

India can reinvent education with AI

If the country can empower its children to become fluent in the language of AI, to master these tools instead of fearing them, then it will gain a decisive competitive edge

A silent revolution is unfolding in classrooms. Students are no longer just Googling answers — they are collaborating with Artificial Intelligence (AI). They are co-writing essays with ChatGPT, generating lab reports in seconds, solving math problems through conversation, and even using AI to communicate with their teachers. This is happening now — in real time, in real classrooms, all over the world.

And yet, the most common response from educational institutions has been fear. Schools are banning AI tools. Universities are implementing harsh penalties. Administrators are doubling down on surveillance technologies. In the US, some teachers are being pressured, or even threatened, for raising concerns about outdated curricula or experimenting with AI in their classrooms. Instead of being supported for trying to adapt, they are being told to toe the line. It is a global backlash driven not by reason, but by panic.

This isn't just a missed opportunity — it is a fundamental misunderstanding of what's coming.

Every disruptive technology in education has followed the same trajectory: rejection, resistance, then reluctant acceptance. Calculators were once condemned. Computers were banned from exam halls. The internet was feared. Eventually, all of them became indispensable. AI is following the same path, but with much more speed and scale. And what makes it different is that it doesn't just change how students learn — it changes what learning means.

India's education system today, shaped by the legacy of the British who designed it to produce compliant clerks for the empire, is still focused on memorisation, rigid curricula, and standardised tests. It was built for a different age. It cannot keep pace with the demands of an AI-powered world. What is needed now is reinvention.

And India has the roots to lead that reinvention. For centuries, knowledge here was passed through the *guru-shishya parampara*, a system built on trust, mentorship, inquiry, and self-discovery. The teacher didn't just impart knowledge; they nurtured the soul. In ancient universities like Nalanda and Takshashila, learning wasn't limited to rote. The focus was on discussion, dialogue, and depth. AI, if used wisely, can become a new kind of *shikshak*, a virtual guide that supports and adapts to each student,

while the human teacher remains the irreplaceable mentor and moral anchor.

Students who understand how to work with AI — who know how to prompt, challenge, verify, and expand upon its outputs — will be the most effective thinkers and problem-solvers of their generation. Those who don't will fall behind. Blocking these tools won't stop their use. It will only ensure students use them blindly, without oversight, guidance, or understanding.

In *The Driver in the Driverless Car*, I predicted that exponential technologies like AI, augmented reality, and universal connectivity would converge and upend long-standing models — none more so than in education. That convergence is no longer hypothetical. It is already here. AI tutors today can detect confusion and adjust in real time. Augmented reality platforms are

delivering immersive lab experiences through smartphones. Students will soon be engaging with avatars of Albert Einstein, Mahatma Gandhi, or Rani Lakshmbai to explore history and ethics not by reading about them, but by interacting with them.

AI doesn't replace teachers, it elevates them. Great educators won't be sidelined by machines, they'll be empowered by them. Instead of spending time grading or repeating the same lessons, they'll focus on mentorship, inspiration, and helping students ask better questions. Machines will handle the routine. Humans will



Vivek Wadhwa



Traditional assessments — standardised tests, copy-paste homework, generic essays — are no longer fit for purpose.

HINDUSTAN TIMES

guide the profound.

But that shift requires a change in mindset. The real constraint is not technology. It is imagination. If a chatbot can pass a school exam, then perhaps it is time to rethink the exam. If AI can generate an essay, the real learning should be in how a student refines it, critiques it, and makes it their own.

Traditional assessments — standardised tests, copy-paste homework, generic essays — are no longer fit for purpose. AI can complete these tasks in seconds. That doesn't mean the tools should be banned. It means the metrics should evolve. A better measure of learning today is how well a student collaborates with technology, how critically they evaluate it, and what original insight they bring to the final result.

There are real risks, of course. AI can hallucinate facts. It can amplify bias. It can make it easy to cut corners. But these risks are precisely why AI must be part of the learning process. Students need to learn how to question it, how to test it, how to improve upon it. That doesn't happen by lock-

ing it out of the classroom. It happens by inviting it in, under watchful and thoughtful guidance.

There is also unprecedented potential. Intelligent systems, if designed correctly, can democratise access to quality education. A student in a remote village could have access to the same level of instruction as one in a major city. Mobile-first platforms, multilingual support, and smart design can break down the barriers that geography and income have long imposed.

If India can figure this out first, if it can empower its children to become fluent in the language of AI, to master these tools instead of fear them, then it will gain a decisive competitive edge. Not just in education, but in entrepreneurship, research, governance, and global influence.

We don't have to choose between tradition and technology. India can lead by doing what it has always done best: Combining ancient wisdom with future-forward thinking.

Vivek Wadhwa is CEO, Vivionx Biosciences. The views expressed are personal