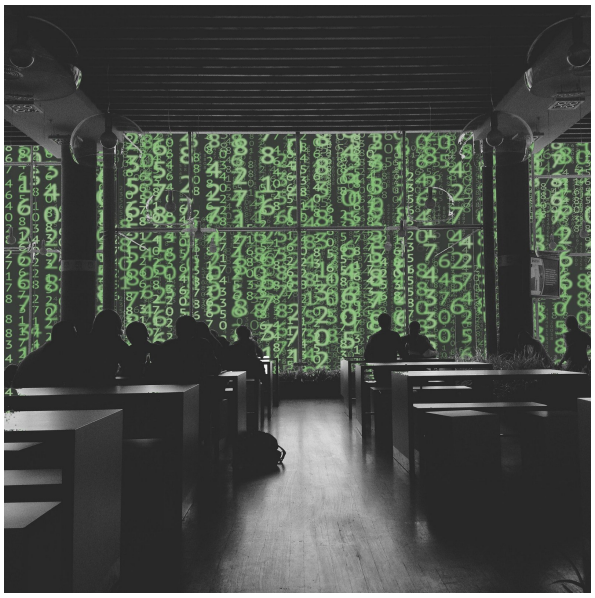

AI IN EDUCATION: WHO BENEFITS FROM ITS INEVITABLE ADOPTION?

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Artificial intelligence (AI) companies try every day to push its use in as many products and tools as possible. This is immediately apparent from the everyday experience of whoever uses the web, for instance in Google's omnipresent "AI overview", and even more from the fact that many technological products (be they cars, vacuum cleaners, bank services or software of any kind) are proposed by default to customers as integrated with AI. It's not just publicity. As some AI leaders have been saying for a long time now, it's also a matter of: i) "educating" society to the habit of using this kind of technology; ii) obtaining from society a (free) work in terms of feedback useful for the development of models ([1,2]).

The particularly urgent nature of this strategy stems from the fact that AI companies are at the heart of a massive potential systemic debt crisis. The huge funding received from private investors is, in fact, based on the bet that, in a not-too-distant future, once AI is fully integrated into production and decision-making processes, companies will require enormous amounts of computing power. Computing power far exceeding current levels and sufficient to justify the colossal undertaking of building infrastructure and training models ([3]). It is clear, then, that the systematic pressure to increase the integration and use of AI tools, which would translate into greater use of

computational infrastructure, serves to a large extent to uphold the promise just described, while a slowdown in the demand for "compute" (as it is called today in the industry's dreadful jargon), or even its mere stagnation, could trigger a serious financial crisis. Investors' bet, in turn, is based on a parallel, very simple bet by companies: to earn more money thanks to AI. Economists' forecasts and statements of AI leaders themselves, however, do not concern a simple "increase in productivity," but also, to a significant extent, the possibility of "cutting costs": that is, hiring fewer people and laying off others ([4]).

These mechanisms are not only sufficiently evident in themselves; they are also explicitly described by AI leaders, to the point that it would be very easy to find numerous examples of statements anticipating the "replacement" of humans and the "disruption" of the labor market. We cite only the following statement by D. Amodei ([5]), which is particularly clear:

AI is increasingly matching the general cognitive profile of humans, which means it will also be good at the new jobs that would ordinarily be created in response to the old ones being automated. Another way to say it is that AI isn't a substitute for specific human jobs but rather a general labor substitute for humans.

In many cases throughout history, technological revolutions required preliminary work (building infrastructure, spreading adoption, fostering familiarity with their use) before they became economically viable: just think of railroads, electrification, and the telephone. In the case of AI, however, widespread adoption also generates a direct benefit for the companies developing the technology itself, because there is an additional mechanism at work: the more people use the system, the more interaction data (prompts, preferences, corrections) is generated, which can be used to improve the models directly and continuously. This mechanism goes far beyond, in terms of effectiveness and, above all, automation, the traditional approach of improving a product through consumer feedback. For these reasons, AI

companies have a particularly strong incentive to drive widespread and early adoption, even at the cost of offering free access (or access at a price well below costs) to their products, which in turn contributes to the availability to take on debt and the systemic risk mentioned above. This makes the "push and persuasion to use" phase of AI qualitatively different from many previous technological revolutions, and it is one of the reasons why the pressure seems more aggressive even compared to the already pervasive campaigns that promoted electrification or railroads.

