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Article

Constructing the Algorithmic Educator: A Critical Discourse Analysis of AI in Education as Represented in High-Reach YouTube Panel Discussions

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Abstract

YouTube has become a significant but largely unstudied forum for public intellectual two-way conversations on AI in education as video has become a ubiquitous medium for communicating ideas. In a world dominated by video as a communication medium, YouTube has become a prominent location for two-way ideas exchanges about artificial intelligence (AI) in education that is not yet well studied as a site of discursive production. These conversations have the potential to influence and shape access to AI in education on an even larger scale than the scholarly publications they would enable, and these influences are evident in the policy, practice, and teacher identity for which these images of the future of education are constructed. The three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model by Fairclough (1992, 2003) is applied to a Corpus consisting of 20 (171,676 words) high-reach and purposively selected panel discussions (8) on YouTube from 2020 to 2026 with Nobel Prize winners, panelists of the WEF, researchers at the Stanford Human-Centered AI Institute and panelists of the UNESCO chair. The six dominant discourse themes found through a process of analysis across 26 deductive and inductive codes, managed by NVivo 15, the student's were: the discourse of inevitability, the teacher identity crisis, ethics in-depth arising from the question of governance, the equity paradox, the human exceptionalism, and the corporate authority. The results indicate that these themes support the educational future of AI in three systematic discursive processes: inevitability normalization, institutional authority concentration and equity instrumentalization. The findings recognize that the lack of practitioner educators outlined in each of 20 panels is in itself a form of discursive power, as absence rather than content. The study is intended to demonstrate that talking about AI in education is not only a reflection of educational futures, it is an act to creating them. As educators, policymakers, or communities aim to understand and embrace AI adoption as a democratic process, it is crucial that their discursive mechanisms are made visible. Recommendations are made for policy makers, schools, teacher educators, curriculum planners and researchers.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis; AI in education; YouTube; public intellectual discourse; educational futures; AI ethics; teacher identity; fairclough; techno-determinism

1. Introduction

In the last five years, the impact of AI on education has been remarkable, moving swiftly from a means of discourse to a tool for practice and an imaginative force for the future. AI is well established to have a measurable impact on learning outcomes in a variety of educational settings, such as advanced intelligent tutoring systems, adaptive learning platforms, automated assessment tools, and

language learning applications. At the same time, however, the other interesting discussion about AI in education has been taking place not in the pages of journals but in top-tier panel presentations hosted by the World Economic Forum, the Human-Centered AI Institute at Stanford University, the Committee on Learning Media, Knowledge and Use of ICTs (CEATA) under UNESCO, and the Nobel Prize Committee. Nobel Laureates, Turing Award winners, government ministers and executives of technology companies are among the speakers appearing in these discussions, which direct more attention than do academic papers and have a widely demonstrated impact on public understanding, policy opinions, and institutional directions in regards to the adoption, deployment, and governance of AI in educational contexts.

Even their impact does not get more than cursive attention as an object of scholarly study. The policies, guidance for universities, and media reports on AI in education (see, Mochizuki et al., 2025; Simpson, 2025; Huang & Gadavani, 2025) have been widely analysed in relation to AI in education. But to date, no systematic research has examined YouTube panel discussions as a place of discourse production on AI in education using Critical Discourse Analysis. This is a large lack. Video roundtables on YouTube are a hybrid genre between policy-speech and popular media, both formally produced and informally distributed, deliberative, designed and disseminated algorithmically, and at once the authority of prestigious institutions and the scale of mass entertainment platforms.

From the constructive perspective, this study fills this gap by analysing the panel discussions in a three-dimensional framework for analysing communication discourse created by Fairclough (1992, 2003) and applied to a corpus of 20 high-reach panel discussions produced in the period 2020-2026 of the platform YouTube (171,676 words). Based on the assumption that discourse can never be neutral, this paper takes the view that the choices of language reflect and at the same time reproduce and shape social reality, and that social relations and ideology are negotiated within it (Fairclough, 1992). CDA aids systematic analysis of the 'how, by whom and for what' of AI discourse in public intellectual gatherings, beyond examining contentious matters regarding AI's educational role. The study has three research questions:

1. What are the dominant discourses surrounding AI in education in high-reach YouTube panel discussions published between 2020 and 2026?
2. What ideological assumptions and power relations are embedded within these discourses, and how are they sustained through specific linguistic and rhetorical mechanisms?
3. How do these discourses collectively construct a vision of AI's future educational role, and what are the implications for educational policy, pedagogical practice, and teacher identity?

CDA methodology is extended to a new domain of discursive productivity and the study provides the first systematic CDA of the discourse of a panel discussion in YouTube on AI in education. It offers empirical support to support the critical arguments of Selwyn (2019, 2022), Williamson et al (2023), and Mochizuki et al. (2025) that showed how six dominant discourse formations constitute AI's education future in an ideologically consequential way at the textual, discursive practice, and social practice levels. Beyond analysis of content, a cross cutting discovery is the structural lack of practitioner educators, and works as a Foucauldian mechanism of silencing in the 20 panels.

