
Challenges and Opportunities for Primary Education in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

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Abstract: The advent of artificial intelligence (AI) is profoundly transforming primary education, a foundational stage for cognitive and social development. This paper explores the opportunities and challenges of AI integration in primary education, highlighting key opportunities such as personalized learning through adaptive systems, enhanced student engagement via interactive technologies, teacher workload reduction through automated tasks, innovative tools like AR/VR and LMS, and cultivation of AI literacy and future skills. However, significant challenges persist, including infrastructure and resource inequality, insufficient teacher training and competency, ethical and data privacy concerns, risks of overreliance on AI undermining critical/creative skills, and policy-institutional lag. The study further proposes strategies to address these challenges, such as supportive government policies, comprehensive teacher professional development, ethical standards for data protection, balanced curriculum design, and promotion of AI literacy. By examining these dimensions, the paper aims to inform equitable, effective, and ethically sound AI integration in primary education.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence (AI); Primary Education; Personalized Learning; Educational Technology; Challenges and Opportunities

Online publication: July 26, 2025

1. Introduction

1.1. Background and Significance

The advent of artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming numerous sectors worldwide, with education emerging as a key area of profound change. Driven by significant advancements in machine learning, natural language processing, adaptive learning systems, and immersive technologies such as augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR), the potential for AI to fundamentally reshape how children learn, how teachers deliver instruction, and how educational systems function efficiently is enormous and far-reaching. Specifically, primary or elementary education, serving as a foundational stage for cognitive and social development, is particularly crucial: experiences during these formative years not only influence immediate academic outcomes like literacy and numeracy but also profoundly shape children's attitudes toward learning, their sense of agency in decision-making, their creative expression, and their capacity for lifelong learning. For example, AI-powered tools can provide personalized learning experiences, adapting to individual student paces and styles, while VR simulations offer interactive environments that make complex subjects more accessible and

engaging. As these technologies integrate into classrooms, they promise to enhance equity by supporting diverse learners and preparing students for a future where AI-driven innovations are integral to everyday life.

1.2. Research Purpose and Questions

This paper aims to explore the opportunities and challenges that AI brings to primary education in the AI era. The key research questions are:

What are the main opportunities AI offers to primary education in terms of pedagogy, student engagement, and skills development?

What are the significant challenges—technical, ethical, pedagogical, institutional—that hinder or risk undermining the beneficial potentials of AI in primary schooling?

What strategies or policy measures can help maximize the opportunities and mitigate the challenges, thereby fostering an equitable, effective, and ethically sound integration of AI into primary education?

2. Opportunities of AI in Primary Education

2.1. Personalized Learning and Adaptive Instruction

One of the most compelling promises of artificial intelligence in primary education is personalized learning. AI-powered adaptive learning systems can meticulously assess a child's current level of understanding, unique learning pace, and specific learning style. Based on this comprehensive evaluation, the technology dynamically adjusts instructional content and methodologies to align with each student's individual requirements, thereby enhancing engagement and optimizing educational outcomes through tailored support. This approach addresses diverse learning needs effectively, fostering a more inclusive and efficient classroom environment. For example, according to a recent systematic literature review, AI trends in elementary education are dominated by adaptive learning systems, LMS, AR/VR, etc., which allow more tailored educational experiences^[1].

2.2. Increased Engagement and Motivation

AI can significantly boost student engagement and motivation by employing adaptive technologies that respond to individual learning preferences and pace. Research consistently indicates that AI tools effectively address students' fundamental psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, thereby substantially enhancing both intrinsic motivation—derived from personal interest and satisfaction—and extrinsic motivation—driven by external incentives and recognition. Moreover, AI-driven tools featuring capabilities such as real-time feedback systems, highly interactive multimedia content, gamification strategies with rewards and challenges, or immersive AR/VR simulations can transform learning into a more enjoyable and meaningful experience, particularly for young learners who are naturally drawn to dynamic and stimulating educational environments. This comprehensive approach not only fosters deeper involvement but also cultivates a sustained passion for learning across diverse student populations.

