The AI-Brick Road: AI as the Future Key to Education?

How can we know when it’s time to reshape the learning experience? Imagine a future classroom where feedback is automatic, language translators are available at the touch of a button, or students are assigned to group projects based on complementary skills. Artificial intelligence (AI) technology seemingly holds the key to unlocking this promising world of education, yet many Americans seem hesitant to embrace it. A nationally representative survey of approximately 3,000 US adults, conducted by Verasight as part of a class at Cornell University, examines attitudes toward the functionality of AI in education. The findings? 39.1% of Americans don’t view AI as a useful tool in classrooms, while 33.1% remain undecided. So what does this mean for the future of AI in schools?

In recent years, AI technology has shifted from a vague concept to a tangible, prominent tool across various sectors. Its integration into the education domain has left various educators, students, and parents to wonder whether the impact of this shift will be positive or detrimental to learning. The survey captures the public’s outlook on the ‘usefulness’ of AI in schools, garnering a diverse range of opinions in distrust, indecision, and cautious optimism.

With its prospective ability to flag difficulties, personalize learning for individual student needs, serve as a teaching assistant, and enhance accessibility, we anticipated that most Americans would find AI technology to be a positive mechanism for students and their learning potential. However, only 27.8% of Americans believe AI could be useful in schools, likely due to skepticism toward AI and its departure from traditional teaching methods, leading students to develop an over-reliance on technology.

These results reveal current attitudes toward AI, which areas are more receptive to how AI could enhance educational outcomes, and how we should continue to invest in artificial educational tools. Skepticism towards AI remains most prevalent across all regions, but support for AI is lowest in the West and Midwest, potentially stemming from cultural attitudes or access to technology. Understanding these regional dynamics serves as an important reminder of the cautiousness that we should proceed with in adopting new technologies. It’s also a potential indicator that educators should continue to allocate their resources in other directions, particularly in areas like the West and Midwest. However, this also raises important questions about the optics of AI in how it's presented to educators, lawmakers, and parents, and potential disconnects in its application that could be amended to benefit students.

AI could be transformative in bridging educational disparities and narrowing the gap for students and educators with a lack of resources. The [US Department of Education](https://www.ed.gov/sites/ed/files/documents/ai-report/ai-report.pdf) believes that “AI may enable achieving educational priorities in better ways, at scale, and with lower costs.” Uncovering how we can leverage AI, particularly in underserved communities where educational resources are scarce, could be the key to breakthroughs in barriers to access for students. Similarly, uncovering how we can change the rhetoric surrounding AI could be the key to breakthroughs in shifting American perceptions.

The debate on AI in schools is still fresh, but one thing is clear: AI has the potential to transform learning. While reservations rooted in concerns about traditional teaching, labor, and reliance remain, these attitudes stem from misunderstandings about the potential uses of AI. We haven’t yet perfected the tools we need to revolutionize learning, but with continued strides in research and careful implementation, we can genuinely support students and teachers while mitigating the risks that Americans are wary of. The key to reshaping education lies in transparency, equity, and a commitment to innovation.