GLOBAL INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS ASSOCIATION

Should we ban AI in schools?

INSIGHT REPORT

Should we ban AI in schools?
An education expert discussion

On 2 March 2023, the Global Independent Schools Association (GISA) hosted a global call, bringing together prominent individuals from the education and business communities to explore the impact of AI in schools. GISA global calls bring together school leaders from the independent sector, education experts, and business representatives to promote meaningful discussions on key issues affecting the education sector.

THE PANELLISTS TAKING PART ⌄

MODERATOR

JESSICA SHEPHERD
Former Education Correspondent
The Guardian

SPEAKERS

JONNIE NOAKES
Director of Teaching and Learning at Eton College

PRIYA LAKHANI OBE
Century Tech
Founder and CEO

SAIMA RANA
Chief Education Officer of GEMS Education

PABLO MORALES ANDREAU
United World School Director General

THE BIG QUESTION:
Should we ban AI in schools?

Jessica Shepherd framed the debate occupying many minds in education and beyond: "We know that a new generation of AI powered tech is becoming much smarter at automating the work done by teachers and students, and can generate very convincingly argued essays, but also produce lesson plans and teaching resources. And some in education have responded with calls to ban its use in the classroom, while others are arguing that it should be embraced with suitable checks and balances." She added: "I think the independent education sector really offers huge insight into these areas by showing how AI can be used, where its limits are."

PROS: THE POSITIVES OF AI ⌄

Panellists spoke first on what they thought the positives of AI were. **Priya Lakhani** said that AI could deliver personalised education at scale, by augmenting the teaching and learning experience, which would be otherwise impossible given that there is a global shortage of quality teachers. **Saima Rana** agreed, saying AI can also help deliver enhanced learning experiences and methods, better engagement and therefore better education outcomes for all stakeholders.

Jonnie Noakes highlighted how he was impressed with the way assessment technology using AI can be harnessed to support learning through crunching data and developing targets. **Pablo Morales Andreau** said he was impressed with the way students enjoy using the technology and how this can help motivate them in their learning.

CONS: THE NEGATIVES OF AI ⌄

Then panellists focused on what the counterbalancing negatives were, in their view. **Priya Lakhani** warned that unless anti-plagiarism tech kept pace with AI developments that students use for things like homework and coursework help, there was a risk of students not producing the quality of work that we would wish them to. **Saima Rana** said her fear was that the tech is expensive and there was a risk to global equity in education with the gap between the haves and the have-nots potentially widening.

Jonnie Noakes raised that AI has been "trained to sound like human speech and human writing, and it does that really well, but it doesn't actually understand the meaning of what it's saying. So it can come up with complete nonsense, but very plausibly." Therefore, it would be important to "remember its limitations", whilst using it for what it does best. **Pablo Morales Andreau** worried that reliance on AI may mean students did not follow the complete path of learning properly, impacting negatively on their understanding.

Discussion points

Using AI as an assessment tool

Jonnie Noakes raised how AI can be used for tasks like marking as it is good at pattern recognition, but it should not be relied on for factual information, so human intelligence and oversight would continue to be required as a control, as AI gets better at what it does. **Priya Lakhani** said digital natives will be spending a lot more time engaging with various technologies in the future, so it was important for teachers to consider how best to equip their students to deal with this and its future implications. **Saima Rana** agreed, saying "We have to ensure that our students are trained to be able to be agile in the face of new technology, to be able to navigate themselves throughout the newer world that exists."

How is AI used in the independent school sector?

Jonnie Noakes said Eton uses the Century Tech platform very effectively for the teaching of spelling, punctuation and grammar, adding: "At the moment, we're wrestling with how can we teach our pupils to use ChatGPT responsibly? We're not going to ban it. It doesn't make any sense to ban it because they will access it anyway. So instead, we're asking them to use it, but to recognise its limitations."

