

A Historically Informed Developmental Trajectory for Medical Education Reform in the Age of AI

Angellar Manguvo, University of Missouri–Kansas City; Benford Mafuvadze, Independent Researcher, USA

Abstract

Artificial intelligence (AI) is reshaping how biomedical knowledge is accessed, synthesized, and applied, raising important questions about the cognitive competencies medical education should cultivate. Although these concerns appear new, educational institutions have previously confronted similar disruptions when emerging technologies altered relationships among knowledge, expertise, and learning. Using a historical-comparative design informed by institutional adaptation theory, this article analyzes recurring patterns in educational responses to technological innovation across six dimensions: institutional resistance, pedagogical positioning, faculty gatekeeping, curricular reform, assessment transformation, and equity of access. The analysis suggests that technological integration in education tends to proceed through identifiable stages, beginning with resistance and concern about skill erosion, followed by supplemental integration, pedagogical reorientation, and eventual curricular adaptation. Based on these patterns, the article proposes a developmental trajectory model for integrating AI into professional education and suggests that medical education currently stands between supplemental integration and early pedagogical reorientation. Meaningful AI integration will require curricular reform, revised assessment models, faculty development, and governance frameworks for responsible use.

Keywords: Curriculum Transformation, Pedagogical Change, Faculty Preparedness, AI, Medical Education, Cognitive Offloading.

Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly reshaping how medical knowledge is accessed, synthesized, and applied, raising fundamental questions about the nature of the “medical mind” that medical education seeks to develop. As AI tools increasingly retrieve knowledge, synthesize diagnostic information, and generate clinical recommendations, medical educators are reconsidering which cognitive competencies remain essential for clinical practice and how those competencies should be cultivated in an AI-mediated environment (Gordon, et al. 2024). Although these debates may appear unprecedented, similar concerns have accompanied earlier technological transformations in education, where innovations that alter how knowledge is accessed and applied have challenged established conceptions of expertise, intellectual labor, and professional authority.

Technological innovation has repeatedly reshaped educational practice, often provoking intense debate before becoming normalized within teaching and learning environments. Across educational history, new tools have raised concerns about foundational skills, the role of educators, and the broader purposes of learning. These concerns typically emerge when the technology appears to threaten the cognitive processes that educational systems are designed to

cultivate. Yet historical experience suggests that technologies that initially generate skepticism often become integrated into pedagogy once educators develop strategies that align technological capabilities with educational objectives.

The introduction of handheld calculators into elementary mathematics classrooms during the late 20th century provides an instructive example of how educational systems respond to technological disruption. Calculators initially sparked widespread debate among educators and policymakers who feared that reliance on automated computation would erode arithmetic competence and undermine mathematical literacy (Hembree & Dessart, 1986; Schielack & Dockweiler, 1992; Monaghan, 2016). Critics also argued that automating manual calculations could weaken number sense and diminish the intellectual discipline traditionally associated with mathematics education. Over time, however, calculators were gradually incorporated into mathematics curricula and came to be viewed as tools that could support deeper conceptual engagement when used appropriately. This historical transition is not merely illustrative; it provides a critical precedent demonstrating that technologies initially perceived as threats to cognitive development can, when pedagogically integrated, enhance higher-order reasoning and reshape disciplinary competencies.

Medical education now faces a comparable moment of disruption. Advances in both machine learning and generative AI have introduced tools capable of assisting with synthesizing biomedical knowledge, generating clinical documentation, diagnostic reasoning, and simulating complex clinical scenarios. These developments have prompted debates that closely resemble those surrounding earlier technological introductions in education with major concerns about overreliance on automated systems, erosion of critical thinking, and uncertainty regarding the evolving role of educators in technologically mediated learning environments (Rahman et al., 2024). As AI increasingly shapes how medical knowledge is accessed and applied, questions about how to preserve the cognitive and professional foundations of medical practice have become central to discussions of medical education reform.

Institutional Adaptation as a Theoretical Lens

Understanding the debate outlined above requires a broader historical and theoretical perspective. Accordingly, this study draws on institutional adaptation theory, which conceptualizes educational systems as dynamic institutions that evolve in response to social change. Institutional adaptation theory suggests that change, such as new technologies rarely produce immediate transformation; rather, integration typically unfolds through processes of resistance, negotiation, and gradual modification of established practices and norms (Thelen, 2002; Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, 2003). Within educational contexts, these processes are shaped by interactions among professional norms, faculty attitudes, governance structures, and pedagogical traditions that influence how innovations are interpreted and implemented. Situating contemporary developments within this institutional lens provides a framework for understanding how educational systems adapt to disruptive technologies and how such adaptations may influence the future design of medical training.