2. Literature Review

2.1. *AI in Education: Landscape and Critical Gap*

Since about 2017, there has been a dramatic increase in studying the potential applications of AI in education, and this rate of change has quickened since the introduction of ChatGPT in late 2022. Building on a systematic review of the field of AIED that previously identified 146 peer-reviewed articles from the past 12 years of publication (2007-2018; Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019), the outlines of the current AIED landscape came into sharp focus while pinpointing the major issue identified across these four key areas: the almost complete lack of critical reflections on challenges and risks of AIED and the weak relationship to theoretical pedagogical perspectives. This is still a missed theme in the

literature (Zhu et al., 2025). While the detrimental effect of AI on learning outcomes is increasingly measurable, the prevailing approach is a techno-determinist one – focusing on whether and how to adopt AI and on examining the impact on learning outcomes, rather than on questioning the intentions, power dynamics, and discourses involved in adopting particular AI systems, by whom, for whom, and how (Lambros, 2025).

In opposition to this trend, one of Neil Selwyn's most longstanding critical voices on AI in the education arena has emerged. Five basic questions regarding who benefits, who decides, and what ideas of human development are coasting when it comes to AI-education adoption, were brought up in his 2019 monograph. In the *European Journal of Education* in 2022, he published an article that argued for the need to scrutinise more closely five issues of contention, namely: implications for social justice, sustainability issues, democratic accountability of governing AI, the actual educational limitations of data-driven learning systems, and the threat of AI exacerbating structurally deep inequity (Selwyn, 2022). Williamson et al. (2023) have shown how datafication in education transforms the power dynamics of institutions and the definition of what educational knowledge is – with AI not just being the impressive instrument of data measurement, but also the subject maker and rationalist of education. In UNESCO's own policy guidance on AI in education, Mochizuki et al (2025) discovered that even though UNESCO is an international body of renown, AI integration is presented as a foregone conclusion, while industry logic takes precedence over critical pedagogical views. Similarly, Huang and Gadavani, (2025) explain that it is through the process of discursive construction that the discourse of dominance between government and corporate/educational actors is situated hierarchically in the various contexts of political economies. This study contributes to this tradition by examining CDA in a new and lesser-studied discursive context.

2.2. *Critical Discourse Analysis as Theoretical Framework*

The theoretical framework and the analytical method used in the present study is Fairclough's (1992, 2003) model of three dimensions of CDA. The model deals with discourse events as text, discursive practice, and social practice at the same time. The text level brings analytical focus on micro-level of the linguistic structures and phenomena: lexic, grammatic, metaphors, modals, us of pronominals and nominal structures. The discursive practice dimension is focused on productions, circulation and reception of texts that are located in specific institutional situations, such as positioning of speaker, disposition of references to the other, and this role of discursive platform. Social practice dimension puts discourse events into larger, more complex webs of power and ideology, trying to answer the questions of what the discourse functions are and for who/on behalf of whom the discourses advance.

The discourse theory helps to complement this. This is complemented by Foucault's discourse theory (1972). The epistemology that underpins his understanding of discourse as a historically located system that creates a legitimacy of knowledge formation, but that also excludes other discourses, is used to explore whom do these institutions change the voice of and which perspective is heard a little louder or less in the development of the educational futures of AI? Both models are productive as complementary at the micro-analytical and the macro-analytical level. Micro-analytical-level productive complementarity is the means of developing interpretations of specific linguistic mechanisms in analyses, as provided by Fairclough's model, while the macro-analytical level's productive complementarity is the means of developing a perspective on the structural conditions that produce and support dominant discourse formations, provided by Foucauldian theory.

2.3. *YouTube as a Site of Public Intellectual Discourse*

YouTube is a unique space in today's public intellectual culture. Burgess and Green (2018) defined the site as a key piece of public intellectual infrastructure, but not entertainment infrastructure (Stevenson & Baker, 2025). The world's largest easing of the traditional institutional media gatekeeping occurs when panel discussions organized by the World Economic Forum, the

Nobel Prize Committee, the Human-Centered AI Institute at Stanford University, and UNESCO are conducted at a high level, engaging not just with national audiences but with a global audience that can reach audiences on a scale no other academic publication ever does. Bekirsky et al. (2025) successfully show that social media platforms are not only hubs for the reproduction of the existing discourse, but also are active contexts that produce discourse in the sphere of AI-education discourse. The platform gets the scholarly backing it deserves, as Mostafa et al. (2022) have chronicle seven years of scholarly studies on the platform in disciplines. It is a rich scholarship to justify YouTube panel discussions as analytically worthy objects of critical inquiry, and it presents methodological forays upon which this study rests.

2.4. Research Gap

Although various CDA-based analyses have been made of AI-education policy documents, newspaper reports and guidance material from universities, there has been no published study that explicitly analyzes, using CDA, a high reach panel discussion as a space in which the discourse of AI-education is produced. This gap is big for three reasons. This is big gap for three reasons. First of all, these conversations go well beyond the scope of academic journals and governing policies to help affect knowledge production for the public on the educational future of AI. These conversations have the power to reach audiences much larger than academic journals or formal policy documents and thus are a significant place where public knowledge production about the future of AI in education takes place. Secondly, they sit in an unique discursive space which is neither a formal policy speech nor popular media but which has hitherto never been studied systematically by scholars. Third, the focus on specific linguistic and rhetorical features by which 'competing visions' of AI's place in education are legitimized, contested or excluded in these high-profile settings has not yet been explored. All the three aspects of this gap have been addressed in this study.

