

Research Article

Humanizing Learning in the AI Era: Teachers Efforts to Cultivate Learning Awareness and Independent Thinking in Students of SMAN 2 Singingi Hilir

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Abstract: Advances in artificial intelligence (AI) technology present both opportunities and challenges for education. On the one hand, AI can enrich the learning process; on the other hand, it has the potential to shift human values in education. This study aims to describe teachers' efforts to humanize learning in the AI era, particularly in fostering students' learning awareness and independent thinking at SMAN 2 Singingi Hilir. The study used a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection techniques through interviews, observation, and documentation. Data analysis was conducted following the Miles and Huberman model, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The results show that teachers act as facilitators and inspirators in technology-based learning. Humanization of learning is realized through instilling the values of reflection, empathy, and responsibility in the use of AI. In addition, teachers foster students' independent thinking through project-based learning and reflective discussions that balance digital intelligence with moral values. This process helps students become critical, independent, and ethical learners amidst the digitalization of education.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence; Humanization of Learning; Independent Thinking; Learning Awareness; Role of Teachers.

1. Introduction

The rapid advancement and proliferation of artificial intelligence (AI) technology has initiated and brought about significant, far-reaching transformations within the landscape of education worldwide. The emerging paradigm known as Education 5.0 demands and requires that educators not only achieve mastery over digital and technological aspects, but also demonstrate the capacity and commitment to preserve, uphold, and integrate fundamental human values throughout the entire teaching and learning process. As technology increasingly pervades, dominates, and reshapes educational spaces and learning environments, a critical new challenge has emerged: ensuring and guaranteeing that the learning process remains fundamentally human-centered and human-oriented, rather than becoming excessively reliant upon or dominated by fully automated systems and mechanistic approaches. Within this complex and evolving context, the role of teachers becomes exceptionally crucial and indispensable as facilitators who nurture values, cultivate awareness, and guide the conscious learning development of students.

The humanization of learning represents a comprehensive pedagogical approach that deliberately positions and recognizes students as active subjects who are conscious, autonomous, and genuinely responsible for their own learning processes and educational journeys. Humanistic education strives earnestly to cultivate and develop critical thinking awareness, learning independence and self-directedness, as well as reflective capabilities that enable students to comprehend and extract meaningful understanding from each and every learning experience they encounter. This fundamental concept and philosophical orientation

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becomes increasingly vital and essential amid the powerful currents of educational digitalization, where numerous students are beginning to develop dependencies upon artificial intelligence tools and resources without developing corresponding critical consciousness and awareness regarding the sources, validity, and limitations of the knowledge they access and consume.

In this contemporary era, teachers confront and must navigate a dual challenge of considerable complexity: on one hand, they must effectively harness and utilize AI as an efficient and powerful learning medium and instructional tool, while on the other hand, they must vigilantly ensure and safeguard that students do not lose their reflective capacities, authentic thinking abilities, and original intellectual agency. Therefore, the humanization of learning in the AI era must be understood and approached as a strategic effort aimed at maintaining and preserving a delicate equilibrium and productive balance between technological advancement and progress on the one hand, and essential human values and humanistic principles on the other.

From an epistemological perspective and philosophical standpoint, the process of humanizing learning is fundamentally grounded in and supported by the understanding that genuine knowledge and authentic understanding do not emerge merely from passive reception or external transmission, but rather arise from the active and reflective engagement of the learning subject with their experienced reality and lived context (Dewey in Paramarta et al., 2024:7). Consequently, the true essence and authentic nature of learning is not simply about receiving and absorbing information passively, but necessarily involves processes of critical thinking and self-awareness regarding the meaning, significance, and implications of knowledge. Within this epistemological framework and theoretical context, AI functions and serves only as an instrumental tool and supportive aid in constructing and facilitating learning experiences, while the ultimate source of truth, understanding, and authentic knowledge remains firmly located in and dependent upon the processes of human reflection, interpretation, and meaning-making.

