

Session Outcome Document

Rethinking learning for the AI era

DiploFoundation, Geneva Internet Platform, Beijing Institute of Technology

9 July, 17:00 - 17:45

<https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/forum/2026/Agenda/Session/250>

Key issues discussed

- Two foundational modes of learning - apprenticeship and storytelling - are being disrupted by AI. Throughout history, humans have learned in two core ways: by observing masters (apprenticeship) and by constructing and sharing narratives (storytelling). AI now threatens the second mode, as students can generate polished essays with minimal effort, undermining the cognitive and emotional process of building a narrative.
- Students have started using AI to pass exams without genuinely learning, raising urgent questions about the purpose of education. This raises the broader question of who will generate new knowledge in the future if we rely more and more on AI synthesis rather than original thought.
- Five meta-capabilities were proposed as essential for the AI era: learning agility, execution capability, communication skills, leadership potential, and critical judgement. AI should not replace education but should push institutions to raise their standards, shifting the university's role from providing answers to helping students ask better questions.
- Critical thinking and adaptability are becoming increasingly rare and therefore increasingly valuable. As access to information becomes cheap and ubiquitous through AI, the ability to evaluate, filter, and make sound decisions in a sea of contradictory data is now at a premium. Adaptability is a learnable skill, not an innate trait, and continuous learning is the quality most likely to sustain professionals through an unpredictable future.
- Human qualities - curiosity, compassion, and imperfection - remain irreplaceable and must anchor education in the AI era.

Key insights

- The discussion reflected a cross-cultural and cross-generational convergence on several core themes: that AI is a tool which must remain in service of human agency; that critical thinking and adaptability are the most valuable skills in an AI-saturated world; that distinctively human qualities - storytelling, curiosity, compassion, and the capacity for genuine reflection - cannot be replicated by machines.
- AI acts as 'a mirror' that reveals what makes people uniquely human. Education should not aim to optimise students into machine-like efficiency, but instead preserve the human capacity for imperfection, reflection, and independent thought.

- AI will continue transforming education, but its success will ultimately depend on whether schools and universities place greater emphasis on critical thinking, storytelling, adaptability, and lifelong learning, skills that remain fundamentally human despite rapid advances in AI.
- A commitment to lifelong learning, ideally established early in life, is the most resilient foundation for a career, as the specific disciplines studied are likely to be transformed or rendered obsolete by technological change.
- AI is an increasingly indispensable professional tool capable of improving productivity, drafting documents, and supporting complex operational decisions, but human vision, responsibility, and face-to-face collaboration remain irreplaceable.
- Execution capability - the ability to translate AI-generated ideas into real-world results - is the key differentiator in the AI era, since idea generation itself has been largely commoditised by AI tools.

Key recommendations and forward-looking actions

- Pedagogy must align with actual human behaviour. Since students will naturally use available AI tools, educational systems that ignore this reality are ineffective. Assessment methods must evolve accordingly.
- Rather than banning AI outright or permitting unrestricted use, a middle path was suggested: designing assessments - such as oral examinations and project-based evaluations - that require genuine understanding and cannot be gamed by AI, thereby accommodating AI as a tool while preserving learning integrity.
- On the question of when students should engage AI, a compromise practice was proposed: students should first clarify their own understanding and formulate their own questions before consulting AI, so that they can critically evaluate the AI's response rather than passively accepting it - a middle ground between avoiding AI and depending on it.
- Rather than framing AI as either a threat to replace or a panacea to embrace uncritically, multiple speakers converged on a compromise position: AI should be used as an assistant for time-consuming or information-gathering tasks, freeing human cognitive capacity for higher-order reflection, creativity, and judgement.

Full session report at

<https://dig.watch/event/wsis-forum-2026/rethinking-learning-for-the-ai-era>