

The teacher still beats AI

Experts: Educators can provide personal guidance a student needs



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PETALING JAYA: Students today have many artificial intelligence (AI) tools that can generate explanations and instant answers to just about any question.

However, nothing beats a real-life teacher.

Tuition centres are still seeing strong demand from students seeking additional academic support, say educators.

Mathematics and Additional Mathematics teacher Mohammad Zulkarnaen Zainuddin, who runs a tuition centre in Seri Kembangan, said that while AI-powered platforms are increasingly used by students, they cannot replicate the guidance and interaction that teachers provide.

"The number of students in my centre has increased. In fact, every year I see an increase of around 30%," said the tutor who teaches students from Form One to Form Five.

He does not see AI as a threat but as a useful supplementary tool.

Such tools, he said, are not always reliable.

"AI can misunderstand symbols, especially when the question is handwritten.

"Sometimes the solution given does not make sense. Students still need the human touch. They need to know if the solution actually matches the question," he said.

Also, he said, relying on AI to simply generate answers could undermine learning.

"If they use AI for answers and copy it without understanding, they gain nothing," he said.

English language tuition teach-

Human touch: Students using Chat GPT to do their homework while being monitored by their teacher at a tuition centre in Cheras. — AZHAR MAHFOF/The Star



er Arwind Kumar also says there has been no decline in enrolment at his Kuala Lumpur centre, which has about 70 students.

"Beyond academics, students need perspective, discipline and the right mindset. That is something no technology can replace," he said.

He too said students must learn to use AI responsibly.

"It can be useful in explaining difficult concepts or providing additional examples, but problems arise when students use it purely to generate answers.

"Going straight to AI just to get the answer is simply laziness.

"A teacher can see when a student is confused, discouraged or lacking confidence. That kind of connection is real and plays an important role in a child's growth," he said.

Soloman Santhiaboo, who runs a tuition centre in Serdang, said only a small number of high-performing students can use AI tools effectively.

"About 80% still require guidance and structured teaching from educators."

His centre has about 1,000 students from Year One to Form Five,

with Santhiaboo teaching around 100 students in economics and business studies.

"Tuition centres also provide an environment where students can ask questions, clarify doubts immediately and receive personalised attention.

"If students depend on AI to generate answers instead of analysing and solving problems, it may affect important life skills like critical thinking, creativity and independent learning," he said.

Yap Siew Mei, a teacher at a centre in Cheras, says parents still value structured learning environments.

"Students can easily generate answers using AI tools, but that does not mean they understand the concepts behind the answers.

"Teachers play a crucial role in helping students build strong fundamentals and learn how to evaluate whether information is correct. Every child learns differently, and through close interaction we can detect the specific challenges they face," she said.

Experts also agree that there is a risk in excessive reliance on AI in learning.

The biggest risk arises when AI

replaces a student's own thinking and internalisation of concepts and skill sets, said Asia Pacific University of Technology & Innovation Digital Learning Hub director Prof Dr Abtar Kaur Darshan Singh.

"Learning is not simply about producing an answer. It involves reasoning, reflection and developing conceptual understanding.

"If students just rely on AI, they can bypass these important cognitive processes," she said.

Prof Abtar, the Unesco chair in Harnessing Innovative Technologies to Enhance Quality Teaching and Learning, described AI as a form of "scaffolding" in education – a temporary support system that helps learners move forward until they can perform a task independently.

Teaching, she said, involves far more than delivering information.

"A good teacher observes how a student is progressing, not just whether they have the correct answer.

"Teachers notice when a student is losing confidence, when curiosity is emerging, or when a concept has not quite clicked yet," she said.