Meanwhile, from an axiological perspective that examines values and their role in education, educational endeavors inherently possess moral and humanistic values that cannot and should not be automated, mechanized, or reduced to algorithmic processes. Freire, as cited in Gultom's journal (2024:1-2), emphatically asserts and argues that genuinely humanizing education is education that cultivates and nurtures freedom of thought, personal and social responsibility, and authentic self-awareness and consciousness. Accordingly, the integration and utilization of AI within learning contexts should be deliberately directed and intentionally oriented toward strengthening, reinforcing, and amplifying these fundamental values, rather than eroding, diminishing, or undermining them. Education grounded in axiological foundations and value-based principles positions teachers as guardians and keepers of values (value keepers), who bear the crucial responsibility of ensuring that technology functions to expand and enhance human potential and capabilities, rather than replacing, substituting, or eliminating distinctively human capacities and qualities.

With these epistemological and axiological foundations firmly established as guiding principles, this research endeavor aims not merely to describe, document, or illustrate practices of learning humanization in a surface-level manner, but rather seeks to deeply interpret and meaningfully understand the multifaceted role of teachers as guides and cultivators of consciousness amid ongoing digital transformation and technological disruption. Teachers play an absolutely essential and irreplaceable role in ensuring and verifying that artificial intelligence is employed and deployed in ways that strengthen, enhance, and amplify distinctively human thinking capacities and intellectual capabilities, rather than negating, replacing, or rendering obsolete these fundamental human qualities and cognitive abilities.

Based upon the comprehensive exposition and analysis presented above, this research specifically aims to describe, examine, and analyze the efforts, strategies, and practices undertaken by teachers in cultivating learning awareness and fostering thinking independence among students at SMAN 2 Singingi Hilir in the contemporary AI era. The research focus is deliberately directed toward investigating and understanding how teachers implement and apply principles of humanization within their pedagogical practice and instructional approaches, and what specific strategies, methods, and techniques they employ to ensure and maintain that technology consistently serves as a supportive tool and enhancement mechanism for thinking processes, rather than becoming a substitute, replacement, or impediment to authentic human thought and genuine intellectual engagement.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Philosophical Foundations of Humanistic Education

The concept of humanizing learning is deeply rooted in and fundamentally derives from humanistic educational philosophy, which deliberately positions and recognizes human beings as both the central focus and ultimate purpose of all educational endeavors. According to Rogers, as cited in the journal by Wafi et al. (2025:4-5), education must necessarily facilitate and support the process of self-actualization, whereby students develop into individuals who are conscious, open-minded, and personally responsible for cultivating and developing their own inherent potential and capabilities. Humanization, in this fundamental sense, means restoring and returning education to its essential nature as a process of humanizing human beings—of helping individuals become more fully and authentically human (Freire in Cahyani & Wibowo, 2025:452). Within this conceptual framework and philosophical context, teachers function not merely as transmitters or deliverers of knowledge and information, but rather as guides and facilitators in the crucial work of building students' self-awareness, helping them discover meaning and purpose in life, and developing their reflective capacities and abilities.

2.2 Existentialist Perspectives on Freedom and Authenticity in Education

From the perspective of existentialist educational philosophy, as articulated by Sartre (1943) and further elaborated by Sholihah et al. (2023:49-50), human beings are fundamentally understood as creatures who possess the freedom and responsibility to determine the meaning and significance of their own existence. Education, consequently, must necessarily provide space, opportunity, and support for freedom of thought and the courage to make authentic decisions and meaningful choices. This philosophical principle proves especially relevant and applicable in the context of AI-era learning, where genuine freedom of thought is frequently threatened or constrained by dependencies upon algorithms and data that have been pre-selected, pre-organized, and "provided" by automated systems. Teachers must therefore ensure and vigilantly safeguard that technology does not dull, diminish, or eliminate students' reflective capacities and personal responsibility for their own knowledge construction and meaning-making processes.

The existentialist emphasis on freedom and authenticity challenges educational practices that position students as passive recipients of predetermined knowledge or that reduce learning to the efficient acquisition of information curated by external authorities—whether human or algorithmic. Sartre's famous dictum that "existence precedes essence" suggests that human beings are not born with fixed natures or predetermined purposes but rather create themselves through the choices they make and the commitments they undertake. Applied to educational contexts, this perspective implies that authentic learning cannot consist merely of absorbing externally imposed content but must involve students in actively constructing their own understanding, questioning received wisdom, and taking responsibility for the knowledge claims they accept and the intellectual positions they adopt.

