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POST-AI EDUCATION: REDEFINING THE HUMAN ROLE IN LEARNING

Nguyen Thanh Son
Viet-Hung Industrial University, Vietnam

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ABSTRACT
Artificial intelligence (AI) has rapidly shifted from a supportive tool to a central force in higher education, transforming how knowledge is created, delivered, and assessed. As generative AI systems increasingly handle tasks such as grading, feedback, and content generation, the question arises: what remains uniquely human in learning? This paper introduces the concept of Post-AI Education, focusing on the redefinition of the learner's role in an age where AI can "know" and "do" much of what traditional education once required. Drawing on a systematic–narrative review of recent scholarship, the study identifies four essential roles for learners in post-AI contexts: creator, collaborator, reflector, and humanist. These roles highlight the enduring value of creativity, ethical judgment, reflexivity, and empathy – capacities that AI cannot replace. The proposed framework provides theoretical grounding and practical implications for curriculum design, teacher preparation, and policy development in the emerging post-AI educational landscape.

KEYWORDS: *Post-AI Education, Human–AI Collaboration, AI Literacy, Generative AI in Higher Education, Learner Roles, Educational Transformation*

INTRODUCTION

Artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming higher education. From automated grading and adaptive tutoring to content generation and personalized learning, AI has moved from being a supportive tool to becoming a central element of the educational process. These advances create opportunities for efficiency and innovation but also raise critical questions about authenticity, integrity, and the place of human agency in learning.

While much attention has been given to the integration of AI technologies, less focus has been placed on the evolving role of learners themselves. In a world where AI can generate knowledge, solve problems, and evaluate performance, the question is no longer what AI can do for education, but what learners should become in a post-AI environment. This article introduces the concept of Post-AI Education, emphasizing the need to redefine the human role in learning. It proposes a framework that positions learners not as passive recipients of knowledge but as creators, collaborators, reflectors, and humanists, ensuring that education continues to cultivate uniquely human capacities in the age of AI.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into education has evolved from experimental applications into a transformative force reshaping assessment, pedagogy, and the role of educators. Early systematic reviews [20] established foundational domains of AI in education (AIED), emphasizing adaptive systems and intelligent tutoring. More recent comprehensive reviews [17,18] highlight the diversification of research, identifying adaptive learning, predictive analytics, and personalized tutoring as dominant themes while noting persistent gaps in ethics and stakeholder involvement.

The rise of generative AI has prompted significant inquiry into its implications for higher education. Studies demonstrate both opportunities and risks in assessment practices: some reveal tensions between AI-generated feedback and human judgment [12,1], while others underscore concerns of integrity and student adoption [3,7]. Complementary perspectives suggest that assessment formats and critical thinking tasks mediate how students engage with AI tools [2,6].

Parallel to assessment, scholars emphasize AI literacy as a critical competency for both students and educators. One study introduces "Post-AI Education" through the triad of AI literacy, prompt engineering, and critical thinking [13], while another proposes a six-component ED-AI Lit framework encompassing ethics, evaluation, and collaboration [14]. These frameworks align with human-centered perspectives stressing the necessity of ethical oversight and learner agency in AI-mediated environments [10,9].

Finally, the human role within AI-supported learning remains contested. Some advocate for hybrid intelligence models where AI augments rather than replaces human cognition [15,8]. Similarly, others highlight AI's potential to capture emotional dimensions of learning, though challenges in accuracy and privacy persist [16]. Collectively, these studies underscore a shift from AI as a tool to AI as a collaborator, necessitating a redefinition of human roles in the post-AI educational era.

OBJECTIVES & RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The reviewed literature has shown that while AI-driven educational technologies provide new affordances for assessment, personalization, and human–AI collaboration [1–4, 7–8, 12], the role of human learners in an era where AI can generate, evaluate, and curate knowledge remains underexplored. Most existing studies have concentrated on AI literacy frameworks [13–14], ethical oversight [9, 19], and authentic assessment practices [3, 9, 12], but there is a lack of systematic work addressing the fundamental question of what learners should become when AI "knows almost everything." This research therefore positions itself within the emerging discourse of *Post-AI Education*, where the primary concern is not merely the integration of AI tools but the redefinition of human roles in learning.
The objectives of this study are threefold:

1. To identify how AI integration across teaching, learning, and assessment reshapes the traditional functions of learners in higher education.
2. To analyze the types of competencies and dispositions that remain uniquely human—such as creativity, ethical judgment, reflexivity, and emotional intelligence—in a post-AI context.
3. To propose a conceptual framework that redefines the learner's role as a creator, collaborator, reflector, and humanist in higher education systems transformed by AI.

From these objectives, three guiding research questions (RQs) emerge:

- RQ1: In what ways does AI adoption in higher education challenge and transform the role of human learners?
- RQ2: Which competencies and values should be prioritized for human learners in the post-AI era?
- RQ3: How can a conceptual framework of human roles in learning contribute to the theoretical and practical development of *Post-AI Education*?

By addressing these questions, the study seeks to advance the theoretical grounding of post-AI education while providing practical implications for curriculum reform, teacher training, and policy development.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopts a systematic–narrative literature review combined with conceptual synthesis to explore the evolving role of human learners in post-AI education. The methodology is designed to provide both rigor in identifying and analyzing existing evidence, and flexibility in developing a new conceptual framework.