Guided by an institutional adaptation framework, this study employs a historical-comparative approach to examine the introduction of handheld calculators in elementary education alongside the contemporary emergence of AI in medical training. The aim is not to suggest direct equivalence between these technologies, which differ substantially in scope and capability, but

rather to illuminate the developmental trajectories through which educational institutions gradually incorporate technological innovations.

The remainder of the article proceeds as follows. First, the methodology section outlines the historical-comparative research design and analytical framework guiding the study. Subsequent sections examine key dimensions of technological integration. These include institutional resistance, pedagogical positioning, curricular reform, assessment transformation, and equity of access to trace how educational systems respond to technological disruption. Building on these analyses, the article proposes a developmental trajectory model that provides a lens for understanding the current stage of AI integration within medical education. Although early signs of pedagogical adaptation are emerging, the analysis suggests that medical education remains in a transitional phase, and substantial institutional work remains necessary to fully align training systems with the realities of AI-mediated clinical practice.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a historical-comparative research design to analyze how educational institutions respond to technological innovations across different historical contexts. Historical-comparative analysis has long been used in the social sciences to investigate institutional change by examining how similar structural challenges are addressed across distinct historical settings (Skocpol & Somers, 1980; Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, 2003). Historical inquiry is particularly valuable because it enables researchers to identify recurring patterns of institutional response and draw lessons from past experiences that may inform contemporary and future decision-making (Thelen, 2002; Pierson, 2004).

Sources were selected based on their relevance to documented educational responses to technological innovation and their representation of both early-stage debates and later-stage institutional adaptations. Comparative analysis was conducted by identifying recurring themes across cases and mapping these themes onto the six analytical dimensions used in this study.

Within this framework, the introduction of handheld calculators into elementary mathematics classrooms functions as a precedent case that provides a historically complete cycle of technological adoption. The calculator transition progressed through identifiable stages that included initial skepticism, pedagogical experimentation, institutional negotiation, and eventual normalization within mathematics instruction. By contrast, the current integration of AI into medical education represents an emerging case that is still undergoing processes of institutional interpretation and pedagogical adaptation.

The choice of a historical-comparative approach is grounded in several epistemological considerations. First, historical analysis allows researchers to identify path-dependent processes whereby early institutional decisions establish long-term pedagogical trajectories that shape later reforms (Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, 2003). Second, comparative historical inquiry functions as an analytic heuristic rather than a predictive model. While past technological transitions cannot precisely predict AI's trajectory in medical education, they illuminate recurring institutional dynamics, including resistance, policy lag, debates over cognitive implications, and curricular adaptation (Collier, 1993). Third, historical analysis mitigates presentism, which is the tendency

to treat contemporary developments as entirely unprecedented. Although AI introduces capabilities far beyond earlier educational technologies, many debates surrounding its adoption reflect familiar debates and concerns (Thelen, 2002). This approach is, therefore, well suited because it identifies recurring institutional patterns while situating contemporary developments within broader trajectories of sociotechnical change (Skocpol & Somers, 1980; Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, 2003).

Data Sources

The analysis draws upon multiple sources to support the historical-comparative inquiry. Historical materials include scholarly research examining the adoption of calculators in mathematics education, particularly studies investigating cognitive and pedagogical implications (Hembree & Dessart, 1986; McNamara, 1995; McCauliff, 2004; Monaghan, 2016). These sources provide insight into the debates, institutional responses, and instructional adjustments that accompanied calculator integration. Policy documents issued by professional organizations, such as the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, offer additional perspective on how governing bodies historically responded to technological change and guided pedagogical implementation.

For the AI case, the analysis draws on contemporary scholarship in medical education examining emerging pedagogical applications, ethical considerations, and faculty perceptions associated with AI adoption (Masters, 2023; Topol, 2024; Tolentino et al., 2024; Roveta et al., 2025). The study also incorporates AI policy statements and guidance issued by medical schools (Morales et al. (2026) as well as by professional and regulatory organizations, including the American Medical Association (AMA). Together, these sources support the identification of emerging institutional responses and provide empirical grounding for the analysis of how medical education is adapting to AI-mediated learning environments.

