

Editorial. Reflections on the advent of generative AI and its impact on scholarly publishing

Editoriale. Riflessioni sull'avvento dell'IA generativa e sul suo impatto sull'editoria scientifica

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The current debate on the “technology–learning” nexus, and more specifically on the effects of the rapidly increasing presence of AI tools in our learning ecologies, tends to focus on both the potential and the challenges of these tools for learning (Giannakos et al., 2025). While there is considerable enthusiasm about the ways in which technology, and generative AI in particular, can enhance learning (Kamalov et al., 2023; Maragliano, 2026), both in education and in everyday life, serious concerns have also been raised about its potentially detrimental impact on education and human cognitive development (Perrotta & Selwyn, 2020; Selwyn et al., 2023; Risko & Gilbert, 2016).

As for the potential, in line with the “extended mind” perspective (Clark & Chalmers, 1998), technology is seen as a learning companion capable not only of providing individualized, constructive feedback, but also of amplifying our creative, critical, and analytical skills across several dimensions: cognitive, informational, communicative, expressive, perceptual, and motivational (Olimpo, 1997; Conole & Dike, 2004; Persico, 2026).

The main concerns, on the other hand, relate to the risk that the habits induced by these tools—particularly delegation and overreliance—may lead to the atrophy, or even the lack of development, of related skills. This is especially worrying when it affects critical abilities, such as decision-making in ethically sensitive domains. We view this risk as more serious than the well-known phenomena of bias and hallucination: after all, learners have always been exposed to false or biased information, and effective teaching can leverage such situations to foster and strengthen critical thinking. By contrast, overreliance and the delegation of decisions may interfere with our cognitive abilities or hinder their development, even if they can accelerate and enhance certain processes.

Although it is natural that some cognitive abilities become less central and may eventually be lost, while others gain importance as our relationship with technology evolves, some competencies remain indispensable: logical reasoning, critical thinking, creativity, and those associated with the higher levels of the revised Bloom's taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001).

However, as academics and scholars, we often see the speck in our students' eyes but not the log in our own. With this editorial, we aim to draw our readers'—and especially our authors'—attention to the ways in which the widespread availability of generative AI tools is reshaping the landscape of scholarly publishing, not only for the better but also, and increasingly, for the worse. From our privileged standpoint as journal editors and members of editorial boards, we have observed significant changes in the submissions we receive. These changes have become particularly evident since November 2022, when ChatGPT was released as a precursor to the generative AI chatbots that now support our work in multiple ways.

Some of these changes can be regarded as positive. One of the most noticeable is the significant improvement in the fluency of English in submitted manuscripts. Native speakers may not fully appreciate the advantage of mastering the language that has become the de facto standard of scientific communication, particularly in fields such as education, where the quality of argumentation is paramount. Tools that eliminate grammatical errors and suggest more effective formulations can make a substantial difference, especially for early-career researchers with limited resources who cannot afford professional editing. The same applies to scholars working in resource-constrained contexts. In this sense, these tools contribute to making academic publishing a more equitable arena, where the quality of ideas and the robustness of research matter more than geographical circumstances.

These tools can also assist with one of the most tedious aspects of academic writing: formatting references according to the often complex and idiosyncratic requirements of different citation styles¹

Nonetheless, while the linguistic quality of submissions has improved, the same cannot be said of their scientific quality, let alone the soundness and appropriateness of the background provided for the study, including the references cited. Specifically, the use of generative AI should not cross the line into overreliance and complete delegation, particularly in relation to writing the theoretical background and identifying bibliographic sources.

According to Cotton et al. (2024), recognizing text that has been written by AI is not easy but there are signs that can help: lack of originality, factual errors, and most of all, the fact that "*human writing tends to be more contextually aware and responsive to the needs of the audience, while writing generated by AI may be more generic and less tailored to a specific context*" (p.323). An introduction written by a chatbot tends to be error-free but rather superficial and often not in line with the research work described in the rest of the paper. Thus, it is not infrequent that reviewers point out to the editors' parts of papers that sound AI-generated and, thus, not informative enough and poorly aligned with the rest of the paper.

Another frequent case of overreliance is when the compilation of references is entirely delegated to AI tools. At best, DOIs are fabricated; at worst, even the titles of cited works—and sometimes the journals themselves—are hallucinated. Overreliance on AI represents a negation of the author's responsibility: references may be not only incorrect, but also inappropriate to support the authors' claims, and, in many cases, may not have been read at all.

