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2026 Volume 4, Issue 2
Educational Innovation Research
ISSN: 3029-1844(Print) ISSN: 3029-1852(Online)

The Integration of Artificial Intelligence and Innovative Education:Research on the Path to Improve the Critical Literacy of College Students

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***A*bstract:** With the rapid advancement of information technology, artificial intelligence (AI) has been increasingly integrated into the education sector, particularly in higher education. The combination of AI and innovative education has emerged as a key pathway to enhance college students 'critical literacy. This paper examines the application and practice of AI in innovative education through relevant literature, analyzes its role in fostering critical thinking and innovation capabilities among undergraduates, and proposes concrete implementation strategies. The findings demonstrate that AI can improve students' critical literacy and innovation abilities through intelligent learning tools, personalized teaching plans, and knowledge management platforms. However, educators and administrators must leverage AI technology to create an innovative educational environment tailored to students' development, guiding them to adapt to modern learning methodologies and mindset shifts.

Keywords: artificial intelligence; innovative education; critical literacy; college students; educational model; digital transformation

Online publication: February 26, 2026

1. Introduction

In the information age, artificial intelligence is transforming work and lifestyles across all sectors, with education being no exception. As education undergoes digital transformation, AI has not only profoundly impacted teaching content but also revolutionized pedagogical approaches, assessment methods, and learning paradigms. For college students—both as recipients of knowledge and future innovators—the cultivation of critical thinking skills has become particularly vital.

Critical literacy denotes an individual's capacity to objectively analyze problems, think critically, and make rational judgments. In higher education, cultivating critical literacy is pivotal for enhancing students' comprehensive competencies and meeting societal demands. As an innovative educational paradigm, innovation-oriented education emphasizes nurturing students' creative abilities and thinking patterns, with artificial intelligence providing robust support for this endeavor.

This study focuses on the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) and innovative education, exploring its pathways and practices in enhancing college students' critical literacy. By synthesizing the following literature, the research attempts

to analyze from multiple dimensions how AI can promote the development of critical literacy among university students.

2. Literature review

2.1. The integration of artificial intelligence and education

Zhang Yuchen et al. (2026) demonstrated that AI technology not only delivers personalized learning plans but also provides real-time feedback on students 'progress through data analysis, offering more precise support for teaching[1]. This approach opens new avenues for innovative education, particularly in cultivating critical thinking. By integrating simulation with practical application, AI can stimulate students' depth of thought and independence.

2.2. Critical thinking and innovative education

Chen Jun (2025) explored the integration of practical teaching and social practice in ideological and political education. His research demonstrates that diversified interactive teaching methods can effectively enhance students 'critical thinking[2]. Although the study primarily focuses on ideological and political education, its conclusions also apply to innovative education, where diverse teaching approaches can stimulate students' reflective thinking and critical analysis skills.

2.3. Application of digital tools in critical thinking

Research demonstrates that digital learning tools effectively cultivate critical thinking in college students. As Li Xiaohua et al. (2026) noted, these tools help learners develop self-monitoring and reflective skills in online environments, which are closely linked to critical thinking development[3]. In this process, AI not only provides personalized learning content but also dynamically adjusts the learning experience based on students' performance and feedback.

2.4. Management mechanism of innovative education

In their 2026 study, Chen Libin and colleagues examined the management mechanisms of innovation and entrepreneurship competitions, proposing effective strategies to develop innovative thinking in education[4]. While their research primarily focuses on entrepreneurial education, the "competition-driven innovation" concept they introduced also applies to cultivating critical literacy. Through such educational frameworks, students can hone their ability to critically analyze problems and creatively solve them through real-world challenges.

3. The integration path of artificial intelligence and innovative education

3.1. Deep integration of personalized learning and critical thinking

Artificial intelligence technology can customize personalized learning paths and resource recommendations based on students' interests, learning styles, and cognitive abilities. By continuously collecting and analyzing learning behavior data, AI dynamically adjusts the difficulty and presentation methods of learning content, enabling each student to gradually deepen their understanding through challenges tailored to their level. In cultivating critical thinking, AI utilizes features like intelligent Q&A, scenario simulation, and debate assistance to guide students in examining problems from multiple perspectives, raising questions, and conducting systematic arguments, thereby fostering their reflective and logical reasoning skills.

