjung

Dimension	Current Condition	Readiness Level	Notes
Technological Infrastructure	Internet network available across all school areas; devices adequate for social media management and online forms	Moderate (Level 2 of 4)	No dedicated local or cloud server for AI workloads; bandwidth capacity for AI needs has not been assessed
Human Resource Competency	Social media literacy is relatively high among some staff; overall AI literacy remains very low	Low (Level 1 of 4)	No staff with AI or machine learning competency; prior

Dimension	Current Condition	Readiness Level	Notes
Data and IS Readiness	Admission data stored digitally in spreadsheet format; not yet structured for advanced analytics	Low–Moderate (Level 1–2 of 4)	ICT training limited to office application usage Data dispersed across Google Forms, WhatsApp, and spreadsheets; no naming standards, formats, or cross-platform integration
Institutional Support	Leadership commitment to digitalization is high; no formal AI policy or digital transformation plan in place	Moderate (Level 2 of 4)	Limited ICT budget; no dedicated team or person responsible for technology development beyond existing operators

Barriers to AI Adoption at SMK Negeri 1 Tanjung

This study identified three groups of AI adoption barriers based on their frequency of occurrence in the data and their degree of impact on the prospect of AI implementation in the future. These three barriers are interrelated and cannot be resolved in isolation from one another.

The first barrier is the low competency of human resources in the field of AI. Based on the results of interviews and observation, not a single educational staff member at SMK Negeri 1 Tanjung has a formal background or specialized training in artificial intelligence, machine learning, or data analytics. Most teachers and administrative staff know the term AI only from media coverage, not from direct usage experience. The principal acknowledged that the development of educators' digital competency has thus far been focused more on the mastery of office applications and social media, rather than the more complex AI technology.

The student enrollment operators specifically noted that the digital system currently in use is already quite challenging for some staff members who are unaccustomed to technology. Several staff still require assistance when entering data into online forms or managing digital files from prospective students. This condition demonstrates that even basic digitalization has not yet been fully mastered by all team members, meaning the gap between the current situation and readiness to use AI systems remains very wide.

The second barrier is data fragmentation, which is fundamental and structural in nature. Data related to student enrollment and promotion that has been collected is still scattered across various platforms without adequate integration. Applicant data resides in Google Forms, communications and files are on WhatsApp, promotional content is on social media in varying formats, and final recapitulations are created manually in separate spreadsheets. There is no single system that centrally houses, consolidates, and manages all of this data.

This fragmentation condition directly impacts data quality and utility. Because data is neither standardized nor integrated, even simple analyses must be performed manually by operators. To date, the school has never conducted applicant trend analysis based on historical data, either for capacity planning or for evaluating the effectiveness of promotional activities. Without structured and clean data, AI systems cannot be operated, as the quality of AI output is entirely dependent on the quality of the input data provided.

The third barrier is weak institutional support in the form of policy, budget, and strategic planning. SMK Negeri 1 Tanjung does not yet have a formal digitalization policy document, a digital transformation plan with measurable targets, or an adequate information technology budget beyond basic operational needs. The principal conveyed that the desire to develop a more sophisticated digital system exists, but budget constraints are a limiting factor. There is also no dedicated team or person responsible for technology development beyond the existing operator staff.

In addition to the three primary barriers, this study also identified one contextual factor that further influences AI adoption readiness: the limited supporting ecosystem at the local level. There are no technology industry partners, digital consultants, or AI training institutions readily accessible from Tabalong Regency. The nearest university with an information technology program is located in a fairly distant city, so access to AI knowledge resources from outside the school is also very limited.

Most Relevant Potential AI Applications

Despite the above limitations, the findings from interviews and documentation analysis identified several AI application points that are most potentially viable and realistic for SMK Negeri 1 Tanjung in the medium term. The first potential is the use of AI-based chatbots to serve the questions of prospective students and parents during the enrollment process. This need is very real, as operators currently must respond to hundreds of WhatsApp messages containing similarly repetitive questions every year.

The second potential is AI-based analytics to monitor the effectiveness of promotional content on social media. At present, content managers have no structured monitoring system to determine which types of content are most effective in reaching prospective students. AI-based analytics tools that are available online actually already exist and can be accessed, but have never been utilized by the school's public relations team. The third potential is a system for predicting the number of applicants based on historical trends and social media data, which can help the school plan capacity and promotion strategies more accurately from year to year.

