

PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT LABORATORY

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In an era where access to information is both effortless and remarkably rapid, significant transformations have emerged in our processes of both learning and thinking. How this situation affects us has become a crucial subject of debate. Are we evolving into passive recipients alongside artificial intelligence? Can we preserve the authenticity of learning while our attention is being "stolen" in a digitalizing world? Does AI stifle our creativity, or does it offer a stepping stone that enhances our agency?

As the Social Sciences University of Ankara Psychosocial Development Laboratory, in our March 2026 issue, we focus on the answers to these questions and the connections between artificial intelligence and authenticity in a digitalizing world. We hope you enjoy the read.

CURRENT ISSUE: AI AND AUTHENTICITY

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ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: A THREAT OR A STEPPING STONE?

With the integration of artificial intelligence into our lives, many of us use it as an "assistant." AI, which has also shown its impact in education, is being used by students and sometimes even academics as an assistant. Academics, who generally use AI for routine and time-consuming tasks, primarily use it for literature reviews, text translation, and data processing. Even though we think we are saving time, we also become open to certain threats. Especially when considering academics in the field of social sciences, AI may not fully understand the complexity of human behavior. This can lead to a loss of context. Another critical point concerns ethics and security.

In the research conducted by Janiūnienė and colleagues in 2026, the results of the questions they asked academics, particularly in the social sciences, show that although it lightens the workload in an academic sense, there is an absolute need for oversight.

Aside from situations that can lead to serious academic issues such as plagiarism, it is a known fact that artificial intelligence also generates information from fabricated sources. At this point, AI literacy carries immense importance. Users must ensure the accuracy of information when using artificial intelligence. The goal here is not to prevent AI from making zero mistakes, but to increase our awareness regarding the existence of these errors.

If we wish to establish an academically reliable environment, the way to achieve this is not by banning artificial intelligence, but by providing AI literacy training to both students and academics. We must not forget that artificial intelligence is an assistant or an inspiring tool for us; it is not a writer to take our place.



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The recent rise of generative models like ChatGPT in higher education is a prominent topic on the agenda. Although it has sparked significant concern within academic circles, it has also been viewed as a new way of learning. The focus of discussions in the media and articles is generally on violations of academic integrity; however, the real issue is how this technology will transform our "originality" in the learning process.

While a large portion of news reports, as high as 88%, view artificial intelligence as a "threat" that facilitates cheating, there are also sharp opinions among academics who see this situation as a "plague" on education (Sullivan et al., 2023, p. 2).

Nevertheless, when viewed from a learning perspective, the primary risk is that the student's stage of "struggling" with the material is almost entirely eliminated by artificial intelligence. For instance, having writing assignments given at the university completed by AI serves as a serious barrier that prevents the student's creativity, self-development, and engagement in the learning process.

Considering all of this, do you think artificial intelligence is a threat or a stepping stone to a new system?

-Begüm Karabacak & Erkan Taşçı



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ATTENTION AND LEARNING IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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Popular views often argue that technology has permanent and negative effects on our brains; however, scientific research shows us that this situation is much more complex and nuanced. Although this topic is predominantly related to cognitive and neuroscience, we have endeavored to synthesize the core findings of the article by associating them with the individual's developmental journey. Let us examine this subject together, drawing on Jason M. Lodge and William J. Harrison's article, "The Role of Attention in Learning in the Digital Age."

In the digital age, our learning journey is closely linked not only to technological tools but also to the complex connections these tools establish with our attention and our social world. Internalizing information and having an authentic learning experience depends more than ever today on our ability to direct our "attention" correctly. Learning in the process of psychosocial development is not just filling the mind with information, but an interaction involving connectivity that we establish with our environment, our curiosity, and our internal goals.

However, this interaction creates a back-and-forth between the two fundamental attention mechanisms of the digital world: "voluntary attention," which we direct by our own will, and "involuntary attention," which is triggered by external stimuli beyond our control.

Many digital platforms utilize "persuasive technology" that exploits our psychological systems to "prey" on our involuntary attention just to keep us there. This situation significantly affects our mind's capacity to focus. This is because the human mind has neural resources too limited to process many things simultaneously. The authenticity of learning is directly related to how much say an individual has over their attention in this digital ocean. Dealing with multiple digital tasks at once (multitasking) causes our minds to constantly switch between tasks, thereby leading to the superficialization of learning. Similarly, this situation, known as "screen inferiority," can negatively affect the depth of comprehension compared to paper, due to digital environments inherently containing more distractors.

So, how can we reclaim our attention in this digital chaos? We must consciously minimize our involuntary attention by limiting notifications and distractors. By turning to printed materials for tasks that require deep focus, we can reduce the cognitive load presented by the screen and bring our "voluntary attention" mechanism to the forefront. In short, taking control of our own attention management will allow us to establish a much healthier and more conscious bond with technology.

-Erkan Taşçı

THE CRITICAL MIND VS. READY-MADE ANSWERS: THE POWER OF SELF-REGULATION IN THE AI ENVIRONMENT

From the age of seven to seventy, many of us have come to rely on artificial intelligence for a wide range of tasks as it has become an integral part of our lives. While it helps students understand AI lessons, it is sometimes also used to avoid schoolwork that we find challenging. So, how can we make better use of this tool, which risks making us lazy? Research in this area highlights just how crucial 'metacognitive support' is.

