



Is AI killing the education system or was it already in decay?

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Mass adoption of disruptive innovations allows underlying issues to emerge into mainstream dialogue. A historic example is the birth control pill, an oral contraceptive where women for the first time in modern medicine can actively control their menstrual cycle and reproduction. Co-developed by American biologist Gregory Pinch and gynecologist John Rock in the 1950s, the pill was commercially approved and made publicly accessible by the US Food and Drug Administration in 1960. Introduced in the height of America's second wave feminist movement, the pill has become more than just a drug to reduce or prevent pregnancy. It has morphed into a critical tool, raising the dialogue on the growing importance of female autonomy and emancipation from the patriarchal system, and a symbolic act to restructure gender roles and norms. No longer are women bound by their domestic duties and maternal responsibilities but are encouraged to pursue their own education and career pathways.

In today's age, a disruptive innovation is unequivocally Artificial Intelligence, specifically the subset branch of AI, Generative AI. GenAI requires prompts to generate new content, pulled from large language models of data and pattern recognition (ACU 2024). First mentions of GenAI models date back to the late 1950s and only recently, for over 70 years, has made its public release in November 2022 by OpenAI with ChatGPT. Since its debut, ChatGPT has been widely embraced by the world for its reliability and convenience that governments worldwide are actively encouraging businesses and educational institutes to integrate AI technology into their operational processes. This includes the Australian Government, launching in 2021, the National Artificial Intelligence Centre and in 2024, the National Australian Framework for Generative AI in Schools to provide practical guides on safe and responsible AI adoption.

Like any disruptive technology, mixed reactions to the adoption and usage of it is expected. For GenAI, the biggest controversy lies in learning development in schools and work-related tasks. Many psychologists and educators stress that long term use of GenAI descends into heavy reliance and consequently, cognitive atrophy; a deterioration of physical loss of brain tissue due to persistent declined use of memory and straining of difficult mental tasks. Researchers note that our natural instinct for the path of least resistance influences our tendency to offload challenging tasks to technologically capable machines (Pomeroy 2025). As a result, GenAI platforms are incredibly enticing to use as its features allow the completion of tasks that are otherwise seen as mundane, repetitive and disengaging. Evidently, OpenAI proudly informs the public, "ChatGPT has reached 100 million monthly active users just two months after launch in January 2023," demonstrating rising public embrace of GenAI platforms (Sen 2026). Early raised concerns on prolonged use and reliance of GenAI is not skepticism, it is a warning to prevent further jeopardy on our brain's health and mental capacities in overcoming tasks both simple and complex tasks in our everyday lives.

GenAI enthusiasts or technology rationalists counteract GenAI implications by reminding

users that this model of AI is simply a tool. Vitomir Kovanovic (2025), Associate Professor and Director of the Centre for Change and Complexity in Learning puts it, "Knowing when, where and how to use AI is the key to long-term success and skill development. Prioritising which tasks can be off-loaded to an AI to reduce cognitive debt is just as important as understanding which tasks require genuine creativity and critical thinking." Balancing GenAI seems to be the key but why is the concern of the younger generations' relationship with GenAI, specifically, their learning development in schools so visceral? Perhaps the burning question should shift to whether ***AI is killing the education system?***

GenAI studies investigating the implications on student learning revealed heightened weak memory retention, disengagement and shallow learning. However, further empirical analysis highlights that GenAI did not create these learning disabilities. These problems already existed and the only thing AI did was remove the cover that made shallow learning look acceptable. Praveen Singh (2017) explains, "When the output of a student who understood nothing looks identical to the output of a student who understood everything, the assessment was never measuring understanding. It was measuring compliance. AI just made the old approach impossible to defend." The education system remains unchanged for many centuries. From the classic model of sit and listen to grades being an acceptable proxy and capture of one's capabilities, to diplomas and certificates being blunt instruments as a visible method in solving a coordination problem. A cheap, legible method like an assembly line in the Industrial Revolution to fundamentally sort millions of people at scale - power capitalism (Nosta 2025).

Historically, every younger generation is perceived by other generations as naive, lazy and clueless and thus lacks the representation and authority to participate in decisions and processes that impact them. Voiceless and powerless, the only route of retaliation is relying on mechanisms or technology that allows them to 'cheat' their way out of the system. The mass embrace of AI by the younger generation is not a projection of their *laziness*, it is a clear signal of quiet quitting the education system. Wielding GenAI is the alternative act of rejecting the education system in relation to low attendance and low grades. This justifies that the education system is a model disconnected with student's identities and interests, exhausting them and disengaging them from wanting to learn. Ultimately, the education system is in decay.

To make matters worse, encouragement by the Australian government and teachers to use GenAI is only further crippling learning abilities. GenAI requires prompts, a question, instruction, or statement you provide to the platform to receive a curated answer. One can argue that repetitive creation of prompts is an active exercise to honing better questions and communicating thoughts, because in essence, a prompt is an active engagement with the subject in pinpointing knowledge gaps curated by one's inner voice (Chakrapani 2025). Nonetheless, when it comes to already disengaged students, they are likely to passively curate shallow questions that are either reinforcing misunderstandings, preventing discernment of knowledge gaps and/or hindering learning efficiency (Burke 2024). Understanding of the subject matter remains superficial and with enough repetition, users associate the instant delivery of answers from GenAI as "learning with resolution rather than with exploration" (Mishra & Henriksen 2025).

On an optimistic note, GenAI can erode habits of deep learning but with targeted interventions, it can limit the damage. The key is supportive teachers who can disrupt bad impulses through probe and contradiction. They can lead metacognitive and developmental activities that emphasise evaluating information and reasoning over rote memorization. In 2024 however, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training published a report on GenAI usage in the Australian education system, noting that AI tools are integrated into schools, and educators are "ill-prepared by their institutions" (Department of Education 2023). Kieran McCarron (2023), Policy Officer of

the National Tertiary Education Union, further elaborates that GenAI practices were pushed onto them, and that attitudes of resistance are partly due to a lack of school support and access to experts and communities of practice.

From a structural level, the Australian government has not only failed to appropriately support the upskilling of teachers on GenAI usage, but the active encouragement for students to engage in GenAI is also powerfully signaling the idea that it is acceptable to participate in a hive of unoriginal ideas. The Australian government has created a structurally self-reinforcing circuit, exacerbating superficial engagement over deep understanding and the issue of us becoming "intellectual tourists" who "visit ideas, not inhabit them." This period of learning is the decline of life-long learning, individual voice and creative imagination.

The public debut of ChatGPT in November 2022 brought generative AI into the global conversation. Since then, the mass embrace of GenAI by young students to meet school requirements at a bare minimum has caused these rising concerns to emerge into mainstream dialogue. Countless news reports, media articles and studies published are making it harder to ignore the poor foundation of the education system that is pervasive and failing the younger generation. This surge in GenAI adoption should be read as a silent cry for help and rather than focusing on the implications of GenAI usage, we should be addressing the crumbling foundations of the education system and revitalise it to meet the younger generation's demands.

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