WHICH DEPARTURE REASONS CAN ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE ADDRESS? EVIDENCE FROM ACADEMIC STAFF IN UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract. Artificial intelligence is entering universities in Uzbekistan as a state policy priority, yet policy documents treat faculty members only as learners and teachers of the technology and do not consider its effect on their workload or retention. Drawing on anonymous responses from 1,005 faculty members, this paper examines the reasons why 476 respondents left their previous jobs and asks which of these reasons artificial intelligence tools could address. Two thirds (66.6%) cited at least one reason that such tools can affect directly or indirectly, but excessive workload is the only reason they can relieve directly. Those who had left because of workload are more than twice as likely as others to be in the high turnover intention group in their current job (29.3% versus 12.6%). Five strategies are proposed, and their priority is set according to how formalised employment is in each institution.

Keywords: artificial intelligence; academic staff turnover; reasons for leaving; workload; technostress; higher education; Uzbekistan

Introduction

Artificial intelligence is being introduced into higher education in Uzbekistan as a priority of state policy. A decree adopted in October 2025 provides for artificial intelligence topics in university curricula from the 2026/2027 academic year, fifteen artificial intelligence laboratories in higher education organisations by the end of 2026 and cascade training of teachers (President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2025). Across the policy documents, however, the faculty member appears only as someone who learns and teaches the technology. How faculty members will work in an environment with artificial intelligence, whether their workload will change and how this will affect their intention to stay are not addressed. The only norm that limits algorithmic personnel decisions is the right of an individual not to be subject to a decision affecting his or her rights that is taken solely by automated means (Republic of Uzbekistan, 2019). The same technology can reduce a faculty member's workload or add new strain, and the outcome depends on how it is introduced. This paper therefore asks a narrower question: which of the reasons for which faculty members actually leave can artificial intelligence address?

Two paths of influence

Empirical studies point to two opposite effects. On the risk side, awareness of artificial intelligence was directly and positively associated with turnover intention among 423 teachers at 64 Chinese universities (Wen & Cai, 2025), and the same direct effect appeared among 456 employees of public and private organisations in Vietnam (Pham et al., 2026). The main channel is exhaustion. Among 819 Chinese university teachers, 33.6% of the effect of technostress on teaching innovation was transmitted through burnout and 20.0% through self-efficacy in using artificial intelligence (Wu et al., 2026). Among five technostress factors studied in 251 academics, only the invasion of work into personal time through technology reduced psychological well-being (Wang & Yao, 2025).

On the protective side, self-efficacy in using artificial intelligence weakened the link between awareness and turnover intention, although only in the public sector (Pham et al., 2026). Faculty

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members in Kuwait rated the potential of the technology to cut time spent on administrative tasks highly, at 3.95 on a five-point scale (Almisad & Aleidan, 2025), and among 249 university teachers in Spain it was fear of misusing the technology, not worry about the future of the profession, that reduced the intention to use it (Verano-Tacoronte et al., 2025). Self-efficacy and fear of misuse can both be changed through training and clear rules. Studies in Russia add that initial resistance to digital change declined over time, with blended forms preferred (Rogozin et al., 2022), and that teachers fall into at least three groups by their level of use (Buyakova et al., 2026), so a single mandatory requirement for everyone would overload the group of minimal users.

Data

The evidence comes from an anonymous questionnaire answered by 1,005 faculty members as the 2026/2027 academic year began. Of these, 476 (47.4%) had changed jobs at least once and indicated the reasons for leaving their previous job, with several reasons allowed. Each reason was classified by whether an artificial intelligence tool could address it directly, indirectly or not at all, and for each reason the share of respondents now in the high turnover intention group (a mean score of 4 or more on a five-point scale) was compared between those who cited it and those who did not (Table 1).

Table 1

Reasons for leaving the previous job, current turnover intention and the potential of artificial intelligence tools (n = 476)

Reason for leaving	Share, %	High intention, cited, %	High intention, not cited, %	p	AI potential	AI tool
Better opportunity elsewhere	33.2	23.4	15.1	0.035	None	–
Dissatisfaction with pay	32.1	26.8	13.6	0.001	None	Pay analysis
Excessive workload	31.5	29.3	12.6	<0.001	Direct	Automation of administrative work
Limited career growth	25.8	19.5	17.3	0.675	Indirect	Personal development plan
Family reasons	24.8	16.9	18.2	0.874	None	–
Unfair leadership	22.7	38.0	12.0	<0.001	Indirect	Transparent criteria
Contract expiry or institution's initiative	21.4	22.5	16.6	0.211	Indirect	Monitoring of contract terms
Unfavourable team climate	14.1	37.3	14.7	<0.001	None	–

Note. Author's survey. Respondents could cite several reasons.

