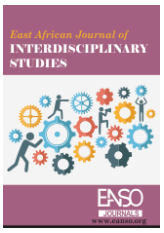

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Original Article

The Delegation of Thought: Education and Judgement in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

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ABSTRACT

This position paper analyses the silent transformation of the concept of education in the age of artificial intelligence. Based on the thesis that thought processes are increasingly being delegated and judgement replaced by algorithmic assistance, the text analyses the cultural, epistemic and institutional consequences of this development. Education is no longer understood as a form of intellectual self-activity, but as a functional operating competence reduced to accessibility, usability and immediate availability. The article pursues an essayistic-diagnostic approach and locates the crisis of education in schools and universities as an example. There, the areas of tension between autonomy and automation, between the desire to ask questions and the economy of answers, are paradigmatically revealed. The delegation of thinking to AI is not understood as a technological danger, but as cultural incapacitation legitimised by convenience and pressure to be efficient. The argumentation pleads for a reconstruction of education as the ability to form interdisciplinary judgements, to orient oneself intellectually and to criticise the technological world view. Artificial intelligence must not become an epistemic authority, but must itself be made the subject of education-based reflection. The paper concludes with a plea for an education that is not limited to access, but rather proves itself in thinking, especially where technology invites thinking, but does not replace it.

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INTRODUCTION

It is happening quietly, almost imperceptibly. As systems become faster, answers appear more immediate, and the boundaries between human judgement and machine production of results become blurred, a fundamental change in the self-image of thinking is taking place. The delegation of cognitive processes to algorithmic structures, long legitimised by promises of efficiency and digital facilitation, is becoming a fundamental cultural movement in late modern societies.

Artificial intelligence is not the cause of this process, but a catalyst. It fulfils what is attributed to it: Recognising patterns, weighting options, and making suggestions (Luhmann, 1990), to refer to the system-theoretical logic of functional expectations and environmental complexity reduction. Because it works so precisely, it changes the relationship of people to their cognitive ability. What no longer needs to be thought by oneself is no longer thought by oneself. Availability replaces access, access replaces thinking things through.

Education, traditionally understood as a process of intellectual self-formation and appropriation of the world, is under double pressure: on one hand due to the externalisation of knowledge in digital systems, and on the other due to the reduction of the concept of education to usability and instrumental competence. Where education becomes an operating competence, it loses its critical function. It becomes functionalised, standardised and gutted.

This work asks:

- What happens to human judgment when technological systems take over those activities that were once considered an expression of mental autonomy (Mead, 1934)?
- What does interdisciplinary education mean if connections are only aggregated and no longer explored?
- How can we save a concept of education that is not based on models but on the ability to doubt, to synthesise and to take intellectual responsibility?

The following sections approach these questions not empirically, but diagnostically, as an attempt to make the cultural shift in the concept of education comprehensible in the light of theoretical concepts. This form of epistemological approach follows what Mittelstraß (2005) describes as "diagnostic thinking": not an explanation in the narrow sense, but a structuring determination of what is currently happening.

EDUCATION UNDER DIGITAL CONDITIONS

What passes for education today is often just the sum of operationalised skills: problem-solving, applying, and adapting. In a world in which everything seems to be available, structured retrieval takes the place of intellectual penetration. Educational processes are optimised, standardised, and de-temporalised - they should be efficient, modular and measurable. In this context, Selwyn (2016) criticises the digitalised language of education as semantically gutted: terms such as 'learning', 'innovation' or 'competence' are rhetorically charged but epistemically emptied. Education thus appears as a technical function rather than a pedagogical relationship (Selwyn, 2016). However, it is precisely this efficiency that destroys what constitutes education in the true sense of the word: the ability to see more than is necessary. In this logic, teaching is no longer understood as a relational process, but as a control

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unit within the framework of competence-oriented output control.

Biesta (2012) warns urgently against confusing education with mere learning optimisation and calls for teaching to be reclaimed as a pedagogical act of interruption and orientation. Digital systems have not caused this trend, but have accelerated it. Access to knowledge has become global, but it is increasingly decoupled from the ability to differentiate. Where knowledge can be called up at any time, it loses its resistance. Friesen (2011) points out that pedagogical formats such as the lecture are not mere containers of information, but historically evolved forms of knowledge transfer. Where digital systems transform these formats into access technologies, not only content but also pedagogical structure is lost (Friesen, 2011). It no longer challenges - it is ready and waiting. It is precisely this renunciation of friction that is fatal: education needs the unavailable, that matures in time and debate.