Analytical Framework

To organize the analysis systematically, the study examines both the historical and contemporary cases through six analytical dimensions designed to capture key aspects of institutional change within educational systems. These dimensions function as interpretive lenses that illuminate how educational institutions interpret, negotiate, and ultimately integrate disruptive technologies into existing pedagogical structures.

Table 1. Analytical Dimensions of Institutional Adaptation to Technological Innovation

Analytical Dimension	Description
Institutional Resistance	Forms of skepticism or opposition during the early stages of technological adoption.
Pedagogical Positioning	Ways in which new technologies are conceptualized within instructional practice and learning processes.
The Gatekeeper Phenomenon	The role of educators as institutional mediators who either facilitate or impede the integration of new technologies.
Curricular Reform	Modifications in curriculum design that occur as educational systems adjust to new technological capabilities.
Assessment Reform	The evolution of assessment practices as technologies reshape the competencies that educational institutions seek to measure.

Table 1. Analytical Dimensions of Institutional Adaptation to Technological Innovation

Analytical Dimension	Description
Equity of Access	Disparities in access to technological resources and their implications for educational equity.

Examining these dimensions across historical and contemporary contexts enables identification of a developmental trajectory that characterizes institutional responses to disruptive technologies. Rather than serving as variables for direct comparison, the dimensions function as a conceptual framework for tracing how educational institutions adapt as new technologies emerge. Consistent with qualitative historical inquiry, the framework aims not to establish causal prediction but to illuminate recurring patterns that may inform contemporary educational decision-making (Thelen, 2002; Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, 2003). The sections that follow examine how these dynamics unfolded during the calculator era and how similar processes are emerging in the integration of AI within medical education.

Institutional Resistance

The introduction of handheld calculators into elementary education during the 1970s provoked substantial resistance from educators and policymakers who viewed manual computation not merely as a procedural skill but as a core component of mathematical reasoning. For many critics, performing calculations by hand was associated with the cultivation of number sense, logical thinking, and intellectual discipline. Consequently, the use of calculators generated widespread concern that it would weaken students' arithmetic competence and undermine foundational cognitive skills (McNamara, 1995).

A strikingly similar debate has emerged in response to the introduction of both machine learning and generative AI in medical education. The rapid proliferation of generative AI tools has prompted concern among medical educators that learners may become excessively dependent on algorithmic outputs for clinical reasoning, diagnostic decision-making, and knowledge retrieval. For example, critics strongly argue that heavy reliance on AI systems may weaken the diagnostic "muscle memory" physicians traditionally develop through repeated engagement with complex clinical problem-solving scenarios (Rahman et al., 2024; Topol, 2024).

These reactions illustrate a recurring institutional pattern in the adoption of technological innovations. Innovations that appear to automate core disciplinary tasks frequently provoke concerns about the erosion of professional expertise and the weakening of foundational intellectual skills. These patterns of resistance set the stage for subsequent pedagogical reconsideration, where the role of technology shifts from perceived threat to potential instructional resource.

Pedagogical Repositioning

Following the initial period of resistance, research examining calculator use gradually reshaped how educators understood the pedagogical role of computational technology. Studies found little evidence that calculator access diminished students' conceptual understanding. Instead, calculators often enhanced mathematical reasoning by reducing the cognitive load associated with repetitive arithmetic operations. For example, Hembree and Dessart's (1986) meta-analysis

demonstrated that students who used calculators frequently showed improved problem-solving performance because computational tasks no longer monopolized cognitive resources.

These findings contributed to a shift in the pedagogical positioning of calculators within mathematics education. Rather than being viewed as threats to intellectual development, calculators increasingly came to be understood as tools that support deeper conceptual engagement. Educators recognized that the goal of mathematics instruction was not merely the mechanical execution of calculations but the ability to determine when and why particular mathematical operations should be applied.

A comparable reframing is emerging in medical education. Over time, debate has begun to shift from concerns about technological dependence to questions about how such tools should be positioned pedagogically within educational practice. Just as the use of calculators enabled students to offload mechanical computation, AI allows medical students to offload certain tasks related to information retrieval. This shift redirects attention from performing routine cognitive tasks toward how learners engage with and interpret technologically mediated information. Some of the emerging scholarship suggests that AI-assisted learning does not necessarily diminish cognitive engagement and may, in some cases, support higher-order reasoning by reducing the cognitive load associated with routine information processing (Masters, 2023; Topol, 2024). At the same time, the pedagogical implications of AI-supported learning remain under active scrutiny. Within this evolving context, educators are increasingly reconsidering how learning activities and instructional practices should position AI within the broader process of clinical knowledge development.

