

When chatbots crashed the classroom...

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Calcutta: Essays in homework, school projects, speeches in assemblies, and even lesson plans prepared by teachers — AI is steadily reshaping traditional classroom practices.

Educators said the distinction between machine-generated and human intelligence has begun to blur with the rapid adoption of AI in schools.

While some see it as a useful tool, others fear overdependence could weaken a child's ability to think independently.

"It is something to worry about because children are becoming so dependent on AI tools that their thinking is getting affected. They are not creative enough, and their language is not developing organically," said Devi Kar, director, Modern High School for Girls and Modern High School International.

Teachers said assignments, speeches by school prefects, and even thank-you notes or application letters are increasingly AI-generated, often lacking originality and emotional depth.

"It has become increasingly common now. Even the prefects' speeches are generic and dispassionate. They lack emotion or familiarity. When it is so easily available, why would a child spend an hour or even 30 minutes to prepare a speech?" said Joseph Chacko, senior school coordinator and

English teacher at St James' School.

Rethinking tasks

To counter this trend, schools are experimenting with more creative and unpredictable assignments.

"Teachers cannot rely on stereotypical topics for essays that can be prepared beforehand. Topics have to be more creative and imaginative," said Nandini Bhattacharjee, education director, Loreto South Asia.

At Loreto Day School, Eliot Road, Class IX students were shown an image of the Santhal Rebellion — outside their syllabus — and asked to write an in-class essay based on it.

In another exercise, students were divided into groups: one using AI tools and the other relying on their own thinking. "At the end, some students who used AI said some of their points may have been more accurate compared to the other group, but their contribution was that they had only typed but not really explored or thought," Bhattacharjee said.

Educators said the bigger challenge is teaching ethical use of technology.

"Doing your homework with AI is not ethical. It can be used as a supplement to complete projects," said Pratima Nayar, junior school principal of Calcutta International School.

Teacher adoption

The impact is not limited to students. Teachers themselves are increasingly using AI tools for lesson planning and classroom preparation.

This shift follows the broader digital transition that began during the Covid-19 pandemic,

when educators adapted to online platforms.

However, lesson plans must remain tailored to students' needs and not become overly automated, said Nayar of Calcutta International School.

At a recent early childhood summit in Kuala Lumpur, Swati Popat Vats, president of the Early Childhood Association (ECA) and Association for Preparatory Education & Research (Aper), told an audience of 700 teachers that educators are now preparing children for a world where human and machine intelligence overlap.

Almost all teachers present reportedly expressed some anxiety about AI in classrooms.

"But a machine will never be able to replicate the way you look at a child. A teacher should not use CCTV to monitor a child's behaviour in class, but use their own eyes. Once she does that, she can take the help of AI to compile the data for her but not make AI the observer on her behalf," Vats said.

Major General V.N. Chaturvedi, secretary-general of the Vidya Mandir Society, which runs Birla High School, Sushila Birla Girls' School and Birla High School Mukundapur, said schools must engage with AI rather than resist it.

"You cannot do away with it, but try to embrace it on your terms and conditions. As long as the negatives do not outweigh the positives," he said.

Cognitive risk

Many educators are wary of long-term consequences.

"Earlier, it was the screen, and we would be worried about eyesight getting impacted. Now with AI, the danger is that one's faculties can get blunted," said Kar of Modern High.

Chacko of St James' added that AI is gradually eroding skills among students.

"It is taking away from the current generation of schoolchildren their sense of judgement, creativity and ability to think on their own," he said.

