

Free AI Learning Has a Hidden Integrity Tax

It's not just effort—it's the erosion of truth in knowledge.

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2020

Year MIT canceled Elsevier contract

MIT became one of the first major U.S. institutions to cancel a journals contract with Elsevier, standing by its open scholarship principles.

This pivotal moment marked a shift in how academic institutions view access to knowledge. By refusing to pay for restricted scholarly content, MIT signaled that open access isn't just ideal—it's sustainable. The decision saved millions and set a precedent for institutions embracing equitable knowledge systems.

Source: MIT News • Published October 06, 2026

<https://news.mit.edu/2026/chris-bourg-named-vice-provost-and-barbara-ostrom-director-mit-libraries-1006>



01

Open access is the new infrastructure

Free AI learning platforms often rely on open-access research. But when that access is under threat—due to paywalls, corporate control, or AI training on unlicensed content—the foundation of learning itself becomes unstable. True sustainability in AI education requires not just free courses, but free knowledge.



02

AI learns from broken systems

Generative AI models are trained on vast datasets, many of which are locked behind paywalls or curated by publishers with profit motives. When free AI learning platforms use these models, they inherit the bias and fragility of the data. The cost isn't just in time—it's in the normalization of broken knowledge ecosystems.

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