Data Sources and Selection. Academic publications were collected from databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, Springer, Elsevier, and MDPI, covering the period 2019–2025, which reflects the most dynamic phase of AI integration in education. The selection criteria were: (1) peer-reviewed articles with DOI identifiers, (2) studies explicitly addressing AI in education, assessment, literacy, or human–AI collaboration, and (3) conceptual or empirical contributions relevant to higher education. This process yielded a corpus of 20 high-quality studies [1–20].

Analytical Process. The analysis followed a three-step coding and synthesis procedure:

1. Initial Categorization. Articles were organized into thematic groups: AI and assessment [1–3, 12], AI literacy and competencies [13–14], human–AI collaboration [7–8, 15], ethics and responsibility [9, 19], emotional and affective learning [16], and teacher roles [4–5, 20].
2. Thematic Coding. Within each group, recurring constructs (e.g., authenticity in assessment, literacy frameworks, hybrid intelligence) were identified and coded.

3. Conceptual Integration. Themes were synthesized into a higher-order framework, enabling the identification of gaps (e.g., limited focus on human identity and reflexivity) and supporting the construction of a post-AI learner role model.

Rigor and Trustworthiness. To enhance transparency and reliability, all inclusion and exclusion criteria were documented, and coding was cross validated with existing frameworks. Rather than producing a meta-analysis of effects, this approach aims at conceptual advancement, situating current empirical findings within a broader theoretical argument about the future of human learning in the post-AI era.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The synthesis of 20 peer-reviewed studies revealed that while artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly positioned as an indispensable element of teaching, learning, and assessment, there is still no consensus on the enduring role of human learners. Drawing from thematic coding, this study identifies four central role transformations that define the contours of post-AI education.

1. The Learner as Creator

Several studies emphasize that generative AI can rapidly produce knowledge artifacts, from essays to simulations [1–3, 12]. However, this automation risks reducing learning to passive consumption. In response, the post-AI learner must be reconceptualized as a creator of value beyond algorithmic reproduction. Creativity here is not limited to novel outputs but extends to problem framing, interdisciplinary integration, and the pursuit of questions AI cannot meaningfully answer [13, 14].

2. The Learner as Collaborator

The literature consistently highlights the emerging paradigm of human–AI collaboration [7, 8, 15]. Instead of perceiving AI solely as a threat to integrity, the findings suggest that students must develop the capacity to orchestrate AI as a partner in inquiry, project work, and design. This role requires competencies in prompt literacy, tool evaluation, and ethical judgment, thereby reframing collaboration as a human-AI symbiosis rather than a zero-sum contest.

3. The Learner as Reflector

While much research on AI in assessment underscores efficiency and scalability [1, 3, 9, 12], few address the learner's ability to critically reflect on how AI mediates knowledge and shapes learning trajectories. Post-AI learners must adopt reflective practices: interrogating biases in algorithmic suggestions, questioning the reliability of automated feedback, and evaluating the epistemic boundaries of AI knowledge. Reflection, in this sense, becomes a defensive as well as emancipatory skill, ensuring learners do not conflate machine fluency with deep understanding.

4. The Learner as Humanist

Finally, ethical and affective dimensions emerged strongly in the literature [9, 16, 19]. AI can track emotions and generate empathetic responses, but it lacks genuine moral responsibility. Therefore, human learners must embody the role of **humanists**—preserving empathy, ethical reasoning, and cultural identity as essential aspects of learning. This role underscores that education in the post-AI era cannot be reduced to cognitive performance; it must safeguard the human values that machines cannot replicate.

DISCUSSION

Taken together, these four roles suggest a shift from knowledge acquisition to identity-based learning. The findings align partially with Walter's (2024) framework of AI literacy and critical thinking [13], yet extend beyond skill acquisition to emphasize who learners are becoming in the presence of AI. This conceptual repositioning supports a hybrid-intelligence model [8] while challenging universities to redesign curricula that explicitly foster creation, collaboration, reflection, and humanism.

CONCLUSION

This study contributes to the emerging discourse on *Post-AI Education* by synthesizing two decades of AI-in-education research and proposing a conceptual framework that redefines the role of learners. Drawing from twenty peer-reviewed studies published between 2019 and 2025, the analysis identifies four core roles of the learner in a post-AI context: **creator**, **collaborator**, **reflector**, and **humanist**. These roles highlight that while AI systems increasingly assume functions of content delivery, knowledge generation, and assessment, the essence of human learning remains centered on creativity, ethical judgment, reflexivity, and the cultivation of human values.

The findings suggest that higher education must shift from a model of knowledge acquisition to one of identity-based learning, in which learners are prepared not simply to master information but to navigate, evaluate, and humanize AI-

mediated knowledge systems. This reorientation has implications for curriculum design, teacher training, and educational policy, requiring a redefinition of competencies that align with hybrid human–AI intelligence.

Future research should focus on the operationalization and validation of a Post-AI Competency Framework, combining conceptual insights with empirical studies across diverse educational settings. Mixed-methods approaches—such as longitudinal surveys, ethnographic classroom studies, and AI-embedded assessment pilots—can further ground the conceptual framework in practice, ensuring that the human role in education is not diminished but reimagined for the AI era.

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