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Humanities

09 October 2025

Artificial Intelligence and its Role in Education

We have entered the AI epidemic. Much like the opioid epidemic, people—especially students—are becoming increasingly dependent on AI. While some use it responsibly to enhance their ideas and strengthen their research, many have fallen into a trap where tools like ChatGPT replace their own thoughts and weaken their critical thinking skills. Yet, despite the risks of overreliance, AI does not signal the end of education. Instead, it challenges us to rethink how and what we teach. AI's growing influence should push schools to focus less on repetitive learning and more on critical thinking and integrating AI literacy into the curriculum can encourage teachers to model ethical use, so students are prepared for a world where AI is unavoidable.

Although many educators see AI as a threat to student learning, its potential to enhance writing and feedback shows that it can strengthen education when used responsibly. It is no secret that students have found AI such as ChatGPT useful in completing school assignments. GPT specifically can be really good at essay writing for humanities subjects or problem solving for STEM. But student Olivia Han warns against using it as, hypothesizing that “eventually we’ll leave our own voices behind,” (Han). Although it can

seem like using ChatGPT to formulate assignments is the best decision at the moment, it is easy to lose a sense of originality and creative thinking. But former English teacher Peter Greene argues that prompt formulation is a skill of its own: “If [students] put a great degree of thought into designing a prompt, would that not mean that they were doing something involving real learning?” (Greene). While many people love to imagine ChatGPT as the holy grail for eloquence and knowledge, they forget that GPT is a machine, and machines are only as good as the inputs they receive. If a student can place a prompt into GPT without original ideas or context and receive a passable response, that prompt is likely not having them think critically. Therefore, it is up to educators to create prompts that require thought provoking analysis rather than reusing/rewording overused ones from the internet. Once they’ve done this, AI excels at reviewing and revising student writing. Due to its expanse of available facts and sample essays, AI is especially good at pointing out key improvements in student writing to “increase the quality and complexity of the argument,” (Tufekci). Rather than a teacher going through hundreds of essays from students who are looking for feedback, students have a personal reviser at their fingertips. As technology develops, educators must shift their focus from fearing AI to design assignments and prompts that demand original thought and analysis.

To prepare students for a future shaped by AI, educators must teach AI literacy and integrate responsible AI use into the curriculum. In fact, without proper AI literacy, many students who aren’t exposed to AI early on will go on to make life altering mistakes in their professional lives regarding plagiarism or even AI hallucination. The only way to create a community that agrees on AI standards is by “equitably educat[ing] people to develop

them,” (Tufekci). As AI develops, there are skills that become even more essential such as critical thinking, analyzing, and general knowledge to spot false claims. So, regardless of how developed AI gets, we will always need humans who make new discoveries or create new things, and that starts with students. People need to be able to “verify information they receive from chatbots,” (Goldstein). This new skill of AI literacy and verification is an essential one that should be integrated into education as it shows students how to effectively interact with chatbots and use it to their benefit. One teacher, Jon Gold, has reinforced this idea by “explain[ing] to students exactly how he has used AI in part to model ethical use,” (Goldstein). Although many teachers have been criticized for using AI, it is sometimes one of the best ways to model proper usage. Many people thought the internet would be the end of education since information is available at your fingertips. But through modeled usage and Internet Literacy, teachers and the education system as a whole have used the Internet to boost learning, teach new skills such as how to make effective searches or how to spot bias in an article. The same concept can apply to AI as teachers can show effective use and set guidelines to ensure students are still learning essential concepts without doing busy work. Through guided modeling and curriculum integration, schools can turn AI from a threat into a tool for empowerment.

But, to combat any instances of cheating, teachers should emphasize AI Literacy vs. AI Usage. Learning about AI is realizing it is not okay to use it in all circumstances. Many students can blur lines between these two concepts, yet Olivia Han clearly states “Increased reliance on AI takes away from the ability to challenge ourselves and develop ideas that are original,” (Han). When students force themselves to think critically, it can be

an effective way to learn new concepts or ways of thinking. Bringing this state of enlightenment to AI can help enhance skills rather than just using AI first and neglecting to think. To emphasize this point, it took 74 days for the iPhone to gain popularity and reach 1 million users, while it took ChatGPT a mere 5. This stark difference between two life-changing pieces of technology shows that while we had some time to adapt to the emergence of Apple products and integrate them into our lives, GPT has taken the world by storm, causing the education system to fall behind on its quest to prepare students for the real world. That is why it is important for individual teachers to model ethical AI usage instead of waiting for the system because rejecting GPT could lead to worse outcomes in a student's future. By setting classroom expectations and modeling ethical use, educators can help students develop independent thinking alongside responsible technological habits.

In conclusion, AI does not render education useless—it redefines it. The rise of AI demands that schools prioritize critical thinking, teach AI literacy, and model ethical usage so students can thrive in an AI-driven world. Rather than rejecting new technology, teachers must lead students to learn how to use it wisely. By embracing this responsibility, the education system can turn the “AI epidemic” into an opportunity for stronger, smarter, and more adaptable learners.