

Are We at Risk of Putting the Digital Cart Before the Horse?

Why direct instruction and the development of core knowledge and skills are vital components in preparing learners for the demands of the digital workplace

Whether you're excited or unnerved by the increasing pervasiveness of digital technology, there's no denying its growing impact on how and what we teach. A recent McKinsey & Company report¹ considers how educators should respond to digitalisation, with a particular focus on MENA: 'As companies in all sectors deploy new technologies including automation and artificial intelligence (AI), workers need to adapt their capabilities continuously. Private- and public-sector leaders have a critical role to play in helping prepare the workforce of tomorrow for this skills revolution.'

The report arrives in an educational landscape in which all stakeholders must grapple with the potential uses and misuses of language learning models (LLMs) like ChatGPT. Leaders in K-12 education will find the following three principles to be useful navigational aids:

1. Digital use does not in itself develop digital literacy.
2. Prerequisite knowledge and skills still matter.
3. Effective teachers and school leaders understand points 1 and 2.

Furthermore, use of digital platforms can make lesson time memorable for the wrong reasons. As Professor Daniel Willingham explains, 'memory is the residue of thought'³, so in the days after her English lesson using a colourful new programme, Nadiyah may remember little of how to use auxiliary verbs, but her memory of the super cute avatar she made will be spot on.

But don't just consider this who hasn't copying

Digital use does not in itself develop digital literacy

To kick us off, let's get this old chestnut out of the way: like Santa and the Easter Bunny, what if natives aren't native?

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