ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: THE OPPORTUNITIES AND ITS DISRUPTIVE CHARACTER

Susanne Conze, PhD[1]

[1]*Head of Unit for Higher Education, European Commission*

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ABSTRACT

Digitalization and artificial intelligence are transforming higher education at all levels: how we learn and teach, how institutions cooperate, and how higher education is organised. They expand access to knowledge, enable more flexible and personalised learning pathways, and create new opportunities for transnational cooperation and mobility.

AI is a particularly strong example of this transformation. It can support learning, teaching, research and engagement with society, but it also requires new competences and responsible approaches. Higher education will need to rethink not only what students learn, but also when and how AI is used, how learning is assessed, and how students and teachers are supported.

At the same time, digitalization and AI raise important questions about academic values, equality, quality assurance and the digital divide. More broadly, European higher education is moving towards more specialised yet increasingly interconnected institutions, flexible learning pathways and deeper transnational cooperation.

The key challenge is therefore to use digitalization and AI not simply to increase efficiency, but to build more accessible, flexible, high-quality, equitable and future-oriented higher education.

Keywords: *Digitalization, AI, Flexibility, Cooperation, Transformation.*

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INTRODUCTION

Very broad topic which affects:

A. Learning and teaching – link to AI

B. Transnational cooperation and exchange

C. Organisation of higher education, organisation of HEI, but also development of the HE landscape

Let's start with learning and teaching :

'Digitalisation & Modernisation' – both very broad terms; hard to define - allow for different formats for learning. Digitalisation provides more flexibility and access to broader learning opportunities but makes learning also more complex.

- I can access learning offers online - worldwide and 24/7,
- I can access more information and learning content,
- I can design my own learning pathways, more individually, adapted to specific needs.

Some applications of AI:

- AI exemplifies these possibilities; it allows me to summarise large reports, extract information better and faster, have discussions with a machine that picks from a wide source of information and data. That is cool.
- AI can make a very positive impact (when used adequately) in all aspects of higher education institutions' mission. Besides AI literacy aspects, there are great examples by university teachers using AI in teaching in a very positive pedagogic way.
- Regarding (higher) education, the teaching-learning process will have to change. Not only on what to teach (i.e. basic AI use training should be in all degrees), also on when and how to use AI, the role teachers, the way to evaluate students, the way to organise learning content, structure, the way to support students in their learning processes…
- Linked to this: there is a risk of inequality due to the potential digital AI divide: e.g. students with more resources could pay for access to more sophisticated AI tools leading to better study works.
- There is a need to pay attention to academic values – much more than ever before
- There is an impact on future approaches on how to assess students

TRANSNATIONAL COOPERATION AND EXCHANGE

- Digitalisation has an impact on what higher education can offer and how higher education institutions can work together
- Joint study courses or more intense and deeper collaboration in the European Universities alliances would be more cumbersome without digitalisation – maybe not even possible
- Mobility of student – preparation and organisation can be made easier with the digital tools (we have ESCI as a very good tool to achieve that and also to support digitalisation in higher education); digital mobility can complement and – if necessary – replace physical mobility
- These additional opportunities make the work of HE and the life of students richer & more complex.
- Joint study courses – and the European Degree – offer a tremendous richness in study opportunities. Studying in a university/ higher education institution that is part of the European Universities initiative give easy access to the offer of 8, 9, 10 higher education institutions with their specific strengths in a common topic (exp SEA-EU)
- Finding your path requires guidance, but open broad horizons. Something for which digitalisation is key.
- They require also new reflections on QA and a CR from May last year open exactly to that discussion context. The European Degree is built on the common understanding of quality in the context of Bologna.

ORGANISATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Looking at the organisation of Higher education, we face a variety of challenges, perspectives, opportunities:

- More specialisation of individual institutions and broader cooperation and interconnectivity between institutions.
- Flexible learning pathways also for broader groups of society with different needs and demands.
- Responding to changing needs of skills and competences in the labour market and in society

- Less framing and the risk of higher vulnerability – a key question
- What services are needed for students to help them succeed in a changing landscape

CONCLUSION

Coming to AI: AI could have a systemic impact in higher education, in all three missions of higher education institutions: research, education and community engagement/outreach.

In Europe, most of the higher education community is aware and proud of the European approach to using AI ethically. There are obvious open questions due to some uncertainty on how the AI Act will be applied in higher education, but there is a general agreement on the principles of the AI Act.