

# Dear academia, stop playing AI detective

There was a time when the calculator entered our classrooms and was treated like a mathematical sin. Teachers feared it would "destroy mental arithmetic", as though the future depended on long division.

Numbers were suffered, not solved. Before that, even the computer was resisted, an intruder threatening the typewriter, that noble machine that consumed ribbons and patience in equal measure. Yet neither destroyed learning. They simply amplified it. Today, AI stands in that same familiar academic and public courtroom, accused of making thinking too easy.

However, the real issue is not AI. It is what the AI is exposing. For decades, education in Uganda, like much of the world, has been organised around outputs: essays, exams, and assignments. These were reliable signals of effort and understanding when information was scarce and library access cards were vogue. That world is fading. When a student can now generate structured responses in seconds, output is no longer proof of learning. It is, at best, a starting point.

Yet there is an inching temptation in academia to frame AI in day-to-day education as a form

tance between a student in Kampala and one in a rural district, between the lecture theatre and a student lying on his bed with a smartphone.

Most educators can now see this shift and understand the potential of AI, but many are still quietly waiting for policy direction.

The result is not resistance, but a pause. A kind of institutional stillness where the safest decision becomes no decision at all. Yet education has never progressed by waiting for perfect clarity. While institutions hesitate, students are already adapting. The risk is no longer misuse. It is inaction. By now, AI tutoring must be presenting itself in your mind as a great equaliser, I agree. But history suggests a more complicated pattern. Every technology framed as democratising tends to benefit those already advantaged first.

The gap often widens before it narrows. Based on UBOS and the Ministry of ICT and national guidance, Uganda's digital landscape makes this especially visible. Fewer than 15 percent of rural schools have access to computers or reliable internet, compared to roughly 65 percent in urban schools. Only about a quarter of internet users engage in it for academic purposes, while the majority use it for social networking. In some rural areas, connectivity remains as low as 13 percent, with gender disparities deepening the divide.

In other words, the conversation about AI in education is taking place on uneven ground.

If Ugandan academia is to respond meaningfully, AI fluency cannot be left to chance. In fact, our Ministry of Education should be setting a regional pace to have AI taught deliberately rather than cuddling the hesitation. This means integrating tools into learning, not isolating them. It means mechanisms that teach students to question AI, identify gaps, and recognise limitations. It shifts the cycle to use AI, question it, refine thinking, and build judgement. Without this, AI becomes a shortcut. With it, AI becomes a mirror of the student's potential.

As educators, the real task is not to become better AI detectives. It is to become better designers of learning. Because the future of education in Uganda will not be defined by how low AI has penetrated our education system, but by how wisely we integrate it and how we shift from rewarding answers to cultivating judgement and from enforcing compliance to enabling thinking. The question is no longer whether AI belongs in our classrooms. It already does. The question is whether our classrooms belong in an AI world.

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Artificial Intelligence

of cheating and, hence, a quiet race to tame it. New tools arrive, and the response is predictable, especially from the 'old guard': new rules, stricter policies, and sophisticated detection mechanisms. From pre-primary homework to university coursework, the cycle ignites: ban, restrict, police, and detect.

For Uganda, this is an opportunity, not a race. For years, our education system has operated at a disadvantage, with limited access to up-to-date materials, overstretched teachers, and uneven distribution of resources between urban and rural schools. AI changes that equation fundamentally. It collapses the dis-

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