In addition, there is a structural loss of context: knowledge appears in platforms, modules, search results, but no longer in conceptual systems, no longer in overarching narratives that interpret the world. The result is a form of "cognitive patchwork": Knowledge without localisation, concepts without origins, arguments without form (Coleman, 1988). The concept of education evaporates into competences that tie their validity to technological contexts. The power of judgement here does not merely mean the formation of opinions or the ability to analyse. Following Kant and Arendt, it refers to the ability to interpret the individual in the light of the general without an algorithm, but with responsibility. It is the ability to distinguish between correctness and relevance, even where no formula is available.

Those who can operate software are considered educated; those who can execute scripts are considered clever. But thinking itself as a question, as an interpretation of the world, as an attempt to test validity, is pushed out of the centre. Friesen (2011) reminds us that pedagogical forms such as the lecture not only convey content but also frame thought processes. If they are replaced by algorithmic mediation, there is a risk of losing the situational, social and linguistic dynamics that constitute education (Friesen, 2011). Education thus loses its transformative character and becomes a catalogue of functions.

Artificial intelligence reinforces this development because it provides answers without being asked. It not only replaces the search process, but also tacitly undermines the relationship to the world that education once meant: a relationship of appropriation, not utilisation.

INTERDISCIPLINARITY IN RETREAT – SCIENTIFIC UNDERSTANDING UNDER PRESSURE

For a long time, interdisciplinarity was seen as the ideal path to scientific innovation. It promised a diversity of perspectives, an expansion of knowledge and a productive irritation of disciplinary boundaries. However, what was once conceived as an intellectual movement is now in danger of degenerating into a mere combination of methods without any theoretical responsibility. The idea that concepts wander, change, and resist in new contexts and thereby deepen knowledge is losing its validity, replaced by pragmatic compatibility.

The reason for this lies not only in the structure of academic institutions, but also in the changed understanding of science itself. Where research is increasingly characterised by application pressure, the availability of third-party funding and usable outputs, those forms of knowledge that do not promise immediate implementability are sidelined. Interdisciplinarity is thus no longer understood as a broadening of horizons, but as a sharing of resources.

Artificial intelligence is reinforcing this trend. Its strength lies in linking heterogeneous data sets, not in the conceptual negotiation process. It recognises patterns, but not meaning. The epistemic space in

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which interdisciplinary understanding could succeed, i.e. the zone of conceptual friction, is increasingly being replaced by semantic smoothing: Terms are equated instead of negotiated.

This development harbours a silent danger for the understanding of science: it is no longer governed by the principle of criticism, but by the principle of convergence (Luhmann, 1990). Disciplines no longer converge because they question each other, but because algorithms provide points of connection. The idea that an economic concept is corrected by a sociological perspective, that a technical model is irritated by an ethical question, gives way to the consensus format of computational logic.

But true interdisciplinary is resistant. It requires an understanding of science that emphasises theoretical openness rather than operational efficiency (Coleman, 1988). An understanding that recognises that different ways of thinking are not compatible and that this is precisely where their value lies.

The challenge is therefore not to think of interdisciplinarity as a "platform function", but as a form of intellectual work: as the ability to tolerate difference, to examine positions, not to level out concepts, but to bring them into tension. This is exactly what no AI can do, but every thinking person can.

THE ILLUSION OF COGNITIVE RELIEF

The promises of digital systems are always formulated in a friendly way: Support, optimisation, and assistance. Artificial intelligence is said to relieve people of routines, speed up decision-making processes and broaden horizons. However, what begins as a relief quickly turns into a cognitive erosion, not because the technology can do too much, but because people are too willing to forego the thinking that it presupposes. The central illusion lies in the assumption that thinking can be delegated without losing anything. But this is precisely a category error: technical systems calculate but do not make judgements. They combine, weigh and anticipate, but they do not recognise relevance, ask questions or seek meaning. Anyone who relieves themselves of the task of classification because a system delivers results does not lose computing power, but the ability to make judgements.

This relief is not neutral. It changes the relationship to the world: problems no longer appear as questions, but as pre-structured solution spaces. Decisions are no longer made, but calculated. Cognitive processes are externalised without epistemic responsibility being carried along. As a result, humans become the executors of algorithmic suggestions, no longer as subjects but as users. This is particularly dangerous in fields that are characterised by uncertainty, ambivalence and value conflicts: Education, politics, ethics, research. What is needed here is not computing power, but orientation, differentiation and critical judgement. Where AI is misunderstood as a decision-making aid, it replaces precisely the delay through reflection that is essential for democratic discourse or scientific knowledge.

