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10/10/2025

Artificial Education: The Necessity and Danger of A.I. in Academics

Artificial intelligence (A.I.) threatens to put an end to the way of life of what is arguably the most influential group in the world: students. There have been many headlines broadcasting this fact, announcing that education has been ruined by cheating enabled by A.I. models such as ChatGPT. However, this problem is not as simple as one may be led to believe. The true problem, clouded by fear and opinion, is this: if at all, how should A.I. be incorporated into education? Of course, the answer to this is also quite complex. While A.I. does provide an amazing tool to efficiently educate, the costs of this use make it necessary to strictly regulate how A.I. is used in schools, as well as further limiting A.I. for earlier grade levels.

The dichotomy of A.I. 's potential to both accelerate and degrade the learning of students means that the incorporation of A.I. in schooling must also be split, with heavier restrictions in early grades and freer use in later grades. At the moment, schools have taken one extreme by completely banning A.I. use. After all, many students break rules to make A.I. give them answers. It may be beneficial, however, to examine the other side of the split. What happens if a school expands their rules to allow students to learn with A.I.? Alpha schools do just this, emphasizing the benefits of educational A.I.. One student, a rising seventh grader named Byron, states “that he was pleased with his academic progress so far and that he was learning eighth-grade math, ninth-grade reading and 10th-grade language arts. ‘You don’t get held back by your peers or what the teacher is teaching,’” (Source A). When used right, the endless generation of A.I. can allow guided learners to quickly forge ahead of the set curriculum, greatly benefiting those that wish to learn. This may seem great, but such a system makes it very easy for the “guidance” portion of learning to be left out, despite the fact that “A.I. actually makes it more important that we have everything from librarians… to researchers who can put this rapidly changing information environment

into context and can develop the capacity in students to make sense of things… [A.I.] gets rid of the opportunities for serendipity" (Document B). Tressie McMillan Cottom, a columnist and professor, claims here that students simply cannot just learn from A.I.. It is a technology that can convincingly spit out false or made up information, so there must be more pressure against these falsities in order to succeed in A.I. incorporation. Instead of using artificial intelligence as a crutch to compensate for the lack of a base, students must already have a base of knowledge and skills, something that requires the careful guidance of many human resources. Taking this view on the topic suggests that A.I. is so deceptively helpful that it becomes actively harmful to students, so should be avoided at all costs. As student Olivia Han phrases it, "that's the thing about being human. My thoughts aren't always optimised… [but] when I give [A.I.] my ideas to organize, I lose more than creativity – I lose a deepened understanding of myself" (Document C). Even students, who have the most to gain from student use of A.I., can see that it eventually strips them of their independent creativity. Really, the only truly beneficial use of A.I. for students is as a supplement to regular learning, and only at the point of more advanced information. After all, "technical skills won't be enough to deal with the unpredictable results in markets, so a broad-based knowledge of math and language will be the only way to adapt" (Document D). Digital Theory Lab director Leif Weatherby claims here that basic knowledge and understanding are most important, as all details and specializations inevitably shift and become useless. Because of its tendency to take away or improperly teach these essential skills, A.I. should really not be used when learning at this stage. Lower grade levels, as the site of this general learning, should therefore be the most restricted in A.I. use. The end result of this logical train of thought ends in the conclusion that artificial intelligence should never be part of education, but this is missing the dichotomy of A.I.. Remember, this tool really can help to accelerate learning, and students will inevitably use some A.I. no matter the rules. I think the balancing point between these two sides rests on the most important points of each. A.I. should not be introduced in early grade levels, where education is focused on foundational knowledge, and yet it also can be used to allow students to more efficiently learn how they wish to learn. To fulfill both of these requirements, the truly best place for A.I.

in education is as a regulated addition to teacher-based education in later grade levels, where a student will begin to explore the specializations of knowledge that they wish to pursue.

