CONFERENCE PAPER:

Artificial Intelligence in Social Studies Education: Opportunities and Challenges

Comments from the Organizer of the ISSA Conference

We are pleased to publish the 14th volume of *the Journal of Social Studies Education in Asia* (*JSSEA*). This issue contains various papers presented at the 2024 ISSA Annual Meeting.

This conference paper presents a timely and thought-provoking exploration of the intersection between artificial intelligence (AI) and social studies education. As education systems across the globe grapple with the implications of digital transformation, this paper makes a relevant contribution by highlighting both the potential and the pitfalls of integrating AI into one of the most human-centered domains of learning: social studies.

One of the paper's key strengths lies in its recognition of AI's potential to personalize, adapt, and enhance the learning process. The author effectively articulates how AI-driven systems such as intelligent tutoring platforms, adaptive assessments, and virtual historical simulations can make social studies more engaging and tailored to the diverse needs of students. This is especially significant for a subject that often involves abstract thinking, moral reasoning, and the synthesis of complex historical, economic, and political content. As Holmes, Bialik, and Fadel (2019) argue, AI can foster deeper understanding through timely feedback and scaffolded support, contributing to improved learning outcomes and motivation.

Another commendable feature of the paper is its awareness of practical barriers to implementation. The discussion around infrastructure disparities and teacher readiness accurately reflects ongoing challenges in many education systems, particularly in developing countries. As UNESCO (2021) emphasizes, unequal access to digital infrastructure exacerbates educational inequality and threatens to leave the most marginalized students behind. The paper correctly identifies that without addressing these structural issues, the adoption of AI risks reinforcing the digital divide rather than closing it. Nonetheless, the paper would benefit from a more empirically grounded analysis. While it outlines potential benefits and challenges in broad terms, it does not draw on specific case studies, pilot programs, or comparative data. For instance, referencing how certain schools or districts have successfully (or unsuccessfully) piloted AI tools in social studies classrooms would add depth and credibility to the claims. Zawacki-Richter et al. (2019) highlight that much of the existing literature on AI in education remains theoretical; thus, papers like this would do well to contribute more field-based insights.

The ethical considerations raised, particularly concerning data privacy, surveillance, and algorithmic bias, are crucial and appropriate, but remain somewhat underdeveloped. As Eubanks (2018) demonstrates, AI systems are not ideologically neutral; they are shaped by the values embedded in their design and deployment. In social studies, which often deals with contested histories, political ideologies, and narratives of identity, biased algorithms could pose significant risks to pluralism and critical engagement. For example, content recommendation systems could unwittingly promote dominant cultural narratives while marginalizing alternative perspectives. In this regard, the paper could be further enhanced by integrating perspectives from critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970), postcolonial theory (Spivak, 1988), or culturally responsive education (Gay, 2010), especially given the subject matter of social studies. These frameworks could help assess how AI might be used not merely to deliver content efficiently, but to foster dialogue, social justice, and democratic participation.

Another area worth exploring is the role of teacher agency. While the paper identifies teacher training as a need, it does not delve into how educators can retain professional autonomy in AI-mediated classrooms. Selwyn (2019) warns of the risk of "teacher deskilling" in automated environments, and calls for human-in-the-loop designs that center pedagogical judgment rather than replace it. Lastly, the paper might benefit from more engagement with student perspectives. How do students perceive AI in their learning? Do they feel empowered or surveilled, engaged or alienated? Incorporating qualitative data or literature on student voice could enrich the analysis and offer a more holistic understanding of AI's impact on the learning environment.

In conclusion, this paper is a commendable and timely contribution to the evolving discourse on AI in education, particularly within the humanistic and civic-oriented domain of social studies. It successfully raises awareness of critical issues and opens the door to further exploration. To increase its impact, future iterations of the work should aim to include empirical data, richer theoretical perspectives, and a more nuanced discussion of ethical, cultural, and pedagogical implications. Such enhancements would position the paper not only as a conceptual reflection, but as a strategic guide for responsible and inclusive AI implementation in social studies education.

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