

# Urgent considerations about artificial intelligence and education

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Mauro Jarquín Ramírez.  
(Photo La Jornada)

*(Edit.) The digital form of the media has permanently changed the way people live together. The use of computers and the Internet has become an integral part of our everyday life. Computer science has developed the ability not only to absorb and process information, but*

*also to recognise patterns, analyze them and make predictions. People have been talking about “artificial intelligence” or AI for short since the 1960s.*

*After a short time, a feeling of unease spread among the researchers. Transatlantic corporations, foundations, associations, and lobby groups such as the international media group Bertelsmann, the European Union, the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the World Bank and IMF are now the driving forces behind the reconstruction of the national education system. In essence geared towards the common good, it is now being undermined by corporate interests.*

*In Central America, too, there is widespread unease about digital media and the development of artificial intelligence. In an article published in “La Jornada” in May 2023, the Mexican philosopher Mauro Jarquín Ramírez warns against the neocolonial exploitation of education and school. Digital structures, platforms and various forms of AI violate state sovereignty via education because various AI products have an ideological implication.*

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The development of *artificial intelligence* (AI) has experienced a real boom over the recent years. When the spread of AI reached the education sector, it triggered a whirlwind of innovation

there. It was accompanied by advertising campaigns emphasising its great benefits for the education system. The narrative presented promoted AI to be essentially a tool to support teachers and students in the teaching-learning process through strategies such as personalisation, and a tool for educators to delegate a wide range of tasks, especially the often-time-consuming administration.

## There is confidence, but also skepticism

The heralded entry of private AI in school systems around the world has affected large parts of society and aroused great interest in science. In both fields it evoked confidence over potential teaching and learning improvements but also skepticism and open concerns over the impact of such technology implications. Subsequently, lectures and debates were organised where AI perspectives and education would be discussed.

Although these meetings have been extremely interesting, discussions so far mainly focused on structural constraints and inequalities with regards to technology and Internet access. Important concerns over how to increase productivity and reap the benefits of such technologies were looked at. Certain risks generally associated with abuse, plagiarism, or bias in generative AI were also discussed.

## Asking for history and context

AI education is often taken for granted, as if it had no history nor context. Furthermore, it is presented as if it were a ready-made tool for its users. It is not perceived as a technical, historically conditioned form of expression that affects those who use it; as a technology producing not only useful and «accessible» academic content, but also a new sociability in education.

## Exploitation of education and school

It is important to take into account at least three aspects related to the historical development of AI in education: The collection of digital data refers to the process in which the educational

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reality is transformed into large amounts of information processed by machines (data). This will enable AI to perform tasks such as calculations, projections, diagnostics, etc. Since the complex everyday reality of machines has to be reviewed, the collection of digital data also entails a simplification.

While education data can be generated in different ways – for example, through large-scale standardised tests, among which PISA stands out – the use of platforms and software in education greatly increases the capacity for information gathering. Such data must be collected continuously. As a result, schools act as data mines, and education becomes an exploitative practice enabling big corporations owning such digital “tools” to benefit.

### **Sovereignty and ideological implications**

The question of power is crucial when we talk about digital structures, platforms and AI forms. This applies in at least three ways:

- a) All these expressions represent socio-technical systems that reorganise various educational, curriculum, management and assessment processes. Digital structures and AI itself determine both the digital interaction of users and research results.
- b) Technology, especially generative AI, has ideological implications expressed in the form of “distortions” in the texts it produces. Various AI products produce politically defined results, as studies on *Google Bard* and *Open AI’s Chat GPT* positionings on the Russia-Ukraine war have shown.
- c) On the other hand, the pedagogical collection of data is an exercise of power, as it creates a controlled environment. In this process actors such as bureaucrats and companies can subsequently intervene from outside through political instruments in order to manipulate behaviour and make a profit.

### **Do platform companies dominate the economy?**

Finally, the spread of digital capitalism provides the context for the push into AI in education. This is also the result of open competition between Google and Microsoft in providing AI for education. This has at least two implications:

- a) The creation of enclaves of private profitability in the field of public education through the commercialisation of AI products, which could lead to another cycle of education privatisation;
- b) the use of AI in education, which focuses primarily on the formation of human capital now linked to the requirements of the fourth industrial revolution.

### **Maintaining control over the education system**

Given the enthusiasm for the digital transformation of education, it is advisable to develop a critical distance allowing educational communities, teachers, students and families to understand and discuss their limits and internal tensions. In this way, we shall be able to provide more clarity about the structure of the system as well as the consolidation of current educational projects set to address the requirements of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, without ceding control over education to external actors.

The pursuit of a critical and democratic education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century presupposes the overcoming of technology fetishism. So, before asking teachers and schools to “modernise” without discussion, it is important to understand the complex historical circumstances of AI as well as taking into account the possible (positive or negative) effects of its use on everyday educational life.

Source: <https://www.jornada.com.mx/notas/2023/05/24/politica/consideraciones-urgentes-sobre-inteligencia-artificial-y-educacion/>

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