In a study conducted by Xu and colleagues in 2025, a decline in self-regulation skills (task strategy, time management, and self-assessment) was observed among students in the control group who used artificial intelligence on their own without any guidance. There is an increased risk that students, by becoming accustomed to the instant answers provided by artificial intelligence, will cease active learning and become passive recipients. Metacognitive support is proposed as a solution to this situation. When we speak of metacognitive support, the concept of questioning should come to mind. Here, what we need to question is the artificial intelligence itself. When students used artificial intelligence and asked metacognitive questions such as "What is my goal?" "How accurate is this information? ", and "Can I explain this concept in my own words?" Their self-regulation skills (particularly task strategy and self-assessment) increased significantly.

At the conclusion of the study, students who received metacognitive support (i.e., those guided to question the AI) found the AI to be "more useful" for their tasks. However, compared to the group that copied the AI's output, they found the AI to be "less straightforward." This is because critical thinking is more challenging than simply receiving a ready-made answer.



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In conclusion, artificial intelligence can map out the path we should take in a matter of seconds, as if it were perfectly smooth, but walking that path, stumbling along the way, and building our own truths is down to our ability to self-regulate. In this new age, the greatest danger to learning is not the inability to access information or receiving incorrect answers, but succumbing to the comfort of blindly accepting those smooth, ready-made answers presented to us without asking a single question.

-Begüm Karabacak

INSPIRING MACHINES AND THEIR BOUNDARIES

Artificial intelligence has begun to make its presence felt in many fields and has led to time savings or made work easier in many areas. So, when it comes to art, which reflects a fundamental aspect of human nature, what role has artificial intelligence taken on in this field? At a time when we are beginning to see the impact of artificial intelligence in the arts, we can say that this is an area open to considerable criticism. However, the topic we will be discussing is not whether artificial intelligence belongs in art or not. Today's topic will be where artificial intelligence fits within the art world and how it might be of use to us.



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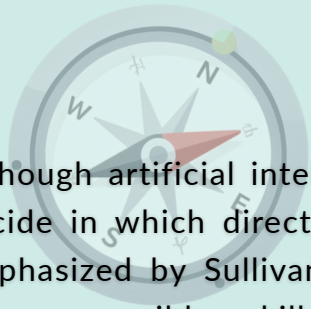
In a study conducted by Huang and colleagues in 2025, the use of generative artificial intelligence in project-based learning by design students is examined in light of self-determination theory. When design students were asked questions about artificial intelligence, their responses were as follows: While they acknowledged that artificial intelligence generates ideas quickly, they noted that it is limited in terms of 'originality,' 'design logic,' and 'creative depth.' In particular, they noted that because AI lacks the emotional and perceptual reasoning possessed by humans, the outputs it produces do not resonate emotionally. Another point of criticism is its difficulty in understanding abstract metaphors and its tendency to confuse cultural nuances. In the study, design students felt a sense of competence when they achieved good results using artificial intelligence. It appears that this sense of satisfaction is linked to the commands they entered. This implies that, no matter how intelligent the machine may be, a person cannot achieve a sense of satisfaction without putting in their own effort.

Artificial intelligence can provide us with thousands of drafts, ideas, or lines of code in a matter of seconds. However, the only force capable of infusing those cold data with soul, cultural depth, and emotional resonance is our own authentic mind. If the machine sparks the flame, it is our own inner motivation that will fan the fire.

-Begüm Karabacak

AFTERWORD: ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE HUMAN

As we have discussed throughout our newsletter, we should view artificial intelligence neither as an absolute savior nor as a threat to be avoided. The core issue lies in utilizing this technology as a "stepping stone" while being able to preserve our own authenticity.



NEVER LOSE YOUR COMPASS

Although artificial intelligence offers us a vast ocean of data, the fundamental elements that decide in which direction to row in that ocean are still our unique values and curiosity. As emphasized by Sullivan and colleagues (2023), while digital tools make the academic world more accessible, skills such as critical thinking and self-regulation continue to be the inalienable strongholds of the human mind. Completely banning these technologies is equivalent to a "fool's errand." It would be more logical to position artificial intelligence as an "assistant" with which we can exchange ideas and which liberates us from intensive routine tasks. For universities, educating students in a way that prepares them for the challenges of this digitalizing world has now emerged as a necessity.

We must build the future not by racing against machines, but by blending the speed offered by machines with the depth and authenticity of the human spirit.

Erkan Taşcı

CLOSING REMARKS AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to express our deepest gratitude to you, our esteemed readers, for accompanying us in our second issue and for sharing in our excitement for disseminating science.

This newsletter is part of the vision of the Social Sciences University of Ankara Psychosocial Development Laboratory to share scientific knowledge with society and to be integrated with the public. Within the scope of this vision, you can also follow our monthly webinar announcements via our Instagram social media account at **@psychosocialdevlab**.

With Gratitude and Regards

We would like to express our most sincere gratitude to our esteemed founding academics, **Asst. Prof. Zehra Allahverdi** and **Asst. Prof. Hatice Işık**, for their permission to prepare this newsletter and for the support they provide, which allows us to conduct our work freely, fosters our productivity, and guides us in our academic journey. We also extend our thanks to our laboratory team for all their moral support during this process. We look forward to meeting you again with new themes in our future issues.

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Next Issue: It will be published in May-June with a new topic.



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