The Gatekeeper Phenomenon

The historical experience of calculator adoption illustrates that the success of educational technologies often depends on the willingness and preparedness of educators to integrate them meaningfully into instructional practice. During the early years of calculator adoption, implementation varied widely across schools and classrooms. While some teachers embraced the use of calculators as valuable instructional aids, others completely resisted their use and continued with their traditional pedagogical approaches. McCauliff (2004) attributes this uneven adoption in part to generational and pedagogical differences among educators. Teachers whose professional identity was closely tied to mastery of computational procedures were often more skeptical of calculators, viewing them as threats to traditional mathematical authority.

This gatekeeper effect is clearly visible in contemporary medical education to date with faculty responses to use of AI varying from cautious experimentation to pronounced skepticism (Ahsan, 2025). Emerging scholarship suggests that many educators remain uncertain about the pedagogical implications of AI-assisted learning and the boundaries between technological assistance and independent intellectual work (Masters, 2023; Topol, 2024). Concerns often center on academic integrity, particularly the possibility that AI may enable students to generate assignments or examination responses with limited intellectual engagement (Rahman et al., 2024). Some faculty also worry that the availability of AI-generated explanations may challenge traditional instructional roles by providing learners with automated guidance that appears to rival that offered by human instructors (Tolentino et al., 2024; Roveta et al., 2025).

Emerging evidence suggests that these concerns are already shaping institutional responses. Blanco et al. (2025) report that many medical educators feel “technologically eclipsed” by students who are more comfortable experimenting with AI tools. In response, some institutions have implemented restrictive policies aimed primarily at preventing academic misconduct rather than exploring pedagogical opportunities associated with AI-supported learning.

Curriculum Restructuring

Within the analytical framework guiding this study, curricular reform represents a central mechanism through which educational institutions adapt to technological innovation. As the use of calculators became widely used, mathematics curricula gradually shifted from an exclusive emphasis on manual computation towards conceptual reasoning, problem-solving strategies, and analytical thinking (Monaghan, 2016). This evolution reflected a broader recognition that technologies can reshape the cognitive competencies that disciplines prioritize.

Medical education now appears to be approaching a comparable moment in which curricular restructuring may become increasingly important. While the preclinical phase has traditionally emphasized foundational scientific knowledge, including biochemical pathways, anatomical structures, and physiological mechanisms; advances in AI-assisted information retrieval challenge the pedagogical rationale for devoting extensive instructional time to memorizing large volumes of factual information. These developments raise broader questions about how foundational knowledge should be organized and emphasized within medical training, a topic that will be explored in greater depth in the discussion of medical education reform later in the article.

Assessment Reform

Technological innovation also requires reconsideration of how educational systems evaluate learning outcomes. During the calculator era, educators recognized that traditional examinations centered on manual computation were becoming increasingly misaligned with classroom practice. When calculators could perform arithmetic operations instantaneously, assessing students primarily on procedural calculations no longer provided a meaningful indicator of mathematical competence (Schielack & Dockweiler, 1992). In response, mathematics assessments evolved to emphasize problem formulation, interpretation of results, and conceptual understanding. Students were increasingly expected not only to produce correct answers but also to demonstrate the reasoning underlying their solutions (Monaghan, 2016). This shift reflected the broader principle that assessment systems must evolve when technologies alter the nature of cognitive work within a discipline.

A comparable challenge is emerging in medical education. Generative AI systems have demonstrated the capacity to perform well on standardized medical examinations, including components of the United States Medical Licensing Examination (Rahman et al., 2024). These developments raise important questions about whether conventional assessment formats adequately capture the forms of reasoning that characterize authentic clinical expertise, an issue that will be revisited later when considering the implications of AI for medical education reform.

Equity and Access

In the framework adopted for this analysis, equity of access represents a critical dimension through which technological innovations reshape educational systems. During the calculator era, disparities in school funding meant that some students gained early exposure to computational tools, while others continued to rely exclusively on manual calculation methods. These differences contributed to what some scholars described as a “cognitive gap” between learners trained in technology-supported problem solving and those whose education remained focused on procedural computation (Monaghan, 2016).

