

AI can support – not replace or control – the teaching profession

Today, on the *International Day of Education*, we highlight the crucial importance of education for democracy, equality and sustainable development in the world. We, the writers of this article, represent over half a million teachers and head teachers in the Nordic region. We find ourselves in the midst of an era of rapid technological change, where the way artificial intelligence (AI) is used in schools will affect whether the fundamental values of schools are protected or eroded.

The question is not whether this development will happen – but how, and on whose terms. For this reason, our voice really needs to be heard in the decisions that are now being made.

We believe that if technology is to contribute to high-quality teaching, the autonomy of the teaching profession must be clarified and safeguarded. It must be the profession that decides whether, when and how AI is used in teaching. Teaching is based on professional judgement, didactic competence and relationships – where technology can be a tool, never the starting point or the governing norm of teaching.

At the same time, we see a growing risk that crucial decisions about technology are being made far away from the classroom. When the profession is not involved, there is a risk that developments will be guided by other aspects than the needs of teaching. Decisions on AI and digitalisation in schools must be based on research and proven experience, and made together with the profession.

If the profession is to have a genuine influence, relevant knowledge is required. The Nordic countries must therefore ensure that national infrastructures and resources are guaranteed for research-based continuing professional development (CPD). Digitalisation in schools cannot be based on the profession being expected to manage this transition on its own. Teachers must be given the time and relevant support to translate research into practice, and to understand and evaluate the implications of technology.

Skills development is also a key issue for equal opportunities in schools. If AI systems are implemented differently, or if municipalities and school authorities have different financial conditions to invest in technology or provide teachers with relevant skills development, there is a risk that AI will amplify the differences between schools. Nordic governments must therefore ensure that resources and national frameworks are in place to prevent inequality from being built into the digital development of schools.

Professional influence and skills alone are not enough. It must also be clear where the boundaries are for how AI may be used in schools. AI must never be used to monitor students or staff. Privacy and legal certainty have to be the starting point. The European Union's AI Act is a central protective mechanism in this context that must be safeguarded, not weakened. The Nordic region needs to be a driving force in this area and stand up for strong privacy, due process and public control. Education requires a strong legal framework to ensure responsibility, transparency and respect for the trust-based Nordic schooling model.

The school of the future will accommodate books, pens, digital tools and AI. Technology can offer valuable support in teaching – but it does not change the teacher's responsibilities. It must never become a substitute for teachers or a back door to cutbacks. Technology can automate administration, but never relationships, pedagogical judgement or the very essence of teaching. There are many elements of learning that no technology can replace: the human interaction, dialogue, language and memory, play, writing by hand and critical thinking. Deciding whether and when technology, books, paper – or a combination of these – is the correct tool in any given teaching situation is a responsibility that must always lie with the teacher.

The Nordic countries are well positioned to lead the way in developing a teacher-led, equitable use of AI in schools. This requires political responsibility. We therefore urge the governments in our countries to adopt a unified approach to AI in education in line with the requirements we set out in this article. There is a need for national strategies that give the teaching profession genuine influence and state clearly that technology must support – but never control or replace – teacher-led education.

We are in favour of developments in AI and digitalisation. We, the presidents of member organisations in the Nordic Teachers' Council (NLS), therefore consider ourselves to be natural collaborative partners when governments choose their strategies.

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