3. Methodology

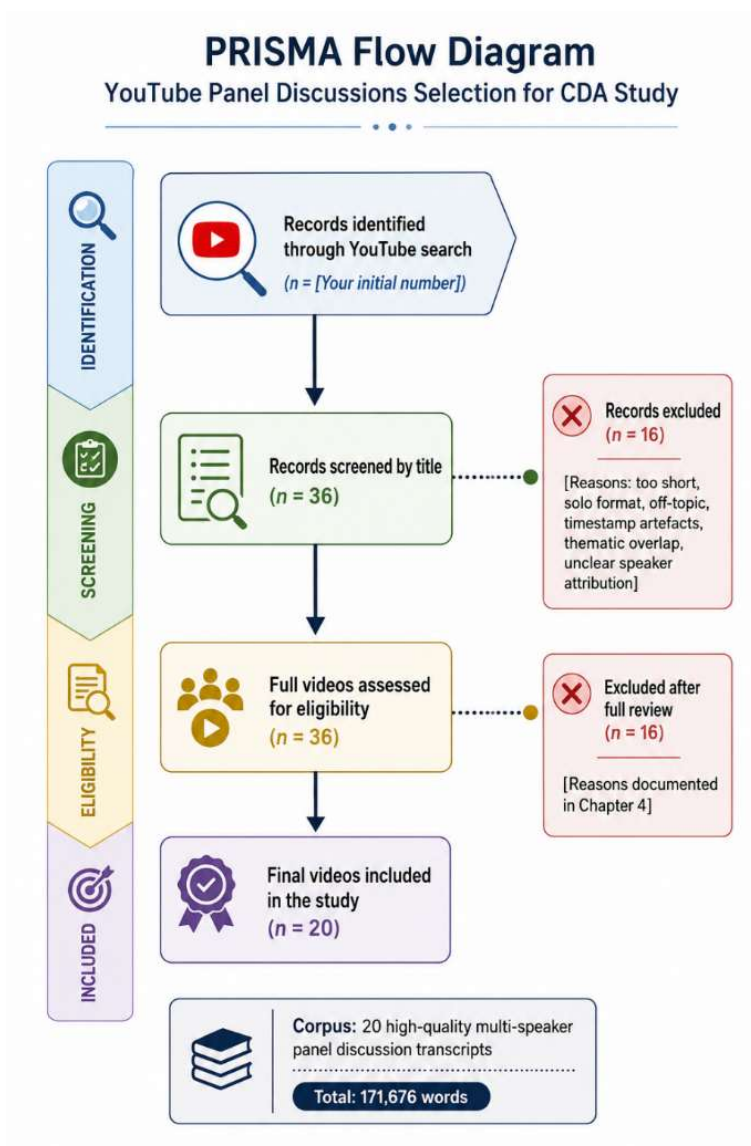
3.1. Research Design

The design of this study is qualitative research that is underpinned by CDA epistemological orientation and analytical framework. Adopting an interpretivist perspective views forum discussions on YouTube as socially produced, discursive texts that are actively shaping what AI in education is, for whom, and for which purpose. It is designed in line with the qualitative traditions in the field of educational technology research (Williamson et al., 2023) and CDA for AI-Education discourse (Knox, 2020; Kong et al., 2025).

3.2. Data Corpus and Selection

The data corpus consists of 20 highly selected YouTube panel discussion talks that were made public, and transcribed by the researcher. The data corpus consists of 20 carefully selected YouTube panel discussions which were made public and have been transcribed by the researcher. Selections were based on predefined inclusion/exclusion criteria. To be included, the panel had to be set up in the format of a panel, with a minimum of three credentialed speakers; be in English; have at least 30 minutes of applicable content; have been published from January 2020 through December 2026; and explicitly focus on AI and education or AI and humanity and have been viewed by at least 30,000 individuals at the time of access. To support high-credibility institutional academic panels such as discussions in the Nobel Prize committees, Stanford HAI summits and UNESCO Chair events, which do not always have public interest observers, the view threshold was revised from the initial proposal of 100,000 to 50,000. This revision purposes consistent with the methodology of purposive sampling logic that focuses relevance and the credentialing rather than a wide system of reaching. For Level 3 analysis, videos were excluded because they did not contain enough video text for systematic coding (less than 3,000 words, n=7), ambiguous speaker attributions precluded the implementation of

Discursive practice analysis (n=1), the content of the video was thematically overlapped with higher-priority selected videos (n=4), or speaker attribution was unclear and so was discursive practice (n=3). All selection process documentation, following the PRISMA flowchart is shown in Figure 1 (supplementary material).



The final corpus totals 171,676 words across 20 discussions, with individual transcripts ranging from 6,204 to 9,877 words. Table 1 presents the complete selected corpus.

Table 1. Systematic Video Corpus with Inclusion Criteria Verification (N = 20).

| # | Panel title | Key speakers and affiliations | Year | 3+ | ≥30m | Eng. | 50k+ | 2020–2026 |
|-----|--|---|------|----|------|------|------|-----------|
| V01 | An Honest Conversation on AI and Humanity (WEF) | Yuval Noah Harari (Hebrew Univ.); WEF moderator | 2026 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| V02 | Queen Elizabeth Prize 2025 AI Pioneers Panel | G. Hinton (Nobel 2024); Y. LeCun (NYU/Meta); Y. Bengio (UMontreal); D. Hassabis (Nobel 2024); J. Huang (NVIDIA) | 2025 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| V03 | Nobel Minds 2024 Nobel Laureates Panel | G. Hinton; D. Hassabis; D. Acemoglu (Nobel 2024); D. Baker; G. Marcus | 2024 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| V04 | WEF Davos 2024: Education Meets AI (Session 1) | UAE Minister of Education; H. Ranieri (Slovenia); H. Partovi (Code.org CEO) | 2024 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| V05 | WEF Davos 2024: Education Meets AI (Session 2) | WEF education ministers and EdTech leaders; SABC moderator | 2024 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| V06 | AI in Higher Education University Leaders Panel | University presidents and provosts (3+ speakers) | 2024 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| V07 | WEF 2024: AI The Great Equalizer? | Han Duck-soo (PM Korea); P. Ingabire (Rwanda Min.); R. Porat (Google SVP) | 2024 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| V08 | WEF Davos: Transformative Technology of Our Time | WEF technology executives, policymakers, researchers | 2024 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| V09 | The Panel People Have Been Waiting For | Multiple AI researchers and policymakers (3+ speakers) | 2024 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| V10 | AI+Education Summit 2025 Closing Conversation | Stanford HAI researchers and educators (4+ speakers) | 2025 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| V11 | Stanford AI+Education Summit 2024 Main Panel | Stanford HAI researchers and learning scientists (5+ speakers) | 2024 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