There is also the cultural component: The social pressure to be efficient means that not knowing is no longer tolerated, but "solved" immediately. Open-ended questions are replaced by immediate service. Thinking loses its form of dialogue and becomes a request for input. Relief thus becomes incapacitation not through coercion, but through convenience. This convenience corresponds to those basic needs for security and order as described by Maslow's levels of need that AI appears to fulfil efficiently without even touching the higher levels of self-actualisation (Maslow, 1943). It is not imposed, but chosen. This is where the real challenge lies: not the power of the machine, but the voluntary renunciation of self-actualisation.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE - TOOL OR WORLD VIEW?

Artificial intelligence is often described as a tool - a neutral, adaptive technology for recognising

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patterns and making predictions. However, in truth, it is more than that: it has long since become an epistemic view of the world. Its implicit logic that everything is quantifiable, calculable and predictable increasingly characterises how we think about knowledge, truth and action. Floridi (2012) describes this development as a transition to "hyperhistory", an era in which the ability to create meaning is increasingly overlaid by the availability of digitally coded information. Knowledge is no longer acquired, but aggregated - a change that fundamentally shifts the relationship between the world and knowledge (Floridi, 2012). The tool becomes a metaphor and the metaphor becomes the norm.

This development is not a technological one, but a cultural one. This is because algorithmic access to the world promises clarity, efficiency and security. It relieves us of the hassle of interpretation, the risk of error and the slowness of understanding. AI thus becomes the projection surface of a new rationalism that no longer favours reflection but performance (Luhmann, 1990). What counts is no longer whether something is understood but whether it works.

The relationship between humans and technology is fundamentally shifting: artificial intelligence is no longer understood as a tool that supports human judgement, but increasingly as an authority that dictates thinking. Recommendations become norms, suggestions become decisions. Susskind (2015) analyses this transition as a structural loss of authority in traditional professions, including the education professions. Expertise is no longer legitimised by experience or reasoning, but replaced by algorithmically generated precision. This fundamentally changes the relationship between knowledge transfer and judgement. The algorithmic output not only replaces human judgement, but it also displaces its necessity.

This development is dangerous because AI is not neutral. Its results are based on models, training data and statistical weightings - they are conditioned, not open to knowledge. Those who follow it blindly are not following reason, but a computational logic that neither recognises responsibility nor understands context. The result is a new form of epistemic authority without the obligation to give reasons. Couldry and Mejias (2019) speak of "data colonisation" in this context: humans are no longer seen as subjects of experience, but as raw materials for data-driven models. This transformation makes AI not only a technical innovation, but also a form of epistemic appropriation with political, cultural and educational consequences (Couldry & Mejias, 2019).

There is also a change in thinking style: artificial intelligence promotes thinking in probabilities, not in reasons. It replaces the why with the how. In this context, Van Dijck (2014) speaks of an epistemic shift through "datafication": the idea that everything measurable is also significant replaces the question of meaning and context. Education is thus no longer understood as an understanding debate, but as a quantifiable output that can be connected to systems, but detached from judgement (van Dijck, 2014). Floridi (2012) describes this change as a transition to the "hyperhistory" of an era in which information is omnipresent, but epistemic depth is increasingly replaced by access. The world is no longer thought through, but calculated (Floridi, 2012). This has analytical benefits, but it destroys the basis of what constitutes judgement: weighing things up, doubting, testing opposing positions. If AI is not understood as a tool, but as a system of knowledge, there is a creeping loss: the loss of plurality, ambiguity and the power of human judgement. Not because AI is hostile, but because it fits too well into an age that longs for unambiguity and can no longer tolerate complexity. So the crucial question is not: What can AI do? But rather: What should it not be allowed to replace?

DISCUSSION

The previous sections have shown that the increasing use of artificial intelligence not only changes practical processes, but also puts the semantic structure of education under pressure. The

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discussion now raises the central question: what concept of education is still viable when thinking is increasingly delegated, judgement replaced and understanding shortened? Traditionally, education is more than the accumulation of knowledge or the training of competencies. It is an expression of intellectual autonomy - the ability to reflect on one's thinking, to change perspectives, to scrutinise arguments, to take a stand. Education enables freedom of thought, not efficiency in action. However, it is precisely this concept of education that comes under pressure when assistance systems marginalise self-thinking. The current transformation shows a paradoxical dynamic. The more accessible knowledge becomes, the less likely it is to be appropriated. The more answers are available, the fewer questions are asked. Education is not abolished, but rather recoded from an internal process of orientation to an external process of usability.