In the emerging AI era, such disparities manifest in new and potentially more consequential ways. Access to advanced AI tools, computational infrastructure, and specialized training resources is likely to be concentrated within well-resourced institutions and high-income countries. Without deliberate strategies to ensure equitable access, the integration of AI risks reinforcing existing structural inequalities within global medical education.

A related concern involves algorithmic sovereignty. Many contemporary AI systems are trained on datasets derived predominantly from high-income healthcare environments. When these systems are used without appropriate adaptation, they may reproduce biases that do not accurately reflect the epidemiological realities, health priorities, or resource constraints of low-resource settings (Amann et al., 2020; Topol, 2024).

At the same time, critical scholarship cautions that AI integration may introduce new risks, including algorithmic bias, epistemic overreliance on machine-generated knowledge, and potential deprofessionalization of clinical reasoning if learners defer excessively to automated systems. These concerns highlight the importance of critically evaluating not only the benefits but also the unintended consequences of AI adoption.

Toward Medical Education Reform in the AI Era

Building on the institutional patterns identified across the preceding analytical dimensions, the historical comparison between the calculator era and the emerging AI era suggests that educational responses to technological disruption often follow recognizable trajectories. Early phases of resistance, concerns about cognitive erosion, uneven adoption across institutions, and debates about pedagogical use have historically accompanied the introduction of new educational technologies. Over time, however, these tensions can give way to productive integration as educators develop new pedagogical frameworks and institutions establish supportive policies and professional development structures.

Evidence suggests that medical education is beginning to enter this transitional phase. Educators are increasingly experimenting with AI-supported learning tools, new instructional approaches are emerging, and scholarly discourse is gradually shifting from questioning whether AI should be used in medical education to determining how it can be integrated responsibly and effectively. Nevertheless, these developments remain preliminary. Many institutions continue to operate within curricular, assessment, and governance frameworks designed for a pre-AI educational environment. Meaningful integration of AI into medical education will, therefore, require coordinated institutional reform extending beyond technological adoption. Effective adaptation must encompass curriculum design, assessment systems, professional development, and

governance structures aligned with the full adoption of AI in educational and clinical training contexts.

These findings suggest several actionable principles for practice: (1) align AI integration with clearly defined learning objectives rather than technological novelty; (2) design learning environments that require active interpretation of AI outputs rather than passive acceptance; (3) invest in sustained faculty development focused on pedagogical, not only technical, competencies; and (4) implement governance frameworks that ensure ethical, transparent, and equitable use of AI in education.

Curricular Reconfiguration for an AI-Augmented Knowledge Environment

One of the most instructive lessons from the calculator era concerns the relationship between technological innovation and curriculum reform. As calculators became widely available, mathematics education gradually shifted from a dominant focus on manual computation toward conceptual reasoning, analytical thinking, and problem solving (Monaghan, 2016).

Medical education now stands at a potentially more consequential inflection point. While generative AI has rapidly entered clinical and educational environments, curricular structures have changed far less dramatically than the technological context. Traditional medical curricula still devote substantial instructional time to foundational biomedical knowledge, reflecting an educational model developed when information retrieval was limited and cognitive storage of facts was essential for safe practice. Generative AI systems can now synthesize biomedical knowledge, explain disease mechanisms, and generate differential diagnoses based on clinical inputs (Masters, 2023; Roveta et al., 2025). Although these systems cannot replace clinical judgment, they fundamentally reshape the informational environment in which medical knowledge is accessed, evaluated, and applied.

Most medical education programs have responded by adding new competencies, such as AI literacy, data science awareness, and digital health onto already dense curricula rather than reconsidering the underlying structure of training. The emergence of AI may warrant a deeper structural reconsideration of how medical training is organized. Advances in AI-supported learning systems increasingly enable more efficient knowledge acquisition, reducing the pedagogical necessity of prolonged memorization-focused instruction and allowing greater emphasis on clinical reasoning, ethical decision-making, interdisciplinary collaboration, and complex diagnostic synthesis (Krive et al., 2023; Topol, 2024; Hernandez et al., 2025).