| | | | | | | | | |
|-----|--|---|------|---|---|---|---|---|
| V12 | Stanford HAI: Philosophy, Politics and AI in Education | R. Reich (Stanford Political Philosophy); Stanford HAI faculty | 2024 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| V13 | Stanford AI+Education Summit 2025: AI Policy for Global Change | F. Neves (Google Workspace); V. Lee (Stanford GSE); M. Lu | 2025 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| V14 | Bengio and Harari: AI, Democracy and Civilization | Y. Bengio (UMontreal, Turing Award); Y. N. Harari; political moderator | 2024 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| V15 | Harari on AI, Geopolitics and Future of Humanity | Y. N. Harari (Hebrew Univ.) and panel moderators | 2024 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| V16 | Acemoglu and Bengio: AI, Institutions and Society | D. Acemoglu (MIT, Nobel 2024); Y. Bengio (Turing Award); French moderator | 2025 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| V17 | Global Institute: AI, Equity and the Future of Education | Education leaders, equity advocates, researchers (3+ speakers) | 2024 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| V18 | Stanford 2024: What Do Educators Need from AI? | G. Kimman (moderator); Stanford educators and AI researchers | 2024 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| V19 | AI and Education: Future of Learning (Sal Khan Panel) | S. Khan (Khan Academy); education AI researchers | 2024 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| V20 | UNESCO Chair: Teaching and Learning with Generative AI | S. Nast (UNESCO Chair director); international researchers | 2024 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

Note. All videos are publicly available on YouTube. ✓ = criterion confirmed met. View counts and access dates recorded March 2026. Speaker affiliations reflect positions at time of recording.

3.3. Analytical Procedure

Analysis was carried out in five phases, following the trustworthy qualitative data analysis framework of Bingham (2023). This would result in an attribute coding process of all 20 transcripts (speaker identity, their institutional affiliations, their professional role, and discursive position in each of the panels) for Phase 1. This yielded a cross-corpus speaker database, on which the 2-level practice analysis of discourse was based. For Phase 2, 26 a priori deductive codes were applied systematically across the three strands of Fairclough's model, that is, the lexical codes (T01 - T12; lexical and metaphoric choice, modality, the politics of pronouns, and nominalization), discursive practice codes (D01, D04, D06, D07; institutional authority, corporate positioning, and policy discourse), and social practice codes (S01 - S10; techno-determinism, neoliberal framing, teacher identity, equity discourse, governance and future construction). Phase 3 entailed inductive coding which resulted in eight more emergent codes being added to the codebook. Phase 4 used level 3 social

practice coding on all the corpus with analytical memos provided for each interpretive decision. However, there was still one last step, namely cross video synthesis that investigated, by NVivo 15 query analysis, word frequency, node co-occurrence matrix, and cluster analysis, the six major discourse themes mentioned in Section 4.

3.4. Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

Credibility was established by analyzing a large corpus of 171,676 words over a period of time, by actively working with evidence that was counter to the results, and by documenting through a systematic audit trail. Thick description of the selection of corpus and the analytical procedures supports transferability. Full coding protocol and dated analytic memos provide capability for dependability. The reflexivity statement is addressed: The researcher has more than 29 years of experience of teaching the English language and first-hand experience in using AI tools in higher education across the Gulf region. This role makes the analysis sensitive to pedagogical issues and the identity of the teachers and it can help to background the technical discourse on the research on AI. Systematic protocol-driven coding and clarity of analytical choices is addressed in this way. This study involves reviewing videos on YouTube, so direct interaction with human agents is not present, and the study does not fit into any standard guidelines for formal institutional ethics approval in a qualitative study.

4. Findings

CDA of the 20-video corpus revealed six major themes of the discourse being used in Fairclough's three analytical dimensions. Themes along with their respective codes, total frequencies and prevalence are represented in Table 2. Each theme is presented below in fullpiece format, and then with three dimensional CDA for the textual, discursive practice and social practice mechanisms through which each discourse formation occurs.