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Results

Three results stand out. First, 66.6% of job changers cited at least one reason that an artificial intelligence tool can affect directly or indirectly. The technology therefore answers part of the turnover problem, and treating it as the single solution would be a mistake. Half of the reasons in Table 1 lie beyond its reach, so an artificial intelligence strategy must be combined with pay and organisational culture measures. Those who left because of unfair leadership or an unfavourable team climate show the highest current high-intention shares, at 38.0% and 37.3%.

Second, excessive workload is the only reason that artificial intelligence can relieve directly, and it is among the three most frequently cited. Of those who left their previous job because of workload, 29.3% are now in the high turnover intention group, compared with 12.6% of the others. A faculty member who leaves because of workload thus meets the same problem in the new job, and the risk of leaving persists. A review of 60 studies on the burnout of university professors likewise identifies work overload among the main risk factors (Cadena-Povea et al., 2025).

Third, the workload reason is unevenly distributed across types of institution. It was cited by 26.9% of job changers in state universities, 36.8% in private universities and 50.0% in branches of foreign universities and research centres ($\chi^2(2) = 9.69$; $p = 0.008$). This pattern is consistent with official statistics, which show a heavier load on the main staff of private and foreign institutions. Automation of administrative work should therefore be aimed first at the permanent staff who carry that load.

Strategies differentiated by employment formalisation

Five strategies follow from these results (Table 2). Their priority differs across institutions grouped by the formalisation criterion F, which scores main, concurrent and hourly posts at three, two and one points respectively and averages the scores over all posts. In the low-formalisation group, more than 60% of posts lack main-position status, and any model would miss these staff. Neither early warning nor training works for staff who are invisible, so visibility comes first and these strategies move to third place. In the middle group, visibility and workload relief share first place. In the high-formalisation group, employment is largely formalised and register data are more complete, so early warning and skills strategies give the greatest return. Algorithmic fairness remains a permanent requirement in every group, because it keeps the other four strategies from turning onto the risk path.

Table 2

Priority of artificial intelligence strategies by institutional formalisation group

Strategy	Artificial intelligence tool	Low F (≤ 2.404)	Middle F	High F (> 2.773)	Indicator to monitor
1. Visibility	Staff register covering all employment forms, hires and exits	1	1	2	F, share of posts without main status, recorded exits
2. Workload relief	Automated preparation of reports, tests and teaching materials	2	1	2	Students per permanent staff member, hours spent on administration

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Strategy	Artificial intelligence tool	Low F (≤ 2.404)	Middle F	High F (> 2.773)	Indicator to monitor
3. Early warning	Semi-annual anonymous survey and a turnover risk model	3	2	1	Share with high turnover intention, model sensitivity
4. Skills and adaptation	Training differentiated by level of use, cascade method	3	2	1	Share of users, self-efficacy
5. Algorithmic fairness	Transparent criteria, checks by group, human decision	Permanent	Permanent	Permanent	Differences between groups, staff complaints

Note. Developed by the author. 1 denotes the highest priority.

Two conditions apply to all groups. The existing legal framework already covers most protective measures, so institutions need internal rules on how the existing norms apply to artificial intelligence tools rather than new legislation. The one gap concerns administrative burden: no document requires checking whether a tool has actually reduced workload or increased it. Measuring each tool's effect on workload should therefore be a mandatory part of the strategy.

Conclusion

Artificial intelligence can reduce academic staff turnover only in part. Two thirds of job changers cited a reason that the technology can affect, but workload is the only one it can relieve directly, and staff who left because of workload remain at elevated risk in their new jobs. The technology should therefore be introduced first as a tool for reducing the administrative load of permanent staff, combined with pay and culture measures, and differentiated by how formalised employment is in each institution. The findings rest on a single cross-sectional survey with few respondents from outside the main staff, so they describe associations, and the effect of each tool on workload and retention needs to be verified after introduction.

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