Figure 1 illustrates our proposed conceptual curricular reform model that reflects this structural reconsideration. In the model, the preclinical phase is streamlined through AI-supported learning environments that accelerate foundational knowledge acquisition and emphasize conceptual integration rather than prolonged memorization. This compression allows clinical immersion to begin earlier and occupy a larger proportion of training. Residency training would increasingly adopt competency-based progression, enabling learners to advance based on demonstrated capability rather than fixed time structures. The educational emphasis would shift toward immersive clinical practice, complex reasoning in AI-mediated environments, ethical and professional judgment, patient communication, and collaborative decision-making across human

and algorithmic systems. Under such a framework, the total duration of required training could potentially decrease from approximately seven years to closer to five years for many specialties.

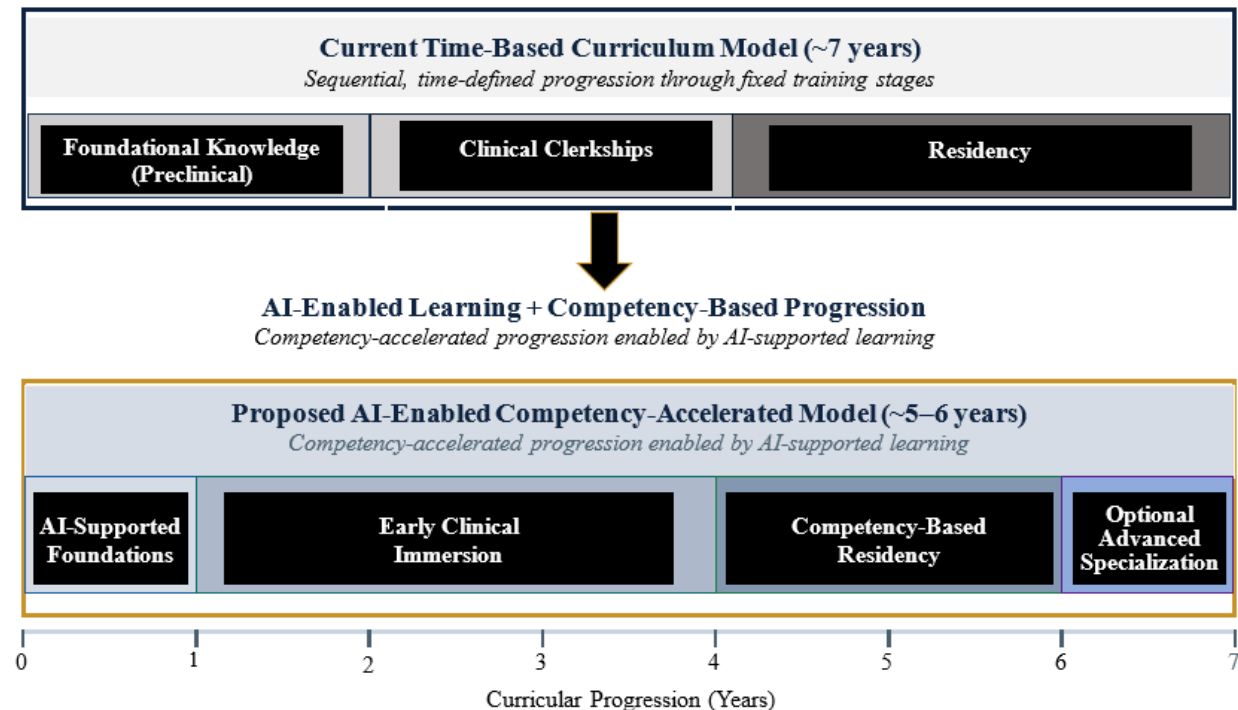


Fig. 1. Comparison of the current time-based curriculum and the proposed AI-enabled competency-accelerated mode), illustrating how AI-supported knowledge acquisition and competency-based progression enable earlier clinical immersion and a restructured residency pathway.

Reimagining Assessment in AI-Mediated Clinical Training

Curricular transformation inevitably requires corresponding changes in assessment systems. As calculators became widely used, evaluation focused primarily on manual computation no longer reflected the skills educators sought to cultivate. Consequentially, test items were redesigned to emphasize conceptual understanding, problem solving, and analytical reasoning (McCauliff, 2004).

A similar, though more complex, transformation is required in medical education. AI capabilities raise important questions about the meaning of professional competence within an AI-augmented learning environment. If AI systems can perform tasks traditionally associated with medical expertise, the objectives of assessment must shift accordingly. Rather than focusing primarily on factual recall or isolated pattern recognition, future assessments may need to evaluate a physician’s ability to interpret algorithmic outputs, identify errors or biases in AI-generated recommendations, and integrate these insights into patient-centered clinical decision-making.