3.2. Systematic application and effect enhancement of intelligent learning platforms

Currently, AI-powered smart learning platforms are being widely adopted in higher education, demonstrating significant educational benefits. These platforms not only integrate diverse learning resources but also leverage algorithms to

deliver personalized content and manage learning progress. For instance, AI-supported knowledge management systems can automatically summarize, filter, and organize materials related to critical thinking, helping students engage in self-directed learning and collaborative inquiry more effectively. Additionally, the real-time learning analytics and instant feedback mechanisms provided by these platforms enable students to continuously refine their cognitive strategies, thereby enhancing their ability to discern and critically evaluate complex knowledge.

3.3. Deep integration of interdisciplinary collaboration mechanisms with innovative education

Innovative education emphasizes breaking down disciplinary barriers, and artificial intelligence (AI) can facilitate this goal. AI technology creates digital environments for interdisciplinary collaboration, enabling students from diverse backgrounds to engage in project-based learning and research. For instance, through topic modeling, collaborative programming, and virtual team tools, AI helps students understand the interactions of multiple factors in complex systems. By solving real-world problems, students expand their cognitive horizons, enhance systematic thinking, and improve critical evaluation skills. This collaborative approach not only boosts students' innovative capabilities but also strengthens their critical adaptability in handling ambiguous and complex situations.

3.4. Innovative applications of virtual experiments and simulation scenarios in cognitive training

Leveraging artificial intelligence, virtual laboratories and scenario simulation platforms accurately replicate the complexities and uncertainties of the real world, providing students with cost-effective and efficient hands-on training opportunities. Within these simulated environments, students can repeatedly test different solutions while identifying flaws and biases in their reasoning through AI-generated evaluation reports and reflective guidance. For instance, in social innovation simulation projects, students apply critical thinking to multidimensional assessments of policy proposals or technological ethics, continuously refining their decision-making skills through human-computer interactions. This "learning by doing" approach significantly enhances the internalization and advancement of critical thinking in practical applications.

4. Challenges and prospects

While artificial intelligence holds tremendous potential in education and presents unprecedented innovation opportunities, its widespread adoption and practical implementation still face significant challenges. First, teachers 'technical proficiency in AI requires urgent improvement. Systematic training programs must be implemented to enhance educators' familiarity with intelligent tools and operational skills, ensuring AI technology is effectively and scientifically applied in teaching practices. Second, there exists a time lag between students 'technological acceptance and critical thinking development. While many students can quickly adapt to using technical tools, developing independent judgment and reflective abilities demands more time. Educators should bridge this gap through curriculum design, interactive guidance, and situational practice, helping students better integrate technological skills with cognitive training. Finally, ethical concerns surrounding AI technology cannot be overlooked, particularly regarding data utilization and privacy protection. Balancing the full exploitation of data value and personalized education with strict adherence to ethical standards—while safeguarding students' personal information from misuse or leakage—has become a critical challenge in advancing intelligent education.

However, with continuous technological advancements, the integration of artificial intelligence and innovative education is opening up broader and more diverse development prospects. An increasing number of intelligent tools and platforms are empowering educators and learners, driving the transformation of teaching models from traditional to modern, and from standardized to personalized approaches. Faced with this historic opportunity, educators should actively embrace technological changes, continuously explore and experiment with new educational methods such as AI-integrated adaptive learning systems, virtual classrooms, and collaborative smart learning environments. This will effectively enhance college students' critical literacy, innovative awareness, and comprehensive abilities, laying a solid foundation for building

a future-oriented educational ecosystem.

5. Conclusion

This study explores the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) with innovative education, particularly its application in enhancing college students 'critical literacy. Through intelligent learning tools, personalized teaching plans, and interdisciplinary collaboration models, AI can effectively foster the development of critical thinking among university students. Despite existing challenges, the continuous advancement of AI technology will unlock its educational potential, creating more opportunities for educational reform and the enhancement of students' competencies.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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