Table 2. Six Dominant Discourse Themes Codes, Frequencies, and Prevalence.

| Theme | Codes | Freq. | Prevalence | Key videos |
|--|-----------------------------|---------|------------------------|---------------------|
| Theme 1: The Discourse of Inevitability | T01,T03,T06,T07,T09,S01,S02 | n=1,282 | All 20 videos dominant | V04,V05,V07,V08,V16 |
| Theme 2: The Teacher Identity Crisis | S03,S04,T08,T10,T12 | n=689 | 16 of 20 high | V10,V11,V12,V18,V19 |
| Theme 3: Ethics, Governance, Regulation | S07,D06,T02,S08 | n=1,221 | 18 of 20 high | V01,V03,V14,V15 |
| Theme 4: The Equity Paradox | S05,S06,S02,T09 | n=358 | 14 of 20 moderate | V04,V07,V13,V17 |
| Theme 5: Human Exceptionalism | T10,T04,T02,S09 | n=873 | 15 of 20 moderate | V01,V02,V03,V14,V20 |
| Theme 6: Corporate Authority | S08,D04,T09,D01 | n=791 | 13 of 20 moderate | V01,V03,V07,V12,V13 |

4.1. Theme 1: The Discourse of Inevitability

The most prevalent argument that dominating the corpus is the idea that the use of AI is natural and inevitable and cannot be democratically contestable. It is the most numerous overall (n = 1,282) and characterized by strong modality (T06), techno-optimist lexis (T01) and corporate language (T09). Its social role is the naturalization of the imperative of technology which educational institutions feel obliged to meet and not consider. (S01, S02) According to a statement made by one of the government ministers in V04 (Slovenia),

But “AI is here, it’s not going anywhere, we need to learn how to work with it, to live with it, to embrace it.” [V04]

The phrase “not going anywhere” exploits a textual level construction which is an inevitability construction (T03) that rules out the possibility of non-adoption. The latter imperative “we need to embrace it” puts obligation (T06) but not agency – no one chooses to embrace AI, it is made to be an existential adaptation. A WEF technology panelist in V08 continues this metaphor with history (T04):

“AI has bits and pieces of all of these revolutionary technologies that humans have engaged in the past, and have used to leapfrog and advance themselves.” [V08]

It is worth noting that this “has embraced” (T07) takes away from the historical context of political debates surrounding both industrialisation and computerisation, and sets the uptake of AI as continuous with the march of civilisation. At the social practice level (S01, S02), it makes democratic debate on and decision about adoption effectively unnecessary and renders policy choice a condition of nature. A strategic disjuncture between the private discourse of leaders in the technology industry, which appears “always to favor automation over human(AI) collaboration”, and agreements made in public is observed by Acemoglu, in the Nobel Prize corpus (V03) and in the discussions evident in the Acemoglu/Bengio arch (V16), where the inevitability discourse is explicitly challenged.

4.2. Theme 2: The Teacher Identity Crisis.

The topic of how AI might impact educators is the most polarized discursive space in the teacher-specific panels. Contrary to the binary notion of replacement or augmentation, the corpus displays a pervasive framing of augmentation: the teacher from being an autonomous pedagogical agent is rather repositioned as an augmentation-envying quality controller, following Selwyn (2019)’s terms of ‘deskilling of teaching through technological mediation’. In V11, Stanford’s HAI researcher articulates his vision of AI for grading student work:

“We wanted to understand if we could use this to augment human teachers to make it more effective or even accurate for them to grade these assignments.” [V11]

The verb “augment” preserves the appearance of teacher agency while repositioning the teacher as a validator of algorithmic outputs rather than the originating pedagogical intelligence. The most significant counterevidence comes from V10, where a researcher reflects on why human teachers produced learning gains exceeding those of AI systems:

“I had this experience of seeing how much human teachers mattered to students. And I’ve been spending the last few years reflecting: why was that getting such a lift over the AI?” [V10]

This utterance activates human exceptionalism discourse (T10) from within the techno-optimist Stanford context, conceding AI’s measurable limitations in the relational dimensions of teaching. The low explicit frequency of deskilling codes (S03, n=6) reflects that deskilling operates through the augmentation framing rather than through explicit replacement rhetoric making it discursively less visible and, consequently, less amenable to critical challenge.

4.3. Theme 3: Ethics, Governance, and the Regulation Deficit

Governance discourse (S07) constitutes the second most frequently coded Level 3 category (n=307) and is concentrated in the Nobel Prize and Harari-Bengio discussions. The dominant pattern

frames regulation as simultaneously urgently necessary and practically unattainable. In V03, a Nobel laureate panelist states:

"I suspect the politicians and the governments, they're just playing catchup. The thing is moving faster than they can get their hands on, and who in the private sector? They just want to make money and get this stuff out there." [V03]

This rhetorical question (T05) frames the governance deficit as a structural inevitability rather than a solvable political problem, constituting what Foucault (1972) identifies as a regime of truth about AI governance. Harari in V01 provides the most charged governance discourse in the corpus:

"If you even mention guardrails and regulation, they scream communism. And Trump has just announced that he will ban individual states in America from regulating AI. There is an arms race." [V01]

The arms race metaphor (T04) positions AI governance as geopolitically constrained: any state that regulates unilaterally surrenders competitive advantage. This converts a political choice into a structural necessity, performing the same techno-determinist ideological function (S01) identified in Theme 1. Bengio in V14 offers the corpus's most policy-actionable counter, arguing the urgency lies in "regulating the deployment into the public sphere" rather than laboratory research—a distinction that the predominantly WEF and governmental panels never make.