Contemporary medical examinations still rely heavily on multiple-choice questions, particularly during preclinical training. Yet AI systems can now generate large volumes of test questions and answer existing examination items. This raises concerns about whether such formats adequately capture the cognitive processes desired for clinical expertise (Moore et al., 2023). Alternative

assessment models have been proposed. Scenario-based simulations could require examinees to critique or refine AI-generated diagnostic suggestions, and open-resource examinations incorporating structured AI use may better simulate real-world clinical environments where clinicians interact with decision-support technologies (Misra, 2024; Gordon et al., 2024). Hybrid formats combining traditional clinical reasoning tasks with AI-interaction exercises may also provide more authentic measures of competence in AI-mediated healthcare settings (AMA, 2023; Xing & Cao, 2025). Examination boards must redefine educational objectives and redesign testing formats to remain commensurate with emerging forms of AI-augmented clinical reasoning (AMA, 2025). Taken together, these developments suggest that the integration of AI into medical education will require a comprehensive reimagining of assessment systems.

Preparing Educators and Learners for AI-Augmented Practice

The calculator era has demonstrated that meaningful integration occurred only after targeted professional development initiatives cultivated “calculator literacy” (McCauliff, 2004). A comparable process of professional adaptation will be necessary for AI integration in medical education. Recent scholarship suggests that many medical educators possess limited familiarity with AI technologies and express uncertainty regarding their pedagogical integration (Masters, 2023; Blanco et al., 2025). Without adequate support, faculty may struggle to guide students in the responsible use of AI tools or design learning activities that incorporate AI meaningfully. Faculty development must, therefore, extend beyond technical literacy to address the broader pedagogical implications of AI-mediated learning. Educators will require training in critically evaluating AI outputs, designing AI-supported learning environments, and helping students interpret algorithmically generated information within clinical contexts.

Students, likewise, require structured preparation to function effectively in AI-augmented environments, including algorithmic literacy, ethical awareness, and the capacity to critically evaluate machine-generated recommendations (Manguvo & Mafuvadze, 2025; Topol, 2024; Roveta et al., 2025). Examination boards and licensing authorities must also engage in targeted professional development to adapt their assessment practices. This includes preparing examiners to evaluate AI-informed clinical reasoning and establishing clear guidelines for the appropriate use of AI within examination and assessment contexts (AMA, 2023; Rahman et al., 2024).

Governance and Policy Frameworks for Responsible AI Integration

The calculator era also demonstrates the importance of institutional governance in guiding technological integration. Early implementation of calculators varied widely until professional organizations issued policy guidance clarifying when and how calculators should be used. These frameworks helped standardize instructional practices and provided clearer expectations regarding pedagogical use (McCauliff, 2004; Monaghan, 2016).

The integration of AI into medical education similarly requires coherent policy frameworks. Without clear governance structures, instructors and institutions may adopt inconsistent approaches to AI use in teaching, assessment, and academic integrity. Such variability risks creating confusion among students and undermining comparability across educational contexts.

Evidence suggests that policy gaps remain widespread. A cross-sectional study of U.S. medical schools by Morales et al. (2025) found that fewer than half had formal institutional policies

governing the use of AI in medical education. This finding underscores the urgency of developing standardized guidance as AI tools become increasingly embedded in educational practice. Effective governance frameworks should address appropriate uses of AI in coursework, expectations for disclosure of AI assistance, and guidelines for incorporating AI into assessment. Policies must also address data privacy, algorithmic bias, and transparency in AI-supported clinical decision-making (Amann et al., 2020; AMA, 2024; Topol, 2024). Institutions that proactively develop clear policies and support structures will be better positioned to harness the educational potential of AI while safeguarding the intellectual and ethical foundations of medical training.

For example, several medical schools have begun piloting AI-assisted clinical simulations and documentation tools within preclinical training environments, illustrating early-stage institutional experimentation with AI integration. These emerging practices provide preliminary evidence of how AI is beginning to reshape instructional design and learner interaction.