2.3. Teacher Support and Workload Reduction

Teachers often face heavy workloads, encompassing a wide range of responsibilities such as lesson planning, grading assignments, monitoring student progress, implementing differentiation strategies, managing classroom dynamics, and handling administrative tasks like reporting and communication with parents. AI has the potential to significantly assist in these areas by automating time-consuming processes: for example, it can enable automated grading of assignments, particularly for objective or semi-objective types like multiple-choice quizzes or structured essays; provide detailed analytics that pinpoint where students are struggling, offering insights into learning gaps and trends; generate supplementary materials such as customized worksheets, interactive activities, or tailored study guides; and even support administrative functions like scheduling and data entry. This comprehensive support reduces the burden on educators,

giving them more space to focus on core pedagogical practices, fostering creativity through innovative teaching approaches, enhancing student mentoring with personalized attention, and enabling professional development opportunities that enrich the overall educational experience.

2.4. Innovative Teaching Tools and Resources: AR / VR / LMS

Emerging technologies, including Augmented Reality (AR), Virtual Reality (VR), Learning Management Systems (LMS), virtual tutors, and intelligent tutoring systems, provide innovative modes of learning that transform educational approaches. Specifically, AR and VR technologies can create highly immersive and contextualized learning environments, such as simulating historical events or scientific experiments, which are otherwise difficult to implement in primary classrooms due to logistical constraints. LMS platforms enable efficient coordinated content delivery, comprehensive tracking of student progress, and seamless resource sharing among educators and learners. Furthermore, virtual tutors and intelligent tutoring systems offer adaptive support and personalized learning pathways, enhancing the overall teaching and learning experience. According to Yusuf (2025), the trends in primary education include AR, VR, LMS, and adaptive learning systems^[1].

2.5. AI Literacy Education and Future Skills Cultivation

Beyond using AI tools, it is critical for young students to develop AI literacy—understanding what AI is, its capabilities and limitations, ethical dimensions, how to interact appropriately with AI tools. These are aspects of digital citizenship for the AI era. Theoretical and empirical work (e.g. Yim et al., 2025) has begun to define what AI literacy means in primary school contexts, including frameworks, pedagogical strategies, and assessment methods^[2]. Cultivating critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, adaptability—the kinds of competencies required in the future—is another opportunity tied closely with AI integration.

3. Challenges in Primary Education with AI

3.1. Infrastructure and Resource Inequality

One significant barrier to equitable education is the pervasive inequity of access to technological resources. Specifically, some institutions benefit from well-developed IT infrastructure, featuring stable high-speed internet connections and sufficient devices for student use, while others struggle with outdated or non-existent facilities. This disparity arises from the prohibitively high costs of acquiring and maintaining hardware and software, coupled with expenses for ongoing maintenance, licensing agreements, and persistent connectivity challenges. Moreover, unequal access is starkly evident across urban versus rural settings and between socioeconomically advantaged and disadvantaged communities, imposing severe constraints on educational opportunities and hindering efforts to bridge the digital divide. These factors collectively undermine the potential for inclusive learning environments and perpetuate systemic inequalities. Yusuf (2025) notes technological disparities, uneven infrastructure, and high costs among the key challenges^[1].

3.2. Teacher Training and Insufficient Competency

Even with adequate infrastructure in place, the absence of well-prepared teachers can result in the failure of AI integration within educational systems. Many primary school educators lack sufficient foundational knowledge of AI technologies, including core concepts like machine learning algorithms, data analytics, and practical applications in daily teaching. They also struggle with understanding how to integrate these tools pedagogically, such as designing lesson plans that leverage AI for personalized learning, and often have limited grasp of critical areas like AI ethics, responsible data handling practices, student privacy concerns, and potential biases in algorithmic decision-making. Research in Sri Lanka highlighted that teachers' readiness to effectively teach AI-related content is notably low, largely influenced by their low self-efficacy regarding AI instruction, which arises from insufficient training, limited exposure to technology, and a lack of

confidence in managing classroom implementations.