4.4. Theme 4: The Equity Paradox

Equity discourse (S05, n=299) is concentrated in the WEF panels and reveals a systematic pattern in which equity concerns are instrumentalised as justifications for AI adoption rather than substantive challenges to it. The WEF session titled "AI: The Great Equalizer?" in V07 is the corpus's most sustained treatment. A panelist raises the digital divide directly:

"Technology is meant to democratize everything, but what we've seen over the past decade or so is that there's a digital divide, to the point where this has ended up on the UN's SDGs. How do we ensure that AI simply isn't just another opportunity for developed Western nations?" [V07]

Despite this direct challenge, panelists consistently pivot toward AI adoption as the equity solution without engaging the structural conditions—infrastructure, connectivity, teacher training, institutional capacity—that would determine whether equitable access is achievable. The most analytically significant equity evidence comes from an audience member, an educator from Zimbabwe, who raises his hand during V04's Q&A:

"As the world stands, there's already inequality when it comes to education. How do we ensure that as we continue to implement AI into education, no child is left behind?" [V04]

The positioning of this utterance is analytically consequential. The most substantive equity challenge in the WEF corpus comes from the audience floor, not the panel—a practitioner voice from the Global South structurally positioned outside institutional discursive authority (D01). This spatial arrangement enacts at the level of discursive practice the very equity asymmetry the speaker identifies at the level of content.

4.5. Theme 5: Human Exceptionalism vs. Algorithmic Supremacy

Human exceptionalism discourse (T10, n=136) operates across the corpus as a defensive response to the concession of AI's cognitive superiority in measurable knowledge tasks. Harari in V01 delivers the most philosophically explicit version:

"While AIs become better than us with words, at least for now, we have zero evidence that AIs can feel anything. AI can say 'I love you.' But these are just words." [V01]

The phrase "zero evidence" deploys scientific modality (D07) to legitimise a philosophical claim about consciousness. Crucially, the utterance concedes AI's verbal-cognitive superiority before relocating human value into affective and embodied domains that cannot be datafied. This concession-then-reclaim structure is the dominant rhetorical pattern across the corpus for managing

the threat to human educational distinctiveness. Jensen Huang in V02 frames the division as structurally complementary:

“Humans can’t recognize 22,000 categories or solve math olympiad problems. So we build AI to do that. So, humans can do what is uniquely human, which is be creative and be empathetic.” [V02]

The pronoun “we” (T05) naturalises AI development as a collective human project serving human interests, presenting human exceptionalism not as a defensive claim but as a design intention. Whether this framing protects teachers’ pedagogical authority or merely licenses AI’s assumption of the cognitive core of teaching while leaving educators with the relational residue is the question the corpus does not address.

4.6. Theme 6: Corporate Authority and the Privatisation of Educational Futures

Corporate positioning codes (D04, S08, combined n=391) reveal technology corporations simultaneously problematised as unaccountable power concentrations and normalised as the inevitable primary agents of AI-education development. In V03, Gary Marcus poses the challenge directly:

“If we cannot trust the energy companies, we cannot trust pharmaceutical companies, tobacco companies can we trust the tech companies, which are extremely concentrated?” [V03]

The rhetorical question raises corporate capture (S08) as a genuine concern while framing it as unanswerable, no panelist proposes a structural regulatory response. In the Stanford corpus, corporate capture operates through a subtler mechanism: the routine institutional positioning of Google, Anthropic, and Microsoft representatives as co-equal voices alongside Nobel laureates and education researchers in discussions of AI-education governance (V13). This discursive practice (D04) naturalises corporate authority over educational questions without requiring any explicit argument for that authority, constituting what Fairclough (1992) terms hegemonic normalisation.

4.7. Cross-Cutting Finding: The Structurally Absent Educator

The most analytically consequential pattern across the 20-video corpus is the systematic absence of practitioner educators – classroom teachers, school administrators, and curriculum specialists – as authoritative panel voices. Despite extensive discussion of teacher roles, pedagogical transformation, and educational futures across all 20 discussions, the speakers constructing these visions are overwhelmingly AI researchers, technology executives, government ministers, and public intellectuals. Teachers are spoken about extensively but almost never speak themselves. The sole exception is the Zimbabwe educator whose question in V04’s audience Q&A constitutes the most direct equity challenge in the entire corpus – yet is positioned structurally outside panel authority.

This absence constitutes what Foucault (1972) terms a silencing mechanism within the regime of truth about AI in education: the people with the most direct knowledge of AI’s pedagogical implications, and the greatest institutional stakes in its deployment decisions, are structurally excluded from the discursive space in which those implications are authoritatively defined. This pattern reproduces and reinforces the power relations that characterise AI-education governance more broadly, in which technical expertise, institutional prestige, and corporate authority carry far greater discursive weight than pedagogical experience or professional knowledge.

5. Discussion

5.1. The Discursive Production of Inevitability

The inevitability finding builds on Selwyn (2022) who identified over-confident discourse in the literature on academic AI and adds a precise description of the mechanisms by which this happens: by nominalising (T07), by embedding AI in the narrative of civilisational progress (T04), and by determining through strong modality the policy determined inevitability of adaptation (T03, T06). Also, they work even when particular individual speakers have key roles, due to the fact that the

discursive structure of the “high-reach” panel format systematically gives rise to a bias towards declarative representations over deliberative analysis. In addition to Knox (2020) finding that nominalization and progress narrative naturalise the process of adopting AI across political-economic contexts, the same mechanisms can be found in seemingly ideologically different narratives within the contexts of Western liberal democratic regimes. What is suggested is that a hyper-deductive discourse circulation, as a discursive change in the way in which knowledge is formed, is created by the discursive flow itself and not by the ideological positions and desires of specific actors, making even critical voices talking about the necessity of the domination of the inevitability discourse.