2.3 Learning Awareness as the Core of Educational Humanization

Learning awareness (or learning consciousness) constitutes the fundamental core and essential center of the process of educational humanization. According to Mezirow, as discussed in the journal by Nawawi et al. (2024:160), learning awareness represents the individual's capacity and ability to reflect critically upon their experiences and to transform their existing frameworks of understanding based upon new insights and deeper comprehension. This reflective and transformative process cannot be performed automatically or mechanically by machines or technological systems; it necessarily requires contemplation, emotional engagement, and the uniquely human contexts of meaning-making that characterize authentic human understanding. Consequently, AI-based or AI-assisted learning must be balanced and complemented by reflective activities such as discussions of values and meaning, open dialogues that honor diverse perspectives, and contextual learning experiences that enable students' learning awareness to develop naturally and organically.

2.4 Humanization in the Context of Education 5.0

Within the specific context of the Education 5.0 era, the concept of humanization acquires new relevance, significance, and urgency. This contemporary educational era demands and requires a careful, thoughtful balance between artificial intelligence and emotional intelligence, between technological innovation and human values, between computational efficiency and meaningful human connection. According to Noddings, as cited

in the journal by Majid et al. (2024:126-127), genuinely good education does not merely teach rational thinking and logical reasoning, but also cultivates and nurtures empathy, compassion, and caring relationships. When artificial intelligence systems can deliver information more rapidly and comprehensively than human teachers, the primary role of teachers necessarily shifts toward becoming moral guides, meaning-makers, and reinforcers of the deeper purpose and significance of learning. In this transformed educational landscape, teachers function not merely as deliverers of knowledge content, but as directors of values and shapers of character amid the profound challenges posed by digitalization and technological transformation.

Education 5.0 represents an evolving paradigm that seeks to address the limitations of previous educational models while responding to the opportunities and challenges presented by advanced technologies including AI, robotics, big data analytics, and the Internet of Things. Unlike Education 4.0, which emphasized digital literacy and technological integration, Education 5.0 places greater emphasis on developing distinctively human capacities that complement rather than compete with machine capabilities—including creativity, ethical reasoning, emotional intelligence, collaborative problem-solving, and the capacity to find meaning and purpose in life.

The shift from teacher as primary information source to teacher as moral guide and meaning-maker has profound implications for teacher education, professional development, and educational policy. It requires that teachers develop not only technological competence but also deep pedagogical content knowledge, sophisticated understanding of human development and learning, strong ethical commitments, and the relational skills necessary to build trusting, caring relationships with diverse students. It also requires systemic changes that provide teachers with the time, resources, and support necessary to engage in the reflective practice, collaborative inquiry, and ongoing learning essential for this transformed role.

2.5 Humanization as Integration of Multiple Philosophical Traditions

Taken as a whole and considered comprehensively, this theoretical review and literature analysis confirms and establishes that the humanization of learning in the AI era represents a thoughtful synthesis and integration of humanistic philosophy, constructivist learning theory, and existentialist thought. Humanization does not reject, oppose, or dismiss technology and technological innovation, but rather positions technology as an instrumental tool and supportive means for expanding, enhancing, and amplifying human potential and distinctively human capacities. Teachers, within this integrated conceptual framework, function as mediators and bridges between technological advancement and human values, ensuring and guaranteeing that every educational innovation remains firmly grounded in and oriented toward the fundamental purpose of education: forming human beings who think critically, act independently, and live morally and ethically.

The integration of these philosophical traditions also suggests important principles for designing and implementing AI-enhanced learning environments in humanizing ways. Technology should be used to support rather than supplant human agency—empowering students to make meaningful choices, pursue their interests, and direct their own learning rather than simply responding to algorithmically determined prompts and pathways.

3. Materials and Method

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of how teachers foster students' learning awareness and independent thinking amidst the utilization of artificial intelligence (AI) technology. This approach was chosen because it is suitable for exploring teachers' real experiences and the underlying meaning behind their actions in pedagogical practices that emphasize humane values.

The research was conducted at SMAN 2 Singingi Hilir, a school that has begun integrating digital technology and AI-based applications into its teaching and learning processes. The informants consisted of several teachers actively using these technologies, as well as a number of students involved in AI-based learning. Purposive sampling was used to select informants, based on their direct understanding and experience with the phenomena under investigation.

