

AI Can't Fix What's Broken—Yet

A scholar's warning on education's learning recession.

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Learning is declining

Education Trend

As reported by Harvard's Tomiko Brown-Nagin in her final reflection as Radcliffe Dean.

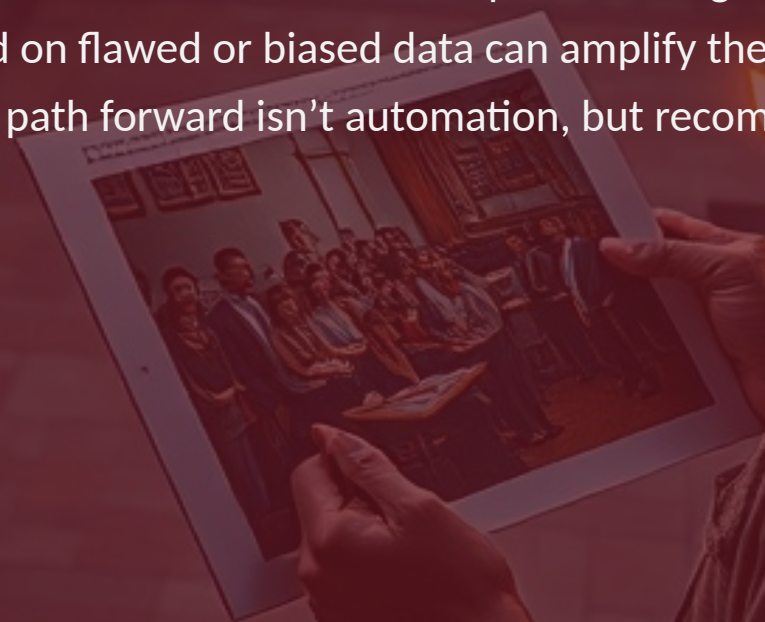
Brown-Nagin identified a systemic decline in learning outcomes across U.S. education, a phenomenon researchers call a 'learning recession' since 2013. This is not a new trend, but one now compounded by AI-driven disruption. The data reveals a crisis in foundational knowledge acquisition, even as technology promises to accelerate it.



01

AI Must Serve Learning, Not Replace It

The real danger isn't AI's intelligence—it's the assumption that technology alone can restore academic rigor. Brown-Nagin's work shows that education's deepest challenges lie in trust, equity, and epistemic humility. AI systems trained on flawed or biased data can amplify these gaps, especially in under-resourced institutions. The path forward isn't automation, but recommitment to inquiry, dialogue, and evidence-based pedagogy.



02

Leadership, Not Algorithms, Drives Reform

Brown-Nagin's leadership of Harvard's slavery legacy inquiry and open dialogue working group shows that institutional change begins with moral courage, not code. AI systems cannot be designed to resolve ethical tensions or build consensus—these require human judgment. The most impactful AI in higher education will be that which supports, not supplants, human-led initiatives in justice, inclusion, and intellectual courage.



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