

AI Won't replace teachers, but it might redefine them

By Kai Jones

When I first sat down to write this column, I did what a lot of students might do, I opened ChatGPT and typed, “How will AI change the way I learn at school?” The answer came back instantly, thoughtful, polished, and completely generic. At that moment, I saw both the promise and the problem of artificial intelligence in education.

The topic is pretty simple to identify, the use of AI in education. But the theme is deeper. What it means for us as learners when tools such as AI begin to take the role of teachers and even tutors. A shift has already begun in the way students engage with their studies as a result of AI-based tools. New research shows that adaptive learning systems that adjust content to align with individual students' performance increase engagement and allow students the opportunity to learn at their own pace. One study found that 83.5% of students felt that AI made them a more efficient learner.

The possibilities are exciting. Imagine a world in which every student has an AI tutor every hour of every day, which knows your weaknesses and can modify your practice assignments, and offer you hints and feedback in real time. That world is much closer than we think. For students who take large classes, can only go to office hours on a limited time, or live in an environment where resources are scarce, AI offers something that human teachers can't easily offer.

But wait. As technology evolves so do questions. If the tool does the teaching, what is the teacher's contribution? If the tool completes the assignment, what learning is taking place? An undergraduate survey surfaced from Cornell University showing major concerns, accuracy of AI-generated material, reduced critical thinking, and worry about academic integrity.

The key point I am trying to make here is that AI in education should add to, not replace, human teachers. Good teaching doesn't just give answers, it asks questions, challenges assumptions, and encourages critical thinking. When we hand over too much to the algorithm, we risk losing that human dimension.

Ultimately, the power of AI in education will be based upon the quality of the questions we ask, the design we create, the limits we impose, and the values we maintain. We can welcome the assistant role, but we need to keep the architect role for ourselves. Real learning does not happen when we are handed the answer, it happens when we struggle, ask, fail, revise and continue. We should use the algorithm, not be the algorithm.