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Nursing & Healthcare International Journal
ISSN: 2575-9981

Learning Management System Change Implementation in a University Setting

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Review Article

Volume 10 Issue 2

Received Date: October 06, 2026

Published Date: November 05, 2026

DOI: 10.23880/nhij-16000343

Abstract

The implementation of a new Learning Management System (LMS) represents a complex organizational change for universities, affecting pedagogy, administration, and institutional culture. This paper examines LMS change implementation within higher education using established change management frameworks, empirical research, and practical case examples. Key drivers, challenges, and success factors for effective LMS transition are identified, with an emphasis on stakeholder engagement, structured planning, and continuous evaluation. The study also explores the role of faculty development, technology integration, and post-implementation sustainability in achieving successful adoption.

Keywords: Learning Management System; Change Management; Higher Education; Digital Transformation; Stakeholder Engagement

Abbreviations

LMS: Learning Management Systems; TAM: The Technology Acceptance Model; UTAUT: Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology.

Introduction

Learning Management Systems (LMS) are central to modern higher education, enabling course delivery, assessment, communication, and learning analytics. Universities increasingly replace or upgrade LMS platforms to address evolving pedagogical strategies, technological advancements, and institutional priorities. However, LMS transitions often encounter resistance, technical challenges, and adoption barriers [1]. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of online learning technologies, highlighting gaps in existing LMS platforms and increasing institutional urgency for digital transformation [2]. Consequently, effective LMS implementation requires not only technical upgrades but also structured change management, faculty engagement, and continuous support.

This paper aims to:

- Identify the key drivers motivating LMS transitions.
- Examine change management frameworks applicable to LMS implementation.
- Explore challenges and mitigation strategies.
- Provide recommendations for sustainable adoption and continuous improvement.

Literature Review

LMS Adoption in Higher Education

LMS adoption is influenced by perceived usefulness, ease of use, institutional support, and faculty readiness. The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) have been widely applied to explain LMS adoption behaviors among students and faculty [3,2]. Research also emphasizes that institutional

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culture and leadership support play a critical role. For example, universities with proactive faculty development programs and clear strategic communication report higher LMS adoption rates [4].

Change Management in LMS Implementation

Technical implementation alone does not guarantee LMS adoption. Change management is essential to address resistance, align stakeholders, and ensure sustainable usage [5]. Lewin's three-stage model (unfreeze, change, refreeze) and Kotter's eight-step process provide structured approaches for managing organizational change in higher education [6,7].

Studies show that early engagement, visible leadership support, and transparent communication significantly improve the success of LMS implementations [8].

Drivers for LMS Change

Universities pursue LMS changes for several reasons:

- Obsolescence or vendor discontinuation: Legacy systems often lack updates or support, forcing institutions to migrate.
- Enhanced functionality: Modern LMS platforms provide better analytics, collaboration tools, and mobile access.
- Cost efficiency: Cloud-based solutions reduce infrastructure costs and provide scalability.
- Alignment with strategic initiatives: Institutions increasingly integrate digital learning into their broader academic strategies [9].
- The pandemic highlighted the limitations of existing platforms and accelerated the demand for integrated, user-friendly solutions [2].

Change Management Frameworks

Lewin's Change Model

Lewin's model emphasizes preparing stakeholders for change (**unfreeze**), implementing new systems (**change**), and institutionalizing practices (**refreeze**) [7]. Universities that fail to unfreeze existing attitudes face resistance and low adoption.

Example: One Canadian university used faculty focus groups and pilot programs before fully implementing a new LMS, resulting in higher satisfaction and engagement.

Kotter's Eight-Step Model

Kotter JP, et al. [6] highlights the importance of leadership, communication, and early wins. In LMS implementation, visible executive sponsorship and celebrating initial successes enhance faculty engagement and confidence.

Example Steps Applied to LMS Implementation:

- Create urgency: Highlight limitations of legacy LMS.
- Build a guiding coalition: Form a cross-functional project team.
- Develop a vision: Communicate clear benefits for all stakeholders.
- Communicate the vision: Use newsletters, workshops, and emails.
- Remove obstacles: Provide technical support and faculty training.
- Generate short-term wins: Pilot programs and early success stories.
- Consolidate gains: Expand features and refine processes.
- Anchor changes: Embed practices into institutional policy and culture.

Implementation Strategy

Stakeholder Engagement

Successful LMS implementation requires active involvement of faculty, students, IT staff, and administrators. Early engagement increases trust, reduces resistance, and encourages adoption [10].

Technical and Pedagogical Integration

Effective implementation includes:

- **Data migration and system integration**: Ensure continuity of learning materials and user accounts.
- **Instructional design support**: Align course content with LMS capabilities.
- **Pedagogical guidance**: Embed best practices to improve user experience [4].

Training and Support

Tiered and continuous faculty training, peer mentoring, and just-in-time support significantly improve adoption rates [11]. Training should include:

- Basic system use.
- Advanced pedagogical tools.
- Troubleshooting and ongoing professional development.

Challenges and Mitigation Strategies

Resistance to Change

Resistance often arises from workload concerns, comfort with existing systems, or fear of new technology. Mitigation strategies include transparent communication, involving faculty in decision-making, and showcasing benefits [1].

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Resource and Infrastructure Constraints

Limited financial and human resources can hinder LMS implementation. Scalable solutions, phased rollouts, and efficient resource allocation help overcome constraints [12].

Continuous Engagement

Sustained engagement is necessary to avoid adoption fatigue. Regular check-ins, feedback loops, and recognition of faculty efforts reinforce positive behaviors.

Evaluation and Continuous Improvement

- Universities should measure success using multiple indicators:
- System usage analytics: Track logins, course activity, and feature utilization.
- User satisfaction surveys: Assess perceived usefulness and ease of use.
- **Learning outcomes**: Evaluate student performance and engagement metrics.
- Continuous feedback loops enable iterative improvements, ensuring long-term adoption and alignment with institutional goals [8].

Conclusion

LMS change implementation is a complex socio-technical process requiring structured change management, stakeholder engagement, and sustained institutional support. Evidence shows that aligning technology adoption with organizational culture and pedagogical goals is critical for success. Universities that invest in communication, training, and continuous evaluation achieve meaningful, lasting LMS adoption. Future research could explore comparative studies of LMS platforms and the impact of emerging technologies, such as AI and analytics, on digital learning strategies.

Declarations

Ethics, Consent to Participate, and Consent to Publish:

- Not applicable. This manuscript does not involve human participants, human data, or animal subjects.

Funding

The authors declare that no funds, grants, or other support were received during the preparation of this manuscript.

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