This logic also underlies the relentless use, in the communication campaigns of AI companies, of the concept of the "inevitable": the idea that certain transformations are now completely beyond any possible choice, regulation, or structural threshold. The insistence by Altman, Amodei, Musk, and some of their employees on the existential risks to humanity, in particular, is (regardless of how well-founded these concerns may be, a topic we won't delve into here) the extreme manifestation of the view that the technology in question has completely slipped beyond the realm of things over which, as a society, we can exercise any kind of decision-making power. *Inevitable*, indeed.

In this context, the decisions made by European public institutions responsible for education play a significant role in determining habits and ways of thinking about AI tools. Evidence suggests that the passive acceptance of AI (and Large Language Models in particular) is having a detrimental effect on the students' ability to learn and assess their own progress ([6–8]). It is also highly plausible that such effects could extend not only to the ability to learn but also to the ability to teach ([9]). Furthermore, the existence of negative effects resulting from the development and use of AI is now so evident as to be undeniable. Environmental damage, facilitation of cyberattacks, concentration of power, mass surveillance, "agents" that are difficult to control and do not follow instructions, military applications leading to errors and/or difficulties in assigning responsibility for lethal decisions: this is only a partial list of AI's "negative externalities" that have now become

firmly established in the public discourse, and which no one can easily dismiss ([10]). The conversation about introducing AI into schools and universities, however, seems to be still in a rather immature stage, in which at most the methods are being debated, while the most prominent concern is the danger of "falling behind."

Even if we set aside the issues related to its effects on learning, and all the negative externalities imposed on society, accepting the introduction of AI into education as "inevitable" means participating in the forced push of this technology into society that we described at the beginning, a push driven by the communication and market strategies of the very private entities that develop AI and the investors who hope to profit from its adoption. This push, in turn, is fueled, as we saw, by structural factors linked to the nature of this financial gamble and the systemic debt associated with it.

In 2007, the Circolare Fioroni banned, in Italian schools, the use of cell phones in the classroom during school hours. Regardless of the specific issues of this document, and however imperfect its practical implementation may have been, the general consensus has long been that the obvious choice for schools was to allow the use of cell phones and smartphones only for specific reasons and on particular occasions. The case of smartphones thus demonstrates that it is, in principle, possible to conceive an educational model in which a certain technology (no matter how pervasive and necessary it may be in the outside world) remains essentially separate from educational activities. In the case of AI, however, it seems equally obvious to many that the entire architecture of education, from elementary school through doctoral programs, must be reimagined around this tool. Underlying this difference are not only the intrinsic characteristics of the two technological innovations but also a structural difference. The investments behind the development of cell phones and smartphones have never involved bets on future societal changes of a scale and risk comparable to those behind AI. It is therefore not surprising that, this time, the companies that own and develop the technology, while

competing fiercely with one another, are perfectly consistent and in agreement in their huge effort to artificially drive the technology into society.

Is it really in the best interest of our country, of our public schools, our public universities, and our students, to effectively participate in this process of persuasion, habituation, and creation of addiction?

Notes:

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[3] E. ZITRON, The OpenAI Bubble, in "Where's Your Ed At", July 15 2026, https://www.wheresyoured.at/the-openai-bubble/.

[4] F. LANDYMORE, CEOs Say AI Gives Them Only Two Options, and Both Are Bad News for Employees, in "Futurism", May 7 2026, https://futurism.com/artificial-intelligence/ceos-ai-two-decisions.

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