Artificial intelligence reinforces this shift because it is designed to provide assistance. It is designed to help and this is precisely where the danger lies. Because the transition from assistance to substitution is fluid. What is intended as cognitive support quickly becomes a structural dependency. The person is no longer relieved, but unlearned. At the same time, it is clear that education can prove its worth through technology. Where systems provide answers, education must teach us to ask questions. Where forecasts prevail, education must enable people to think in terms of alternatives (Maslow, 1943). In the logic of Maslow's theory of motivation, education is not aimed at adaptation, but at self-actualisation. It is precisely this highest level of need satisfaction, meaningful understanding, that is undermined by algorithmised efficiency (Maslow, 1943). Where efficiency reigns, education must defend the experience of diversions, ambiguity and reflection.

The educational concept of the future must therefore be measured by whether it preserves people's ability to make judgements not despite technology, but with it (Adorno, 1969). In this context, Peters (2017) warns against the danger of reducing education to a mere willingness to adapt to technological systems. In a world of potential technological unemployment, education must not be thought of in functional terms, but must be understood as a reflexive safe space for thinking, judgement and personal responsibility (Peters, 2017). This requires not only new didactic formats, but also a reconstruction of the concept of education itself: Education not as a function, but as resistance; not as adaptation, but as the ability to distance oneself. Help must not become education for dependency. Education must empower, not relieve. But resistance to what exactly? Resistance against the creeping cultural incapacitation by algorithmic systems, against the confusion of efficiency with understanding, against a technologisation of thought that provides answers before questions are asked. Education must be directed against the reduction of the human being to a "user", against the loss of orientation, against the externalisation of judgement. It is a resistance against forgetting to ask questions itself, against a world in which relevance is replaced by calculability and the unavailable no longer has a place. In this sense, education is resistance against the cultural logic of relief.

Universities and Schools as Tipping Points

The structural devaluation of the concept of education is particularly evident where it is institutionally organised: in schools and universities. Both spheres are exemplary of the tension between autonomy and assistance between the idea of education as self-education and its reality as the imparting of skills. In many schools, the tablet is not replacing the textbook, but thinking. Adaptive learning systems, automated feedback and centralised task portals create a form of learning that focuses on processing rather than understanding. Williamson (2017) uses the example of the ClassDojo platform to show how such systems not only organise learning processes, but also algorithmically evaluate and influence social

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behaviour. Pedagogical interaction is thus replaced by a digital logic of standardisation - a change that fundamentally alters the relationship between learning, observation and control (Williamson, 2017). Knox (2020) uses the example of the Chinese education system to show how AI-based systems not only influence learning, but also change pedagogical subject forms. Education is not structured as a process of understanding, but as performance optimisation on an algorithmic basis (Knox, 2020). Where individual debate is replaced by algorithmised paths, the educational space becomes a control space. Pupils learn what is asked, not how to ask.

Universities, on the other hand, are caught up in a different dynamic: they are under pressure to deliver "application orientation" and "employability", often at the expense of basic education. Modules are being digitalised, examinations standardised and academic work increasingly reduced to output management. In the process, the dialogue aspect of academic education is being pushed into the background: open thinking, methodological doubt, and the ability for interdisciplinary translation (Mead, 1934). This development is also reflected in the structural devaluation of the teacher's role: pedagogical action is increasingly being replaced by technological systems that simulate interaction but do not lead. In this context, Biesta (2012) argues in favour of a return to teaching, to education understood as a personal, responsible relationship, not as process control. Both systems show that education is jeopardised where it becomes assimilated to the structural principle of the machine. When school becomes a platform and university a certification agency, it is not just content that is unlearned - the attitude that underpins education in the first place is unlearned: the ability to independently appropriate the world.

This is precisely why these institutions must become places where the focus is not on technical usability, but on practising judgement, language and context. Not against AI, but in conscious dialogue with it. The task is not to refuse technology, but rather not to allow it to take over.

LIMITATIONS AND BLIND SPOTS

This position paper does not claim empirical validity or normative ultimate justification. It is a diagnostic essay, a movement of thought in the midst of a process of change that is not yet complete. This results in necessary limitations that must neither be denied nor overlooked. Firstly, the analysis is deliberately theory-led and qualitative. It dispenses with quantifying procedures, representative data or standardised evaluations. This is not a methodological flaw, but an expression of the conviction that certain developments, especially cultural shifts, are not primarily measurable, but interpretable. Nevertheless, a complementary empirical study on the spread of technology-related erosion of judgement in school and university contexts would be desirable. Secondly, the argumentation is sometimes in the mode of exaggeration. The tendencies outlined - the loss of judgement, the algorithmic smoothing of education, the epistemic authority of AI - are generalisations with an epistemic-critical intention. Of course, there are counter-movements: Teachers who keep spaces open for reflection, students who refuse direct access, and educational institutions that are not absorbed in operating logic. These points of light must also be considered without relativising the basic diagnosis. Thirdly, there is a risk of self-aggrandisement that should not be underestimated. Anyone who understands education in the way represented here, as the ability to make interdisciplinary judgements, to work with concepts, to think in opposites, runs the risk of implicitly setting themselves apart from those who (have to) focus on functionality under conditions of availability. The danger lies in misusing education as an instrument of distinction, as a signal of the intellectual elite, rather than as an invitation to joint debate. Fourthly, the text remains deliberately open in its solutions. It diagnoses, irritates and provokes, but it does not formulate any educational policy