DISCUSSION

Affirming the Digitalization Phase of SMK Negeri 1 Tanjung

The research findings indicate that SMK Negeri 1 Tanjung is in the digitalization phase—not merely digitization—but has not yet achieved AI-based digital transformation. The conceptual distinction among these three phases is important to understand precisely so that the direction of development policy does not go astray. Ouyang and Jiao (2021), in their study of the three paradigms of AI in education, assert that the digitalization phase is a prerequisite that must be thoroughly completed before an institution can move toward genuine AI transformation. The condition at SMK Negeri 1 Tanjung—which has actively utilized social media and online forms—demonstrates that the school actually has a stronger digital foundation than many similar schools in regional areas.

Machkour and Abriane (2025), in their prospective analysis, state that educational institutions that successfully navigate the digitalization phase well have a far higher probability of AI adoption than those who pass through it hastily. This finding is relevant to the condition of SMK Negeri 1 Tanjung, which is in the process of strengthening its digital foundation. Accelerating AI adoption without resolving data fragmentation and HR competency gaps risks producing an ineffective and unsustainable implementation.

HR Competency Barriers in the Perspective of Recent Studies

The low AI literacy among educational staff at SMK Negeri 1 Tanjung is not a unique or isolated condition. Lin (2024), in a comprehensive study of the challenges of AI implementation in vocational education, found that AI literacy deficits represent the most dominant structural barrier encountered across various countries, including in the Southeast Asian region. This barrier is multi-layered, as it encompasses not only the absence of technical knowledge but also cultural resistance to significant technological change. The findings at SMK Negeri 1 Tanjung reinforce the pattern identified by Lin (2026).

Wang and Zhu (2026) emphasize that improving AI literacy among educators cannot be achieved through short-term technical training alone, but requires a sustained and contextual professional development approach. Effective development programs must integrate conceptual knowledge of AI with hands-on practice using AI tools relevant to teachers' daily tasks. In contrast to schools studied in urban contexts by Lin (2026), where access to external AI trainers was relatively feasible, SMK Negeri 1 Tanjung faces an additional constraint in the form of a limited local ecosystem, making self-directed, institution-led capacity building even more essential.

Mallik and Gangopadhyay (2023), in their review of AI engagement in education, add that the AI competency gap in vocational education risks widening further if not promptly addressed, given the very rapid pace of AI technology development. Staff who have not yet utilized AI in their work will fall increasingly further behind as AI application in school governance expands. This situation demonstrates a clear urgency for SMK Negeri 1 Tanjung to immediately begin a capacity-building program, even on a limited and phased scale.

Data Fragmentation as a Fundamental Barrier

The fragmented data condition at SMK Negeri 1 Tanjung reveals a challenge that runs deeper than a mere technical problem. Liu et al. (2025), in their study of machine learning approaches for student admission decisions, assert that data quality and structure are the primary determinants of successful AI implementation, far surpassing the hardware or software technology factors used. Fragmented, non-standardized, and non-integrated data not only impedes AI implementation but also hinders data-driven decision-making even for simple analytical purposes. These findings indicate that resolving the data problem at SMK Negeri 1 Tanjung would actually yield immediate benefits, even before AI is fully implemented.

Zulkipli et al. (2023), in their study on the utilization of digital technology in vocational schools, found that the data fragmentation pattern identified at SMK Negeri 1 Tanjung also occurs in many other vocational schools. This pattern generally emerges because digitalization is carried out organically and without planning, where each unit or individual adopts the most easily accessible digital tool without considering integration with the broader system. Its resolution requires policy intervention at the school level, establishing comprehensive data management standards that are binding across all units.

Weak Institutional Support and Its Implications

McClure and Gerdau (2026) assert that AI-based digital transformation cannot succeed without institutional commitment manifested in policies, budgets, and supportive organizational structures. The absence of these three elements at SMK Negeri 1 Tanjung creates a condition in which digitalization initiatives depend on individual enthusiasm rather than a solid institutional system. A condition dependent on individuals is highly vulnerable, as progress already achieved can be halted if that individual transfers to another position or retires.

Alsheibani et al. (2018), in their AI-Readiness model, position leadership support and policy as one of the four main pillars of AI adoption readiness. Without leadership support manifested in tangible resource allocation, AI adoption will stall at the level of discourse. The findings at SMK Negeri 1 Tanjung reveal a gap between the positive verbal commitment of leadership and the commitment manifested in the form of adequate policies and budgets. Bridging this gap is the first critical step before any technical measure is taken.

The success of AI-based digital transformation requires institutional commitment reflected in strategic planning, human resource capacity development, financial resource support, and an organizational culture that fosters technological innovation (Mustapha et al., 2025). The findings of Mustapha et al. (2025) indicate that the successful adoption of AI in educational institutions requires comprehensive organizational readiness to support the digital transformation process. For SMK Negeri 1 Tanjung, these findings indicate the importance of strengthening institutional capacity as the basis for the effective development and utilization of AI in the future.