Additionally, teachers frequently require comprehensive support in co-designing curricula that seamlessly incorporate AI elements, adapting AI tools to fit specific subject matters—such as tailoring simulations for science classes or interactive apps for language arts—and embedding ethical discussions into instruction to address societal implications and promote digital citizenship. This support encompasses needs for professional development workshops, collaborative planning sessions with experts, access to curated resources, and ongoing mentorship to build sustainable competencies.

3.3. Data Privacy, Ethics, and Governance

The collection of student data serves as a cornerstone for numerous AI systems, enabling functionalities such as personalized learning experiences, timely feedback mechanisms, and comprehensive progress monitoring. This practice, however, sparks significant ethical and governance challenges: questions emerge about data ownership—whether it resides with the students, educational institutions, or external entities—as well as the robustness of data storage security against potential breaches, the clarity and openness in data usage to foster accountability, and strategies to mitigate risks like misuse, inherent biases in data handling, and unforeseen adverse effects. Furthermore, apprehensions persist regarding algorithmic bias, which can perpetuate discrimination; fairness in AI-driven outcomes to ensure equitable treatment; and the transparency of decision-making processes within AI systems, which are vital for upholding ethical standards and building stakeholder trust^[3].

3.4. Overreliance on AI & Loss of Critical / Creative Skills

AI tools can significantly boost efficiency in educational settings and provide essential scaffolding, such as personalized learning aids and automated feedback, thereby supporting students' initial engagement. However, when overused or improperly applied, these tools may inadvertently undermine the development of vital cognitive skills, including critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving abilities. Students might become passive learners, excessively relying on AI-generated outputs for tasks like essay writing or problem-solving without engaging in deep reflection, analysis, or independent exploration, which can lead to superficial knowledge retention and diminished intellectual autonomy. Similarly, teachers might reduce their roles too much, shifting from active facilitators and mentors to mere supervisors of AI systems, potentially weakening their impact on fostering collaborative discussions and adaptive teaching strategies. Empirical studies, such as those examining classroom implementations, suggest a tangible potential for diminished critical thinking capacities among learners, alongside heightened concerns over academic integrity issues like plagiarism or reduced originality in assignments.

3.5. Policy, Regulation, and Institutional Lag

Frequently, policy frameworks and educational standards lag significantly behind the rapid pace of technological change, creating a substantial disconnect that hampers progress. This gap manifests in various ways: there may be insufficient or outdated guidelines addressing critical aspects such as AI use, ethical considerations, liability issues, and data privacy concerns. Additionally, curriculum standards often fail to incorporate essential AI literacy components, leaving students unprepared for a technology-driven future. Assessment standards, too, frequently overlook the implications of AI-augmented learning, resulting in evaluations that do not accurately reflect modern educational realities. Budget allocations may be misaligned, with inadequate funding directed towards necessary technological upgrades and training programs, further exacerbating the divide. Educational institutions—including individual schools, school districts, and governmental ministries—often exhibit slow adaptation due to bureaucratic inertia, limited resources, and resistance to change. UNESCO underscores this challenge by stating that the swift advancements in technology introduce multiple risks and complexities, which have consistently outpaced the development of informed policy debates and effective regulatory frameworks, thereby increasing vulnerabilities across the education sector.

4. Case Analyses / Empirical Findings

4.1. Systematic Literature Review: Trends and Experience (2016-2025)

A recent systematic literature review by Furtasan Ali Yusuf (2025) surveyed 45 studies from 2016–2024 about AI in elementary education^[1]. Findings:

Dominant trends include AR, VR, Learning Management Systems (LMS), Adaptive Learning Systems.

Opportunities identified include more effective and measurable AI innovations, improved learning outcomes, and broad application of AI tools.

Challenges include infrastructure inequality, high cost, lack of teacher training, privacy issues, insufficient support budget.