5.2. *Augmentation Without Emancipation*

The findings of teacher identity, as an example, offer discursive evidence in support of Selwyn’s (2019) theoretical claim that augmentation discourse has a deskilling operation. The discourse of deskilling manifestoes doesn’t translate directly to replacement sentiments, however; it’s the bypassing of the teacher’s role from being pedagogical intelligence to a quality controller by AI, which is only noticeable because the augmentation rhetoric doesn’t (as a rule) say no to or back off from teacher presence. This is congruent with Williamson et al. (2023) who argue that the discourse of AI and education is structurally displacing practitioner expertise as it occurs in this specific discursive process, of Augmentation as Deskilling. The frequency of teacher-deskilling codes (S03, n=6) is also on par as an analytical phenomenon to the explicit frequency of augmentation codes (S04, n=14): varying from teacher redundancy to logical assumptions about the role of AI in education, these codes reflect both subtle and more noticeable ways in which the danger of teacher-deskilling is present, but often ‘in plain sight’.

5.3. *Governance Without Democratic Deliberation*

The governance finding extends Mochizuki et al.’s (2025) analysis of techno-solutionism in formal UNESCO policy documents to the informal intellectual discourse that precedes and shapes policy formation. The structural bind articulated in V03 governments playing catchup, corporations commercially motivated frames democratic governance as structurally impossible rather than politically challenging, constituting precisely the ideological function Foucault (1972) identifies in regimes of truth: making the existing distribution of power appear as an inevitable feature of reality rather than a contingent political arrangement. Bengio’s regulatory distinction in V14 between laboratory research and public deployment is the corpus’s most policy-actionable governance proposal and it is significant that it emerges from a researcher with explicit democratic commitments rather than from the policy-oriented WEF and government minister panels. This distribution of constructive governance discourse confirms the structural mapping identified in Section 4: techno-optimist panels produce inevitability discourse; critical humanist panels produce the most practically actionable counterproposals.

5.4. *Equity as Instrument*

The equity findings confirm Williamson et al.’s (2023) analysis of equity instrumentalisation with specific discursive evidence. The Zimbabwe educator’s structural positioning at the audience floor is particularly analytically productive: it enacts at the level of discursive practice (D01) the equity asymmetry it identifies at the level of content, demonstrating that the power relations the corpus’s equity discourse claims to address are simultaneously reproduced in the institutional architecture through which that discourse is produced. This is consistent with Simpson (2025) finding that discourse about educational inclusion frequently enacts the exclusion it nominally addresses. For Computers & Education’s readership specifically, this finding has direct implications for how equity is considered in EdTech research: the corpus suggests that equity framing in AI-education discourse serves to justify adoption rather than to condition it, which means that equity-focused research that

is then cited as justification for uncritical adoption may be performing a function the researchers did not intend.

5.5. Corporate Authority as Institutional Common Sense

The corporate capture finding contributes to the growing literature on the privatisation of educational futures (Selwyn et al., 2025; Williamson, 2017). What the corpus adds is evidence of how corporate authority in AI education is constituted not through explicit argument but through discursive practice: the routine institutional positioning of technology corporation representatives as co-equal voices in AI-education governance discussions. Gary Marcus's tobacco company analogy in V03 frames this with historical precision: just as democratic governance of tobacco and pharmaceutical industries required decades of documented harm before achieving political traction, AI governance may require analogous evidence accumulation before democratic accountability becomes structurally achievable. This is a sobering trajectory for an educational technology community currently operating largely through voluntary institutional ethics frameworks and self-regulatory corporate commitments.

5.6. Addressing the Research Questions

RQ1. Six main patterns of discursive framing emerged: the discourse of inevitability, the teacher identity crisis, the governance deficit, the equity paradox, the human exceptionalism and corporate authority. These are a set of interlocked system of discourses whose point of coherence is inevitability.

RQ2. Three ontological presuppositions are entangled: that the adoption of Artificial Intelligence cannot be undecided in a democratic way; that efficiency and economic competitiveness are suitable metrics to evaluate the performance of AI educational systems; that technology companies are valid co-governors of the futures of the educational fields. Sustained through nominalization, inevitability constructions, corporate language 'bleeding' and equity instrumentalization at all three levels in Fairclough's model.

RQ3. The collection gives its impression of a future where the educational role of AI is an inevitability, where teachers are less than fully ignored but more than fully redefined, where equity is an abstract concern but a puny one and where governance is substantially absent and institutionally naturalized and where company voice dominates and dominates with institutional authority. Likely, those who receive these discussions as an uncritical community without any analytical frameworks will internalize these pressures on adoption as a structural imperative, as imperative choices among options, rather than question them.

6. Conclusions

6.1. Theoretical Contribution

This paper has three unique contributions. First, it creates a framework that can be applied to YouTube panel discussions that Fairclough's (1992, 2003) CDA can also be used with multi-speaker deliberative digital media. This is methodological contribution to the field of qualitative educational technology research, as YouTube panel discussions became more valid, and more relevant, objects of CDA at an analytical field level. Second, it offers systematic empirical evidence on the ideologically significant ways that six dominant discourse formations constitute AI's educational futures, building on the trailblazing in critical sociology of AI in education launched by Selwyn (2019) and furthered by Williamson et al. (2023), Knox (2020), and Mochizuki et al. (2025). Finally, the finding of the structurally absent educator in the specific context where scientists, engineers, and researchers of AI and education engage in public discourse extends Foucauldian analysis of the mechanisms of silencing; the analysis found that discursive power acts not only through the content of an utterance but also through the structural omission of the educator.