Four-Stage AI Adoption Roadmap Model

Based on all empirical findings and relevant theoretical support, this study formulates a four-stage AI adoption roadmap model designed specifically for SMK Negeri 1 Tanjung. This model adapts the phased approach recommended by various recent studies on technology adoption in resource-constrained educational institutions (Marhareita et al., 2022; Riofita, 2022; Wu, 2021). A phased approach was chosen because it has proven more effective and sustainable compared to direct and comprehensive AI implementation, particularly for institutions still in the early stages of digital transformation.

Table 3. AI Adoption Roadmap for SMK Negeri 1 Tanjung

Stage	Primary Focus	Key Activities	Target Timeline
Stage 1: Data Foundation	Data consolidation and standardization	Platform integration, admission data cleansing, data governance drafting, establishment of data format standards	6–12 months
Stage 2: Human Resource Capacity Building	AI literacy and data analytics	Staff training, AI expert partnerships with universities, formation of school digital team	12–18 months
Stage 3: Limited AI Pilot	Trial of specific AI applications	Admission service chatbot, AI-based social media analytics, predictive dashboard for enrollment numbers	18–30 months
Stage 4: Full AI-MIS Integration	Fully integrated AI system	AI-based MIS for the entire promotion and student admission cycle, continuous evaluation and refinement	30–48 months

Yuliana and Pravitasari (2023), in their study of promotion strategies and social media in vocational secondary schools, assert that the shift from manual digital promotion to AI-based promotion must be carried out gradually so as not

to disrupt the currently running system. This approach is highly relevant to the third stage of the roadmap above, in which AI trials are conducted on a single, limited function before being expanded across the entire system. Makrydakís (2021) adds that AI-based digital promotion applied gradually in secondary educational institutions has been proven to produce significant increases in promotional reach and message effectiveness compared to manual approaches, making it a priority worthy of consideration from the outset. These conditions suggest that the utilization of AI in the area of promotion can serve as a realistic starting point for SMK Negeri 1 Tanjung to build AI implementation capacity and experience before it is applied to broader school functions.

Parasuraman (2000) in the Technology Readiness Index emphasizes that technology readiness is not merely a matter of device ownership, but also of users' attitudes, beliefs, and capabilities in productively utilizing technology. The findings at SMK Negeri 1 Tanjung reinforce the relevance of this framework. The availability of basic digital infrastructure has not been matched by adequate human resource readiness and institutional support, so the overall level of technology readiness remains low. The roadmap model formulated in this study explicitly places the development of the human and institutional dimensions before technological investment, in line with the Technology Readiness Index principles advanced by Parasuraman (2000).

The recommendations produced by this study, particularly the four-stage roadmap, can serve as a reference for other vocational schools in Indonesia facing similar conditions—that is, schools that already have a digital foundation but do not yet have a clear guide for moving toward AI adoption. Each stage in this roadmap is designed to yield concrete and measurable value even before AI is fully implemented, ensuring that schools can demonstrate tangible returns on each investment made throughout the transformation process rather than waiting for the final stage to produce results.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that SMK Negeri 1 Tanjung is at the pre-adoption phase of AI—or readiness level two out of four—characterized by sufficiently advanced platform-based digitalization, but without the substantive integration of algorithm-based AI systems. This condition is not a failure but rather an accurate portrayal of a vocational school undergoing a gradual and organic digital transformation process. The three primary barriers identified are: low AI competency among human resources, fragmented and non-integrated data and information systems, and the absence of formal and measurable digital transformation policies and plans. These three barriers are interrelated and need to be addressed in an integrated manner, not piecemeal.

The theoretical contributions of this research include an AI-Readiness Assessment model adapted for the vocational SMK context, as well as a four-stage AI adoption roadmap that can be used as a realistic implementation planning framework. In practical terms, the most immediately actionable priority for SMK Negeri 1 Tanjung—and the prerequisite that unlocks all subsequent stages—is the consolidation and standardization of existing digital data into a unified, structured system. Only once this data foundation is in place can investments in AI literacy training and technology pilots yield sustainable, measurable outcomes. Concretely, the school should begin by appointing a data governance coordinator, establishing cross-platform data integration protocols, and drafting a formal digital transformation policy document within the first six to twelve months. Alongside these internal efforts, building partnerships with universities or technology institutions will be essential to gradually accelerate AI capacity building.

The limitation of this study lies in the single case study design, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. Although the formulated roadmap can serve as a reference for other vocational schools in Indonesia facing similar conditions, further research with a comparative multi-case design is strongly recommended to produce a more comprehensive AI-Readiness model. Such research should ideally encompass vocational schools from various geographical contexts and ownership statuses in order to represent the diversity of digital transformation conditions among vocational secondary schools in Indonesia.

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