Beyond institutional policies, governance at the national and professional level also plays a critical role in shaping how emerging technologies are integrated into medical education. Organizations such as the AAMC, AMA, and accrediting bodies such as the Liaison Committee on Medical Education (LCME) influence curricular expectations, professional standards, and accreditation requirements across medical schools. As AI becomes more embedded in clinical and educational environments, these organizations are increasingly called upon to provide guidance regarding appropriate educational use, competency expectations, and ethical safeguards associated with AI-assisted clinical practice (AMA, 2024; Topol, 2024). Clear policy direction at this level can help establish shared expectations across institutions, reduce variability in how AI is incorporated into training, and support coordinated approaches to curriculum, assessment, and professional standards. The evolving role of these governing bodies highlights the importance of policy alignment across institutional and national levels, an issue that will be explored further in the discussion of medical education reform later in the article.

Developmental Trajectory of Medical Education Reform in the AI Era

Taken together, the preceding discussion suggests that technological disruption rarely produces immediate institutional transformation. Rather, professional education systems tend to adapt through gradual processes of negotiation and adjustment as educators, regulators, and professional communities reconsider the role of new technologies within established training structures. Historical experience from the calculator era illustrates how educational technologies often move from initial skepticism toward eventual pedagogical normalization, while deeper structural reforms may occur more slowly, or not at all. Building on these observations, the following table projects a developmental trajectory through which medical education institutions may progressively integrate artificial intelligence into training systems.

Table 2. Developmental Trajectory of Institutional Adaptation to AI in Medical Education

Stage	Name	Description	Key Characteristics
Stage 0	<i>Technological Emergence</i>	Introduction of a new technology	Early experimentation Limited evidence of educational impact Curiosity and uncertainty

Stage 1	<i>Institutional Resistance</i>	Threat response	Concerns about academic integrity Fear of skill degradation Restrictions or bans Professional skepticism
Stage 2	<i>Supplemental Integration</i>	Optional efficiency tool	Technology used as an optional tool Existing curriculum largely unchanged Supports efficiency without altering pedagogy
Stage 3	<i>Pedagogical Reorientation</i>	Shift in teaching emphasis	Greater focus on conceptual reasoning Technology normalized in learning environments New instructional approaches emerge
Stage 4	<i>Curricular Redesign</i>	Structural curriculum change	New competencies introduced Curriculum content reorganized Technology literacy becomes part of training
Stage 5	<i>Structural Transformation</i>	Full systems-level reorganization	Training pathways reorganized Competency-based progression Duration and sequencing of education revised

Each stage in this trajectory may be identified through observable indicators. For example, Stage 1 is characterized by restrictive institutional policies and widespread skepticism, while Stage 3 is marked by the normalization of AI tools within instructional practice and emerging pedagogical innovation. Stage 5 involves system-level restructuring, including competency-based progression and redesigned training pathways. These indicators provide a preliminary framework for identifying institutional positioning within the trajectory.

Conclusion

AI is rapidly reshaping how biomedical knowledge is accessed, synthesized, and applied. In contrast, the structure of medical education has changed far more slowly. Traditional training models continue to devote substantial time to sequential knowledge acquisition, reflecting an educational environment in which information retrieval was historically constrained. As AI systems increasingly assist with information synthesis, diagnostic support, and clinical decision-making, the pedagogical assumptions underlying these structures warrant reconsideration.

The developmental trajectory proposed in this article suggests that institutions tend to integrate new technologies through recognizable and predictable stages. Initial phases are often characterized by skepticism and regulatory caution, followed by gradual acceptance of technology as a supplemental tool within existing curricula. Over time, as familiarity increases and the capabilities of the technology become clearer, pedagogical priorities progressively shift towards more structured reforms such as curricular redesign and structural changes to educational pathways.

It is apparent that medical education is currently in a transitional phase within this trajectory. AI tools are increasingly present in learning environments and clinical practice, yet they are frequently treated as adjuncts to traditional training rather than catalysts for broader institutional reform. Educational responses have largely focused on incorporating AI literacy or digital competencies into existing curricula, while the underlying structure of medical training remains largely unchanged.

Ultimately, the integration of AI into medical education presents an opportunity not simply to modernize existing curricula, but to rethink the architecture of medical training (Preiksaitis & Rose, 2023). Whether institutions pursue incremental adjustments or more substantive transformation will shape how effectively future physicians are prepared to practice in increasingly AI-mediated clinical environments.

Author Note: Artificial intelligence tools were not used to generate the content of this manuscript. All analysis and writing were conducted by the author(s).

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