Fake citations contaminate the scientific record, contribute to the spread of misinformation, and undermine the principles of trust, transparency, and fairness upon which scholarly

¹ We are aware that Reference Managers can help tackle this issue, and in most cases they significantly alleviate the burden, but still, this is just an example of the many down-to-earth tasks that often absorb too much of the time of researchers and/or editorial staff.

communication is based. They also result in a considerable waste of reviewers' and editors' time, as the peer-review process depends on the accuracy and reliability of submitted work.

As editors of this journal, we strongly discourage such uses of AI tools. At the same time, we encourage their responsible use for improving language fluency, correcting typographical errors, and checking the consistency between in-text citations and reference lists—provided that authors carefully verify all outputs, ensuring that meanings are preserved and that all references correspond to authentic, traceable, and accurately reported sources.

Any use of AI should, in any case, be properly acknowledged, clearly indicating the role played by AI tools and other advanced technologies in the methodology section or in the acknowledgements. To reviewers and university staff—whose work has become increasingly challenging due to the need to detect and prevent academic misconduct—we recommend Cotton et al. (2024), a paper devoted to the theme of ensuring academic integrity in the era of generative AI.

Fortunately, none of the papers included in this issue of the *Italian Journal of Educational Technology* exhibit the problems described above, as those that did were rejected as soon as they were identified by the editorial staff or reviewers. This is a general issue, and as such, it is often difficult to identify a unifying theme: papers are included based on submission timing and editorial workflow rather than thematic coherence.

Nevertheless, the five papers in this issue can be grouped according to their aims and focus. The first two are systematic reviews addressing, respectively, the use of NAO robots and emotional learning in primary schools, and inclusive technologies for students with disabilities. The former, by Musicco and colleagues, examines NAO—one of the most popular humanoid robots—highlighting its potential to support not only emotional skills such as empathy and emotional regulation, but also basic competencies such as vocabulary acquisition and reading. The latter, by Traina et al., focuses on technology-based approaches for the inclusion of students with neurodevelopmental disorders, classifying them into six categories: task-specific software, virtual and augmented reality, video modelling, hardware devices, learning environments, and computer-mediated communication. Notably, the review highlights a gap in the literature: most studies emphasize academic outcomes, with less attention to social inclusion, emotional well-being, and peer interaction. The most frequently studied conditions include intellectual and developmental disabilities, learning disabilities, and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder. The authors conclude by calling for holistic pedagogical frameworks that integrate learning and emotional well-being.

The third and fourth contributions address the now ubiquitous theme of Artificial Intelligence (AI). The third, by Sansone and colleagues, takes an original approach by investigating how Italian university students metaphorically represent Generative Artificial Intelligence (GAI). These representations are analysed in relation to variables such as gender, age, field of study, and prior knowledge of GAI. The metaphors range from tool/assistant (the most common) to partner/coach, agent/autonomy, and risk/control or ethics/governance framings (less frequent but still salient). The resulting picture is strongly polarized, reflecting both highly empowering and deeply critical views of GAI—echoing the dual perspective outlined at the beginning of this editorial. These findings offer useful insights for designing AI literacy initiatives that emphasize understanding, agency, and control.

The fourth study, by Niewint-Gori and colleagues, examines the impact of a professional development initiative involving 60 secondary school teachers, aimed at improving their knowledge of and confidence in AI. The results show statistically significant improvements in the intervention group across several dimensions: general AI knowledge, familiarity with technologies and techniques, the ability to distinguish AI from non-AI tools, and perceived ease of use. Teachers also reported increased engagement and reduced anxiety, despite a greater awareness of the complexity of implementation. These findings suggest that structured

professional development combining conceptual understanding with hands-on practice is effective in fostering foundational AI literacy.

The fifth and final contribution, by Zavatta, addresses another key theme for this journal: the relationship between teachers' personal professional identity (TpPI) and digital citizenship. This exploratory case study analyses qualitative data from interviews with secondary school principals and teachers in Ireland (n = 16) and Italy (n = 27). The findings confirm that teachers' professional identities play a crucial role in their engagement with digital technologies. Strong digital competence, professional agency, and continuous learning enable teachers to move beyond merely coping with technological change to actively thriving within it.

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