Drawing the Line: Reflections on AI and Learning

Tshering Yangki[1]

Initial Resistance

I was writing the final section of my master's thesis when ChatGPT arrived in 2022. I managed to resist it mainly out of fear of being caught. But in retrospect, I am very glad that I completed the thesis without AI, not only because I get to own every sentence I wrote, but because I now recognise that as an experience that will become increasingly difficult to have hereafter.

Every day, we see we are becoming less sure of ourselves.

The Quiet Erosion of Self-Trust

As individuals, and as academics, we are quietly losing confidence in our own judgement. Many of us, including myself, now seek validation from AI tools not just for our writing, but for our thinking, our conversations, and even our sense of whether we handled a situation well.

Immediately after writing what we believe is a beautiful sentence, we find ourselves opening another window to ask an AI tool whether we were right. I do this more than I would like to admit.

This extends to personal engagement too. Sometimes, after an awkward exchange with a colleague, I have found myself describing the interaction to ChatGPT and asking: Was I right? Did I do something wrong? And when it validates me, I feel better. When it suggests I could have handled it differently, I feel guilty.

1 Tshering Yangki is a Lecturer at the Trongsa College of Heritage and Contemporary Studies, Royal University of Bhutan. She pursued graduate studies in Political Communications and Media, and her interests centre on understanding media cultures.

I realise that this is not healthy. The AI is not a therapist, not a colleague, not a friend. It is, as I now understand, pattern recognition with numbers and algorithms that produce something sounding human without any human experience behind it.

But knowing this intellectually has not stopped me from returning to it for second opinion and external validation. And I suspect I am not alone. Research confirms that this unease is widespread. A study (Đerić et al., 2025) of 823 higher education participants found that alongside the genuine benefits of generative AI, the tools also carry significant downsides, such as erosion of critical thinking skills due to overreliance on AI, and degradation of academic competencies.

Emerging empirical evidence on the implications of AI systems for learning and independent reasoning raises significant concerns. In June, 2025, researchers at MIT Media Lab, led by Dr. Kosmyna, conducted a study examining the brain activity of 54 participants who wrote essays using ChatGPT, a search engine, or no digital assistance.

The results revealed that participants relying on ChatGPT exhibited the lowest levels of brain engagement and performed worse across neural, linguistic, and behavioural measures.

More significantly, when these participants were later asked to complete writing tasks without AI assistance, they struggled to generate original ideas and instead attempted to recall content previously produced by ChatGPT. The researchers described this phenomenon as the accumulation of "cognitive debt" (Kosmyna et al., 2025), warning that prolonged dependence on AI could have far-reaching consequences for human intellectual development, independent thinking, and personal autonomy.

A paper from the University of Sydney argues that the most sustainable response to the rise of artificial intelligence in education is not stricter policing or technological countermeasures, but to redesign assessments that AI cannot easily complete. Educators are encouraged to develop assessments that require higher-order thinking, critical judgement, reflection, and originality, which are capacities that remain difficult for AI to replicate (Akbar, 2025).

However, I recently caught myself using AI to design AI-resistant assignments. I stared at the screen for a long while, not knowing what to make of it except thinking how ironic. The incident exposed a subtle vulnerability. Despite understanding the potential risks of AI, I found myself entrusting it with a task that demands human judgement and creativity.

The Problem of Unequal Access

When I was studying abroad, I noticed something that troubled me deeply. Some students with demonstrably limited academic competency were submitting work of striking quality. I only discovered much later that they had paid versions of Grammarly, and paid subscriptions to premium AI writing tools, an access that was not equally available to all.

Studies are drawing attention to this issue. The OECD (Varsik & Vosberg, 2024) report found that the integration of AI tools can widen existing educational disparities, as access to premium technologies remains prohibitively costly for many schools and families, thereby extending educational advantages to students who are already privileged.

The data from Inside Higher Ed is equally sobering. It was found that, as of 2025, half the colleges have not provided students with institutional access to AI tools, leaving many to either finance their own access or go without (Flaherty, 2025).

These findings suggest that the benefits of AI-enhanced learning are being distributed unevenly, as access is increasingly determined by students' financial means, raising concerns that AI may reinforce existing disparities in learning opportunities. It would not be long before we witness this inequality play out in our own classrooms.

The Only Standard That Holds

I have been fortunate to attend three rounds of AI training, focused on the evolving role of AI in university teaching and learning, which gave me the opportunity to reflect on where I could possibly draw the line in my own classroom.

My stance, at least for now, is that the use of AI matters less than what follows. I do not particularly care whether a student uses AI to help craft an essay, as long as they can sit with me afterward and explain it. They should understand the words they have written, account for their arguments, and defend the sentences they have written. If they can do that, then learning has happened, or so I would like to believe.

I once did a classroom experiment where I asked my students to write their essays by hand first, then run it through AI, not to fix it, but to find the mistakes. Their final submission had to include those errors, flagged and owned.

The rule: More mistakes, more marks, not because I was trying to reward failure, but because in an age where it is becoming increasingly difficult to verify whether a piece of work is genuinely someone's own, we can only hold on to honesty.

Thus, I believe that transparency is our guiding principle moving forward. Students should be encouraged to declare and own how they used AI in their work, and educators must do the same.

The most meaningful insight I have drawn from the AI training sessions, and the one I found myself writing repeatedly at the end of every session is this: AI can only be as powerful as the use we make of it. Put differently, AI is only as great as the prompter. The clearer we are about what we want to say, the better we can guide the tool towards expressing it.

Paradoxically, this suggests that the best preparation for an AI-dominated academic world remains the old way, namely reading deeply, thinking critically, and cultivating a voice that is genuinely one's own.

Research from the MIT Media Lab frames this in neurological terms: "Brain connectivity systematically scaled down with the amount of external support" (Kosmyna et al., 2025). The less individuals relied on outside tools, the richer and more widely connected their thinking became.

This shows that when we outsource the struggle, we also risk outsourcing the growth that comes with it. The implications for education are profound. If students increasingly avoid the cognitive effort and struggles that underpin

learning, we may miss out on the growth that gives education its purpose. In this light, educational institutions must place renewed value on humility and honesty, now more than ever.

We are fortunate, in some ways, in our setting. The previous College of Language and Culture Studies' focus on Dzongkha language and literature means that AI tools have not yet colonised our core academic disciplines in the way they have with other disciplines.

Many of our colleagues feel left behind by the AI wave precisely because the tools do not yet fluently speak their language. That gap may soon close, as efforts to build more diverse and representative training datasets already appear to be underway. The more enduring question, then, would be whether these tools will ultimately reflect our values, culture, and contexts.

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