This strategy of allowance with regulation can also be applied to the educators themselves. Teachers have already begun to utilize the new technology to streamline and reduce their workload, but this has instigated major backlash from students. One college student says, “from my perspective, the professor didn’t even even read anything that I wrote” (Document E). This feeling is shared by many others, and for good reason. When teachers refuse to accommodate for student use of A.I., it feels incredibly hypocritical for those same teachers to start using A.I. for themselves. Not only this, but students can feel as if the education that they may have put considerable time or expense into has become invalidated by this use. It is therefore obvious that A.I. should never be used as a shortcut for teachers. However, if teachers use this technology responsibly to help students, is it really that bad? According to history teacher Jon Gold, “ChatGPT [isn’t] a threat to student learning as long as teachers [pair] it with substantive, in class discussions” (Document F). If teachers, instead of using A.I. to do less, use it to build onto their own teaching, students may be able to truly benefit. A.I. really can be used to lessen the menial workload of a teacher, given that the teacher is committed to spending this extra time on the students. In a best-case scenario given by Anant Agarwal, an education innovator, “teachers remain while A.I.-enabled tools… begin to appear, freeing instructors from repetitive tasks and administrative duties. This shift lets teachers focus on what really matters: engaging and inspiring students…” (Document H). Despite the fear and anger that students may feel towards teachers using A.I. to grade and organize, regulated and responsible use can allow for a greater focus on the more abstract and personalized layers of teaching. Students will always benefit from a teacher being more attentive to their educational needs, and this use of A.I. allows for that. Even with this use, a student should never feel as if they are being taught solely by artificial intelligence, so some regulation is still required to prevent exploitation of the technology.

Aside from the direct effects of A.I. use, the presence of artificial intelligence in education also greatly sabotages the trust between student and teacher, warranting a rethinking of the current system of A.I. regulation and student inspiration. Teachers have started to accuse students of A.I. use, commonly

making false accusations. For instance, many students such as Leigh Burrell have been wrongly accused of cheating with A.I., leading them to resort to drastic measures; “The next time Ms. Burrell had to submit an assignment… She uploaded a 93-minute YouTube video documenting her writing process… ‘I was so frustrated and paranoid that my grade was going to suffer because of something I didn’t do’” (Document J). By trying to prevent student cheating, schools have traumatized innocent students, hindering their education. This is a fact that I unfortunately know from firsthand experience. I had been accused by my History teacher in eighth grade of faking an essay with A.I.. While I was able to prove that I had genuinely written the essay, I gained from this a very large fear of any use of A.I. for good or for bad. This could have harmed my ability as a student, making me more paranoid about being obsessively adherent to rules and having my work be acknowledged as my own. In the end, all of these problems seem to stem from the fact that students suddenly have access to a new tool of infinite cheating ability, understandably making teachers take a highly defensive stance. One solution to this dilemma is the timed in-class assessment, but even this still harms many. Academic administrator Clay Shirky points out that “timed assessment[s] may benefit students who are good at thinking quickly, not students who are good at thinking deeply… This is a generation that never learned cursive; its members grew up typing, For many of them, timed essays are not a return to anything but a new and unfamiliar mode” (Document F). Any way of compensating for forbidden A.I. usage unfairly harms students who follow the rules. With this in mind, perhaps it is not really A.I. itself to be the problem to solve. The students themselves are the ones who see the tool and decide to cheat, so the way to prevent distrust in students would be to make sure of their willingness to not cheat, or to ensure the motivation of students to learn. Instead of fully banning A.I. or crafting impractical A.I.-free assessments, schools should focus on understanding each student, pinpointing students more likely to sabotage their learning and encouraging all students to work towards their own education.

The ability of artificial intelligence to allow students and teachers to more quickly learn and teach means that A.I. should absolutely play a role in education, especially as trying to prevent A.I. use only serves to harm students. However, due to the potential of A.I. to mislead and sap a student’s creativity, the

technology should still be regulated and even forbidden in the lowest grade levels, where students must form a base of knowledge. Above all, the prioritization of giving students the motivation and means to direct their own learning should be the goal of education systems, and this goal should be followed through the appropriate application of any useful tool, A.I. included.

Documents

Document A - *A.I.-Driven Education: Founded in Texas and Coming to a School Near You*

Document B - *What A.I. Really Means for Learning*

Document C - *We Need to Chat(GPT)*

Document D - *A.I. Killed the Math Brain*

Document E - *The Professors Are Using ChatGPT, and Some Students Aren't Happy About It*

Document F - *Don't Ban ChatGPT in Schools. Teach With It.*

Document G - *21 Ways People Are Using A.I. at Work*

Document H - *How A.I. Can Revive a Love of Learning*

Document I - *Students Hate Them. Universities Need Them. The Only Real Solution to the A.I. Cheating Crisis.*

Document J - *A New Headache for Honest Students: Proving They Didn't Use A.I.*

Document K - *Thinking Is Becoming a Luxury Good*

Document L - *Ban or Embrace? Colleges Wrestle With A.I.-Generated Admissions Essays.*