Pablo Morales Andreau said use of tools like ChatGPT was a fairly new phenomena in Argentina and elsewhere in Latin America, and that it was important to speak with students to ensure they had a good understanding of materials. **Saima Rana** highlighted how smart (and constantly refining) use of AI can help teachers become better at questioning and "ultimately, questioning is what great educators are about and want great students to be about as well." **Priya Lakhani** said it was important for teachers and schools to get a good understanding of how AI works and use that knowledge to order the best tools for their individual tasks and targets.

What policies do we need in schools regarding the use of AI like ChatGPT?

Pablo Morales Andreau spoke of the need to work together and the importance of collaboration to try to have better ideas. **Saima Rana** said it was important to implement ethical guidelines and transparency measures along with training for teachers as well as students, because of the possibility of errors creeping in from AI; to not let automation take over essential roles of teachers, but instead support their work. **Jonnie Noakes** agreed, saying academic honesty and transparency were vital and that teachers need AI training as in many cases "they will be behind the curve compared with the pupils and many will be frightened by it."

Priya Lakhani said, "Interestingly, ChatGPT even says itself, one approach is to assign tasks that require critical thinking and creativity, making it more difficult for students to rely solely on the output of an AI language model. So: knowing AI language models limitations. Additionally, assignments can be designed to require personal reflection, analysis and original thought, which are skills that cannot be replicated by a machine". She added: "You cannot replace the one-to-one human interactions that we have between students in schools."

How do we teach students so that they have the right skills to use AI in an effective and responsible way?

Saima Rana said "It's about educating our children about the rights and the wrongs and whether it's behaviour, whether it's protocol and process...the dos and don'ts..." She said it was important to help develop children as global citizens and equip them with critical thinking skills that would help them weigh up what AIs were telling them. **Pablo Morales Andreau** agreed, adding, "As school teachers, we need to pay attention about the learning process." He said it was important to get students to explain concepts: "so it's very easy to check if they are learning properly or not."

Priya Lakhani raised that it was important to debate with students how AI works and discuss with them what skills and development they think they will need, helping them to think for themselves and develop their own agency.

Children will be using chatbots for more than just learning, it will inform their perceptions of themselves, their image. How can schools navigate the impact of chatbots on pastoral issues?

Jonnie Noakes suggested, at its simplest, what AI does is to make a lot more ideas and information available. Young people have always had to weigh up and decide where they stand, what their identities are. He further highlighted that AI synthesises information, but doesn't have an authoritative voice. Young people still need to work out where they stand on issues.

Priya Lakhani warned it was necessary to educate children about how chatbots and AI were built, as persuasive technologies measured on engagement levels and chatbots built by machines trained on the internet can easily promote 'fake news' and spread other misinformation. Hence the importance of considering safeguarding while embracing technology. **Saima Rana** agreed, adding the only way to ensure children are safeguarded is through engagement and education: "Making sure that they understand that this is based on data, it's based on a pattern and the pattern might use

fake news to collect that machine-based pattern. So you can't take everything as it is and think that yes, this is the right course of action for me, if I'm feeling low, if I'm feeling down."

Pablo Morales Andreau spoke of the need to help students "to learn how to love themselves, how to be confident, how to have self-confidence.....we're talking about technology....and schools are so important in this matter."

Jessica Shepherd concluded: "We're just scratching the surface of what is going to happen in this area. So it's been really insightful and I think we've concluded that of course, the solution is not to ban AI. And that one thing is certainly sure: that AI is not going to replace teachers. In fact, it can enhance, as all the panellists have shown, in different ways, the education experience. But we must look to the future and make sure that those checks and balances and human intelligence are always there."

ABOUT GISA

GLOBAL INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS ASSOCIATION

The **Global Independent Schools Association** represents, co-ordinates, and gives a voice to the global independent education sector - which educates 350 million children around the world.

We want to showcase the impact of the global independent education sector, and become a resource for the world's governments and global institutions to tap into, talk to, and, in times of crisis, lean on.

As a member of this association, you will join our network of educators, executives, public policy experts, faith leaders, philanthropists and more. You will be able to participate in GISA Advocacy Initiatives, Global Alliances, Working Groups and Events. As a leader you can help to shape our global agenda, gain access to influential decision makers and leaders, and strengthen your global and local networks.

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