6.2. Practical Implications

Table 3 sets out the main implications for 5 groups of stakeholders developed in the study, according to a hierarchy of salience. The overarching takeaway message is that while public intellectual debates surrounding the use of AI in schooling ought to be rather than simply content with providing information, it should be a place of confrontation, speculation, and political contestation. Although these mechanisms are structurally produced by the institutional matrix of digital panel discourse, they are not necessarily the result of individual speakers' intentions. These mechanisms are not always the kind of thing that individual speakers intend; they are produced structurally by the institutional architecture of high-reach digital panel discourse. Actually addressing them means that at the level of panel authority, hacking a space for practitioner voices, having some of the voices from the Global South come into the discourse, having an argument of democratic governance come into the discourse.

Table 3. Practical Implications for Stakeholder Groups.

| Stakeholder | Implication | Priority |
|---------------------------------|--|----------------------|
| Policymakers | Regulatory policies for the use of AI in education need to be morally and politically negotiated, rather than simply emerging from the authoritatively created consensus of the corpus. As exposed here in this report, and also in Nobel Prize debates, the overall governance failure shows that self-regulation of companies is not enough, in its present form. If AI is going to be leveraged for good in educational contexts, democratic governance of its use needs to be made possible by political will, currently missing in public discourse on intellect. | Urgent |
| Educational institutions | Universities and schools need to build their capacity to critically consider the public discourse, instead of just absorbing it, which will provide a sense of pressure for the adoption of AI. These projects on introducing AI need to be opened up to a discourse-level focus on faculty governance, including questions of whose needs are being met or not and who will be voices other than those of the faculty's in the institutional framing. | High |
| Teacher educators | Teacher education programs should ensure that teachers are able to engage in, rather than just react to, social discussions relating to the role of AI in learning. Teachers need to be perceived as experts in relation, ethics, and democracy and their experience of these pedagogical aspects needs to be reiterated as expert knowledge in deliberative processes about AI. Relational, ethical, and democratic knowledge needs to be recognized as an important domain of teachers' knowledge, rather than their ancillary aspects that come in later, when AI has taken over the cognitive aspects of teaching. | High |
| Curriculum designers | There is a need to be able to teach critical discourse skills in AI literacy programs. Students who can recognize inevitability constructions, corporate language in educational settings, and how the issues of equity are being silenced in public discourses about AI will have greater | Moderate-High |

opportunity for participatory democracy in their learning spaces when it comes to adopting AI.

| | | |
|--------------------|--|-----------------------|
| Researchers | The results of this study should be extended through the use of similar CDA models with other language-based platforms, discourse from practitioners, and audience interaction during these high-reach conversations, which would entail extending discourse research into the full ecology of public knowledge production around AI in education. | Methodological |
|--------------------|--|-----------------------|

6.3. Limitations

Three limitations require acknowledgement. First, restriction to English-language content systematically over-represents Western institutional voices. Perspectives from Global South researchers, non-English-language academic traditions, and indigenous educational contexts are structurally absent from the corpus and consequently from the analysis. Second, as a sole-author qualitative study, the interpretive analysis reflects a single researcher's analytical judgements. While the audit trail, codebook, and negative case analysis address this limitation, the absence of inter-rater reliability checking remains a constraint on the confirmability of the social practice findings. Third, the corpus is temporally bounded at 2026; the governance and corporate authority discourse formations may shift as regulatory frameworks mature, particularly as the EU AI Act's educational provisions come into force.

6.4. Future Research

Four directions for future inquiry emerge from this study. Cross-linguistic CDA of AI-education discourse in Arabic, Mandarin, Spanish, and other major languages would address the Global South representation gap. Discourse analysis of practitioner-produced AI-education content teacher blogs, professional development discussions, classroom-level social media would examine whether and how the dominant public intellectual discourse formations identified here are reproduced, contested, or transformed in practitioner contexts. Longitudinal tracking of governance discourse across the EU AI Act implementation period would examine whether democratic regulatory frameworks produce detectable discursive change in public intellectual panels. Finally, multimodal CDA extending beyond transcript text to visual framing, speaker positioning, and platform architecture in panel video discussions would provide a fuller account of how discursive authority is produced and sustained in this evolving media environment.

6.5. Concluding Statement

Public intellectual panel discussions about AI in education are consequential sites of discourse production in which specific visions of educational futures are constructed, legitimised, and naturalised through identifiable linguistic and institutional mechanisms. Six dominant discourse themes collectively construct AI adoption as inevitable, teacher identity as preserved but repositioned, equity as rhetorically central but structurally peripheral, governance as desirable but foreclosed, human distinctiveness as defensible but cognitively conceded, and corporate authority as institutionally naturalised.

These constructions carry real material consequences. Educators who internalise the inevitability discourse may feel they face no legitimate choice but adoption, regardless of pedagogical judgement. Policymakers who consume the governance discourse may conclude that meaningful AI accountability is structurally impossible, foreclosing the political will required to achieve it. Communities from the Global South whose equity concerns are instrumentalised rather than substantively addressed may be left without the structural support that equitable AI-education access requires.

Making these discursive constructions visible is a contribution to the democratic capacity of educators, policymakers, and communities to engage with AI-education futures as political actors rather than passive recipients of expert consensus. As Bengio argues in V14, preserving human values, rights, dignity, and democracy in the age of AI requires spending our best intellectual effort on how society might be organised to achieve this. Critical discourse analysis of public intellectual panels is one way of ensuring that effort proceeds with full awareness of the discursive terrain on which it is being conducted.

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