Another meta-analysis (Wang et al. 2024) in wider AI in education contexts also frames opportunities and challenges, and suggests future research directions around assessment, ethics, and fairness^[4].

4.2. Teachers' Views on AI Integration

In the study “Primary school teachers’ opinions on the use of artificial intelligence” (Mazi et al., 2025), teacher respondents acknowledged benefits such as individualized instruction, support in planning, but expressed concern about their own capacity, ethical implications, and risks of misuse^[5]. Also, readiness studies show many teachers report low self-efficacy related to AI instruction, discomfort with uncertainty, need for training, etc.

4.3. Student Motivation, Psychological Dimensions, Learning Outcomes

Empirical findings show that AI use can satisfy students’ psychological needs—autonomy, competence, relatedness—and in turn enhance engagement (behavioral, cognitive, emotional, agentic dimensions). In addition, Zhou et al. (2025) found that AI usage in teaching significantly enhances student creativity, mediated by learning engagement, with AI literacy serving as moderator^[6]. However, also findings that there are risks: over-dependence, cheating / academic dishonesty concerns; possibly weaker development of critical thinking when AI is misused.

5. Strategies and Recommendations

5.1. Supportive Policies at Government / Institutional Level

Governments should develop comprehensive and clear policy frameworks to guide the integration of artificial intelligence in primary education, encompassing detailed standards for critical areas such as infrastructure requirements, robust data privacy protocols, ethical guidelines to prevent bias and ensure fairness, rigorous teacher qualifications including ongoing professional development, and seamless curriculum alignment to enhance learning outcomes. These frameworks must be adaptable to local educational needs while maintaining consistency in safeguarding student welfare and promoting equitable access^[7].

Additionally, governments should implement sustainable funding mechanisms, such as targeted grants, subsidies, or public-private partnerships, to ensure the equitable distribution of essential resources like digital devices, reliable internet connectivity, and affordable software licenses. This approach aims to bridge the resource gap, particularly for under-resourced schools in rural or disadvantaged areas, preventing them from falling significantly behind and fostering inclusive technological adoption across all educational institutions^[8].

Furthermore, governments should actively encourage and support pilot programs and multidisciplinary research initiatives to systematically evaluate the effectiveness, scalability, and contextual suitability of AI applications in diverse educational environments. By fostering collaborations with academic institutions, industry experts, and educators, these efforts can generate evidence-based insights, identify best practices, and inform future policy refinements to optimize AI-driven educational innovations^[9].

5.2. Teacher Professional Development

To effectively empower educators in the rapidly evolving educational landscape, comprehensive in-service training programs must be meticulously designed and delivered. These initiatives should prioritize not only the development of technical skills, such as mastering the practical use of AI tools for classroom applications, but also deeply address pedagogical integration strategies for seamlessly embedding AI into curricula, critical ethical considerations including data privacy, algorithmic bias, and equity concerns, innovative approaches for assessing student performance with AI support, and the nuanced balancing of teacher and AI roles to maintain human-centered instruction and oversight.

Building on this foundation, co-design workshops should be actively facilitated, enabling teachers to collaboratively participate in crafting AI-enhanced lesson plans that align with real-world constraints like limited resources, time pressures, and diverse student needs, while specifically tailoring content to subject areas such as mathematics, science, language arts, and social studies to ensure relevance and applicability.

Concurrently, robust communities of practice should be established among teachers, fostering ongoing peer-to-peer networks where educators regularly convene—whether through digital platforms or in-person sessions—to openly share experiential insights, celebrate successes in AI implementation, and collaboratively troubleshoot challenges, thereby cultivating a culture of mutual support and continuous professional learning^[10].

5.3. Ethical Standards and Privacy Protection

Develop and enforce comprehensive ethical guidelines for the application of artificial intelligence in school environments, emphasizing critical components such as stringent data protection protocols, explicit informed consent procedures from students and guardians, full transparency in algorithmic operations to ensure accountability, rigorous fairness assessments to promote equity, and proactive strategies for the identification and elimination of biases across all AI-driven systems.