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programmes, didactic guidelines or institutional restructuring strategies. This is intentional, because what is called for here - a return to thinking as a practice of intellectual self-responsibility - cannot be prescribed. It can only be practised again.

For this very reason, any criticism of the delegation of thought must begin with criticism of itself. This text is also the product of a system that aims for efficiency, access and visibility. Writing it is an attempt, not a claim.

CONCLUSION

The great temptation of our time lies not in the domination of machines, but in the willingness with which we relinquish our intellectual independence. Artificial intelligence is not an enemy - it is an invitation. But it does not ask back. It responds immediately, readily, and smoothly. This is precisely where its danger lies: it tempts us to give up asking questions, to get used to the ready-made, to wean ourselves off our judgement.

There is no progress in this delegation of thought, but rather a loss - a loss of reference to the world, of judgement, of education. What is at stake is more than pedagogical quality or didactic design. It is the self-image of humans as rational beings who not only process information but also develop meaning. It is precisely this ability to develop meaning that is central to Biesta (2012): Education is not aimed at adaptation, but at interruption, at pausing in the stream of automated processes to provide orientation.

The position paper developed here, therefore, argues in favour of a reconstruction of the concept of education that goes beyond skills. What is at stake is more than a concept of education - it is a concept of humanity. The human being is not a stimulus-response model, a computing unit or an information node. He is a being in need of orientation who not only uses his world, but understands it. The power of judgement is not optional - it is the condition of his freedom. Education must again be understood as the ability to deal with complexity not through simplification, but through intellectual labour. It must endure difference, name ambivalence, and cultivate contradiction. Not because it is efficient, but because it is human. The role of artificial intelligence in this process is ambivalent. It can enrich education through access, comparison and linking. However, it must not replace it. It must not become an epistemic primacy to which thinking bows. Education must be able to utilise AI without following it. It must be able to judge what cannot be counted: relevance, ethics, meaning. In this context, Couldry and Mejias (2019) warn against the cultural illusion that data speaks for itself. Where human experience is only seen as a resource for algorithmic calculation, the subject is epistemically dispossessed. Education must counter this with the ability to attribute meaning and take personal responsibility (cf. Couldry & Mejias, 2019, pp. 23-28). In this context, education can be understood as "human capital", which, as Coleman emphasises, is dependent on social capital as a mediating structure. It is only through social integration that bonding, trust and responsibility arise as prerequisites for intellectual self-education (Coleman, 1988). Thinking against friendly incapacitation, therefore, means: not avoiding technology, but not submitting to it. Adorno reminded us that education must not be in the service of conformity, but must be understood as protection against socially produced immaturity. Maturity is not shown in the knowledge of facts, but in the ability to resist the automated interpretation of the world (Adorno, 1969). Education does not have to assert itself against artificial intelligence, but rather think beyond it. That means asking questions where others calculate. Doubting where others confirm. Thinking where it doesn't seem necessary. This is the only way to keep judgement alive: by not delegating it. In this situation, education must not withdraw into reflection alone. It must create spaces in which judgement is not only permitted, but structurally possible through teaching presence, discursive openness, and the return of questioning to a system

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that has long been trained to provide answers. What is needed is a pedagogy of indeterminacy, not against technology, but against its confusion with meaning.

The delegation of thinking diagnosed here does not mark a completed development. It points to a cultural tipping point at which it will be decided whether education in the age of artificial intelligence will become a function of technology or its critical companion. Future research should therefore investigate how educational formats can be created that not only address the power of judgement, but also systematically practice it. This applies in particular where algorithmic systems become the normal form of cognitive processes. There is also a need for institutional experimental spaces in which digital assistance does not become a pedagogical substitution, but rather the starting point for discursive debate. The debate on education in the digital age must not only relate to competences, but also to an image of humanity that understands irritation, difference and reflection as indispensable elements of maturity. Educational policy, didactics and research are called upon to develop a pedagogy of unavailability. Not against technology, but against confusing it with truth. Only in this way can the power of judgement not be preserved, but re-established.

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