Data collection involved interviews, observations, and document analysis. Interviews aimed to uncover teachers' perspectives and experiences in managing humanistic teaching in the AI era. Observations were conducted to directly observe classroom interactions, particularly between teachers, students, and technology. Meanwhile, documents such as lesson plans and students' assignment results were used to support the field findings.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Learning Conditions in the AI Era

The results of observations and interviews with teachers at SMAN 2 Singingi Hilir indicate that the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in the learning process has become increasingly intensive. Students frequently rely on applications such as ChatGPT and Google Gemini to complete school assignments without truly understanding the concepts being studied. Teachers observed that this phenomenon has led to a decline in learning motivation and weakened independent thinking. Students tend to focus on instant results rather than reflective processes in understanding learning materials. This finding aligns with Setiawan and Rahmawati (2024:48), who explain that dependence on AI can hinder the development of self-directed learning because students no longer practice building knowledge through critical thinking and direct learning experiences.

Furthermore, teachers recognized that this behavioral shift affects students' character and academic responsibility. Independent thinking, which was previously nurtured through analysis and discussion, is now displaced by the desire to complete tasks quickly using technological assistance. The change not only influences cognitive development but also impacts affective aspects such as perseverance, honesty, and responsibility. Consequently, teachers are increasingly aware that they must act as moral and reflective guides in addition to being content instructors.

In this context, the teacher's role becomes crucial in maintaining the humanistic values of education. The challenge is not to reject AI but to ensure its ethical and meaningful integration into the learning process. Teachers must design learning experiences that encourage students to think critically and reflectively, allowing technology to serve as a tool for exploration rather than a shortcut to understanding.

4.2. Teachers' Humanization Strategies

To respond to these challenges, teachers at SMAN 2 Singingi Hilir implemented humanization strategies in the classroom. The first approach is reflective learning, in which students are encouraged to write reflection journals after using AI. The purpose of this activity is to make students aware of the differences between thinking with machine assistance and thinking based on self-understanding. According to Dewey, as cited in Holt (2020:145), genuine learning arises from reflection that connects experience with conscious thought. This reflective practice helps students understand that learning is a process of internalizing knowledge, not merely reproducing information.

The second strategy involves promoting open dialogue about ethics and responsibility in technology use. Teachers facilitate classroom discussions that help students view AI as a supportive tool rather than a substitute for human thought. This approach resonates with Freire's (2021:52) philosophy, which asserts that education should liberate individuals from structural dependence and foster critical awareness of their social realities. Through guided dialogue, teachers help students develop ethical awareness and critical perspectives on the technological products they consume.

Third, teachers design experiential, exploratory assignments that require students to engage with real-world contexts. Examples include social observations or community-based projects whose outcomes cannot be replicated by machines. This approach makes learning more contextual and personally meaningful. As Carl Rogers and Stevens (2020:111) emphasize, meaningful learning occurs when learners are personally and emotionally involved in the process. Hence, the humanization strategies implemented by teachers at SMAN 2 Singingi Hilir represent a conscious effort to balance technological integration with the preservation of humanistic values at the heart of education.

4.3. The Teacher's Role as a Manager of Learning Awareness

Teachers at SMAN 2 Singingi Hilir play a dual role — not only as instructors but also as managers of learning awareness. In every lesson plan, they ensure that AI is used as a thinking aid rather than a replacement for thought itself. For instance, teachers allow students to use AI for reference searching, but they must analyze and compare the generated content with academic sources. Through this method, AI functions as a cognitive partner that stimulates rather than replaces critical thinking.

Furthermore, teachers design learning activities that promote analysis, reflection, and discussion. Assessment focuses not only on the final product but also on the reasoning process demonstrated by students in constructing arguments. This practice reflects the

humanistic principles of Rogers, who emphasizes the importance of empathy and authentic relationships between teacher and student to create meaningful learning experiences (Chairani et al., 2023). In this framework, teachers become facilitators who cultivate awareness rather than controllers who enforce compliance.

This shift redefines the teacher's role in the AI era — from transmitters of knowledge to curators of consciousness. Teachers guide students to develop discernment, ensuring that the use of AI strengthens rather than weakens their intellectual autonomy. By fostering metacognitive awareness, teachers help students understand how to use AI critically and responsibly, preparing them to navigate a technology-driven world with ethical sensitivity and self-awareness.