Engage key stakeholders—including parents, teachers, and students—in structured dialogues, workshops, and collaborative forums to foster widespread AI literacy, elucidate specific details on how personal data is processed and safeguarded, explore emerging risks like privacy violations, algorithmic discrimination, and unintended consequences, and empower participants with actionable insights for responsible AI adoption.

Ensure robust legal and regulatory oversight frameworks are implemented to proactively prevent potential misuse scenarios, such as systemic biases in student evaluations, invasive profiling techniques, unauthorized exploitation of academic outputs, and violations of intellectual property rights, while establishing clear enforcement mechanisms and periodic reviews to uphold compliance with relevant legislation^[11].

5.4. Balanced Curriculum Design

To effectively integrate AI tools into education, they should be designed to complement rather than replace traditional teaching methods. This ensures that core educational values, such as critical thinking, creativity, and social interaction, are preserved and strengthened. For example, AI can assist in personalized learning and administrative tasks, while teachers focus on facilitating discussions, collaborative activities, and hands-on experiences to maintain human-centered learning.

AI literacy must be embedded into the curriculum from an early stage. Students should develop a thorough understanding of AI fundamentals, including its capabilities, limitations, and ethical dimensions such as data privacy, algorithmic bias, and societal impacts. This education can be delivered through dedicated courses or seamlessly integrated into existing subjects like science, mathematics, and humanities, allowing for contextual and applied learning.

Implement pedagogical strategies that foster reflection, questioning, and metacognition. Students should actively engage with AI outputs, not merely consume them, by critically evaluating sources, asking probing questions, and reflecting on their own learning processes. Techniques like guided discussions, project-based assignments involving AI tools, and metacognitive exercises such as journaling can deepen comprehension and promote responsible, ethical use of technology^[12].

5.5. Promoting AI Literacy and Future Skills

Educational authorities and institutions must prioritize the establishment of clear, age-appropriate frameworks for AI literacy at the primary level. These frameworks should comprehensively encompass foundational elements such as computational thinking, a practical understanding of algorithms and data principles, and crucially, the early recognition of potential biases inherent in AI systems. To effectively cultivate these competencies, educators should actively employ project-based learning methodologies and hands-on activities. This involves providing students with access to interactive platforms or user-friendly tools, enabling them to construct simple AI models or engage with simulated AI environments. The core objective is to transform students from passive consumers into active, informed participants and creators with technology. Concurrently, it is essential to deliberately foster key future-oriented skills within this AI-integrated learning context. This includes nurturing creativity in problem-solving, promoting effective collaboration in digital projects, developing adaptability to navigate rapid technological change, and instilling a strong foundation in digital ethics through discussion and case studies.

6. Conclusion

In the AI era, primary education stands at a critical juncture. AI offers powerful opportunities: personalized learning, greater student motivation, supportive tools for teachers, richer teaching resources, and early development of AI literacy and future skills. Yet it also faces significant challenges: resource / infrastructure inequality; lack of teacher preparedness; privacy, ethics, and data issues; risks of overreliance and diminished higher-order thinking; policy and institutional lag.

Future work should address:

Longitudinal studies tracking cohorts of students over time to see long-term impacts of AI integration on not just academic outcomes, but socio-emotional development, creativity, critical thinking.

Rigorous comparative studies across different socio-economic, cultural, geographic contexts to understand what strategies work best in what settings.

Investigations of ethical governance models, data protection mechanisms, fairness, algorithmic transparency specifically tailored for young learners.

Research into scalable teacher training models, cost-effective infrastructure in low-resource settings.

By attending carefully to both opportunities and challenges, we can aim to harness AI so that it enriches and strengthens primary education rather than undermines essential educational values.

Funding

This research was supported by the 2025 Chengdu College of Arts and Sciences University Student Innovation and Entrepreneurship Training Program Project “The Challenges and Opportunities Primary Education Faces in the AI Era” (Project leader: Ting Xu; Project No.: 202513671224).

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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