Why AI Should Be Called Artificial Learning

(AL) Machines don’t think—they learn.

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Abstract

This paper challenges the conventional term 'Artificial Intelligence' (AI) and proposes the adoption of 'Artificial Learning' (AL) as a more accurate descriptor of modern computational systems. It argues that contemporary AI models demonstrate exceptional learning capacity without exhibiting true intelligence, reasoning, or understanding. The AL framework provides a clearer, ethically sound, and scientifically accurate terminology for the field.

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Abstract

The term Artificial Intelligence (AI) has dominated public discourse and academic research since its inception in 1956. However, the term is increasingly misaligned with the underlying computational reality of these systems. Modern AI models, from deep learning networks to generative transformers, demonstrate extraordinary capacity for pattern recognition, prediction, and optimization—but not intelligence in the cognitive, emotional, or self-reflective sense. This paper argues that the field is more accurately described as Artificial Learning (AL). By examining the conceptual, technical, and philosophical differences between intelligence and learning, this paper establishes that today's so-called "AI" systems merely simulate intelligent behavior through large-scale data learning rather than exhibit true understanding. The reclassification toward Artificial Learning provides a more precise linguistic, ethical, and scientific framework for describing current and emerging computational systems.

Keywords

Artificial Learning (AL), Artificial Intelligence (AI), Machine Learning, Cognitive Science, Epistemology, Data Ethics, Computational Intelligence, Pattern Recognition, Consciousness, Technological Philosophy

1. Introduction

The phrase Artificial Intelligence was coined by John McCarthy and colleagues at the 1956 Dartmouth Workshop, envisioning machines that could perform tasks requiring human-like reasoning, problem-solving, and understanding. Nearly seventy years later, technological progress has indeed been remarkable—but the reality diverges sharply from that vision. Current AI systems excel at learning from data: they identify correlations, optimize outputs, and replicate patterns found in training sets. Yet these capabilities do not constitute intelligence in the cognitive sense. Intelligence implies comprehension, abstraction, self-awareness, and adaptability beyond prior experience. Contemporary AI systems possess none of these traits. This paper proposes replacing the term Artificial Intelligence with Artificial Learning (AL) to more accurately reflect what modern computational models achieve and to avoid the anthropomorphic misinterpretation of machine capabilities.

2. Methodology

The argument in this paper is built on a comparative conceptual analysis supported by insights from cognitive science, philosophy of mind, and machine learning theory. The study proceeds through three analytical stages:

1. **Definitional Analysis:** Examining canonical definitions of “intelligence” and “learning” from psychology, philosophy, and computer science.

2. **Functional Comparison:** Evaluating how modern AI architectures (e.g., deep neural networks, large language models) align more closely with processes of learning rather than reasoning.

3. **Epistemological Reflection:** Considering the implications of rebranding the field in linguistic, ethical, and governance contexts. This methodology does not rely on experimental data but on philosophical and conceptual reasoning, consistent with normative scholarship in emerging technology ethics and terminology reform.

3. Discussion

3.1 **Intelligence vs. Learning:** Intelligence encompasses reasoning, abstraction, self-reflection, moral awareness, and creativity. It is context-sensitive and adaptive to novel conditions. Learning, in contrast, denotes the process of modifying behavior or internal models in response to experience or data exposure. AI systems perform the latter: they learn correlations statistically. They do not reason about the world; they approximate functions based on data distributions.

3.2 **Statistical Approximation, Not Cognition:** Large language models, reinforcement agents, and image recognition systems rely on probabilistic optimization and gradient descent. They construct high-dimensional mappings from inputs to outputs through training but possess no subjective awareness of their outputs. This process is learning without understanding.

3.3 **The Illusion of Intelligence:** The perceived “intelligence” of these systems arises from anthropomorphic projection—humans attribute human-like cognition to systems that mimic linguistic or behavioral cues. However, these models lack consciousness, emotional comprehension, or epistemic self-correction outside predefined parameters.

3.4 **Reframing as Artificial Learning (AL):** Rebranding the field as Artificial Learning produces several conceptual and practical benefits: clarity, transparency, ethics, and interdisciplinary integration.

4. Conclusion

Artificial Intelligence, as currently practiced, represents not the creation of thinking machines but the refinement of learning machines. The systems we call “intelligent” exhibit no awareness, comprehension, or intent; they replicate statistical regularities in data at unprecedented scales. Thus, the term Artificial Learning (AL) more accurately captures the essence of these technologies.

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