4.4. Challenges Encountered

In implementing humanization-based learning strategies, teachers encounter several challenges. First, many students remain more interested in quick results than in engaging deeply with the learning process. Second, limited classroom time makes it difficult for teachers to accommodate reflective activities and in-depth discussions during each session. Third, not all teachers have sufficient understanding of how to use AI for educational purposes. As Sari and Hartono (2022:13) note, many teachers still perceive technology as a threat rather than an opportunity due to limited digital pedagogical competence.

Despite these challenges, teachers at SMAN 2 Singingi Hilir have attempted to adapt through internal training and the sharing of best practices. These collaborative efforts aim to build digital literacy and ethical awareness among educators. Such initiatives demonstrate the teachers' commitment to professionalism and their willingness to evolve alongside technological advancements while safeguarding humanistic values. These challenges highlight the need for continuous professional development in digital pedagogy. Schools must provide structural support for teacher training and create communities of practice to promote ethical technology use. Addressing these challenges is essential to ensure that technology enhances, rather than diminishes, the integrity of the educational process.

Comparison with state-of-the-art is an important part. This section can provide a more measurable illustration of your research contribution. This section can also be added to a brief discussion. If you feel that this section is insufficient and unsuitable to be a separate section, the author(s) can integrate this section with section four (Results and Discussion).

5. Comparison

The findings of this study affirm that humanizing education in the era of artificial intelligence is an urgent necessity in modern learning systems. Education is no longer merely a process of knowledge transfer but a human-centered endeavor aimed at developing reflective, ethical, and critical individuals capable of navigating technological complexity (Nipan et al., 2025:40). Humanization ensures that learners maintain awareness of their own agency and humanity amid technological advancement.

Ontologically, education represents an existential process of cultivating self-awareness and moral values rather than simply mastering technological tools or accumulating data. Teachers hold a moral responsibility to prevent students from losing their sense of humanity within the efficiency-driven culture of AI-assisted learning (Sutikno, 2023:60). This understanding restores education's philosophical roots as a practice of liberation and self-actualization.

Epistemologically, genuine knowledge emerges not from the mere accumulation of digital information but from reflective thinking that integrates experience, values, and self-understanding (Sinaga et al., 2025:71). Axiologically, the purpose of education in the AI era extends beyond learning efficiency toward shaping autonomous and responsible individuals. Humanistic learning—grounded in values, dialogue, and authentic experience—serves as a concrete manifestation of liberatory education that strengthens human essence amid technological dominance (Anjani et al., 2024:4908–4909).

6. Conclusion

This research shows that the presence of artificial intelligence (AI) in education has an ambivalent impact on student learning. On the one hand, AI provides easy access to information and efficiency in completing assignments; but on the other hand, this phenomenon shifts students' learning orientation from process to instant results, thereby weakening motivation and independent thinking. This situation emphasizes the increasingly

crucial role of teachers, not merely as transmitters of knowledge, but as managers of learning awareness who uphold humanitarian values in education.

Through a strategy of humanizing learning, teachers at SMAN 2 Singingi Hilir strive to foster students' learning awareness and independent thinking through three main approaches: self-reflection, open dialogue, and exploratory assignments based on real-life experiences. The reflective approach fosters students' awareness of their own ways of thinking; the open dialogue instills ethical responsibility in the use of technology; and the exploratory project restores the experiential dimension and personal involvement to the learning process. All three have proven effective in re-cultivating the human-centered meaning of learning.

Ontologically, the results of this research confirm that the essence of education is a process of humanizing humans, developing students' existential awareness so they can think critically, ethically, and reflectively amidst technological advancements. Epistemologically, knowledge is understood not as the result of the accumulation of information from machines, but rather as the result of a reflective thought process rooted in experience and self-understanding. Meanwhile, axiologically, the value of education lies in developing independent, responsible individuals capable of using technology wisely for the common good.

Therefore, humanizing learning in the AI era is not an attempt to reject technological progress, but rather to guide its use so that it remains human-centered. Teachers act as a bridge between technology and humanity, guiding students not just to know how, but also to know why and to know how to be. Such education is key to creating a generation of conscious, reflective, and responsible learners in the ever-evolving digital reality.

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