LEGAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE STUDIES, www.jlas.upit.ro.
e-ISSN: 2344-6900, ISSN-L: 1583-0772
No.1 (32), Year XXIV, 2025, pp. 57-69

THE RIGHT TO FREE EDUCATION BETWEEN ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND LIBRARY

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Abstract: *A topic that has been widely discussed over the past two centuries is education, because ordinary people have insisted on it, contrary to the ideas of politicians, who were not always pleased by a rise in the population's level of instruction. The establishment of compulsory education was – without doubt – the greatest progress humanity has ever made in its entire history, and the positive effects of this measure will be felt as long as we exist on Earth. But education has never been valued at its true worth because of the costs it entails, both in terms of the time dedicated to it and especially from the financial aspect of acquiring valuable study materials. However, the Internet and Artificial Intelligence have brought some changes in this perspective, and traditional bookstores are starting to see their role sharply decrease – or is it actually the opposite?*

This text will attempt to provide some answers to an acute issue: what is the cost of education today, relative to its ultimate goal, namely preparing children and young people for a life that brings many challenges.

Keywords: *Free education; Artificial Intelligence; library; costs; legislation.*

Introduction

From the moment of birth, every living being learns things based on the circumstances of its species, its own genetics, and the living environment. This process can only be stopped when something appears that can block our entire way of living, but from that moment, biological

regression sets in and eventually, death. It is not only the situation of a murder (for example, the axe that cuts down a tree causes its death), but especially the case of people who, upon reaching a certain age or being affected by certain illnesses, stop learning or understanding things, and in the most severe form, will completely regress.

The fact that every being learns from the events of its life is logical, but it has a problem: the amount of information that the human/animal/plant mind or brain absorbs (Cowan, 2010). It is not easy to accept that sometimes days of work or social tension can produce just a few lessons, which can sometimes be used only many years after the moment those lessons are realized. So, quantity is what separates living beings, and those that are strong in themselves do not necessarily possess extraordinary physical capacity (either their own or of certain tools used), but rather an intellectual one, which is able to ensure them a longer life with substantial physical and mental benefits.

The very problem of the amount of data that a life has to absorb is the essence of the idea of education, and not so much how this data will be used later. To illustrate, I would mention the situation of a pet that lives for several years on the street, and is then adopted by a person who provides it with almost "royal" comfort, at least by the standards of that species. In the first months, a good part of the lessons from the old life will persist, but as the years pass and neither threats nor other intrinsically difficult situations arise, the habits from the street fade away until they disappear. So, the real discussion in this text is about education, but always keeping in mind the idea of an amount of data suitable for the realities of the 21st century (Bartley, 2025).

The right to free education between Artificial Intelligence and library

Living beings continuously learn from their own experiences, but not all in the same way, as we know from the Latins, who said "non idem est si duo dicum idem" (it is not the same thing, even when two people say the same words). One's own experiences, however, are a matter that we cannot quantify in a unified way, except in the case of very important

aspects – for example, we all learn that fire is dangerous – otherwise, general psychological conditions and objective characteristics make learning different and sometimes even opposite. Thus, for a professional in a field, what is new must truly be something that happens rarely, while for a novice or someone outside the specific context of the event, almost everything is new.

However, continuing education solely through life lessons might have been a solution thousands of years ago, and at those times memorization was more important than effective education because there were no clear means to record various data, but rather methods to note precise, objective data on very important matters (different forms of agreements/contracts, the phases of the sun and moon within different calendars, etc.). For these reasons, most information was presented verbally, remembered verbally, and anything longer (poems, songs, magical incantations, etc.) tended to be part of a certain specialization, either priestly (let's remember the Celtic druids) or administrative, as the forms of organizing human communities were constituted back then) (Schmandt-Besserat, 2014).

The need for tools to record data has been evident since the dawn of humanity, and just as important was the ability to preserve them in a world where weather conditions and various insects in ancient dwellings were much harder to control. However, until these recording tools appeared, memorization was the key to knowledge, and this was not for everyone, with errors in understanding what was memorized or forgetting, as well as the idea of learning as an initiation into a world of data and even power, making everything highly personalized. Combining these facts with a low life expectancy, it follows that learning was something that depended more on luck and less on "knowledge" per se.

The appearance of data recording media changed the world; one could say this was the first global technological revolution. From that moment, two courses of action began to emerge: on one hand, recording information of any kind, and on the other, the ability to understand what was written there. Obviously, the second matter required education, in its

early form, and the intellectual development process of young people took a different path.

Clearly, it was not useful to teach adults what it meant to record and use data, but young people had to be directed toward this knowledge from the start, as this was how they could carve out a better path in life. However, this knowledge – being limited to the small quantity of data recording media – could only be accessible to those capable of having such documents/tools. Implicitly, the limited amount of paper (the fundamental medium for written recording) made access to education merely a reflection of social pyramids within a country (Pierrepont Graves, 1923), with an important clarification: for a long time – indeed, until the late Middle Ages – paper production was far from widespread, and most countries in the world could not produce it (Roughen, 2023).

In fact, as certain studies reveal, three elements underpinned major accumulations of power in history: the ability to produce paper (first), the ability to reduce the costs of writing and printing (second, in logical order of importance), and the establishment of a body of teachers and professors, for they would be the ones educating the youth of their countries in quantities demanded by the labor market and governmental and public services.

Practically, from this perspective, we will see education as a matter of an individual's own resources, and less of the state's.

Basically, if parents were not able to send their children to school – and let's not forget that until the 20th century, the number of children per family was large – they would more likely remain illiterate. Hence, the two problems that humanity has not been able to fully solve even now: first and foremost, the financial considerations that did not allow all children in a family to reach a level of education adequate for their intelligence and will; and the second depended on living and housing conditions, which did not always allow for the development of intellectual capacities already proven in primary schooling, because the best books were too expensive, so families had only a few at home, from which you could learn to read, but from a certain point, you could no longer progress. Millions of children could not go to school because only one of the siblings could be supported by the family; also, for many, the

Bible was the only book in the house – the costs still being high for the financially unharmonized societies that were the rule of history.

In fact, the costs of setting up a library in an ordinary person's home were not small, at least until the 20th century, when massive print runs finally managed to bring culture and education to a truly acceptable level. It was not enough just to love reading and have the desire to learn; more important was the aspect of recovering the investment in education, because this form of human life's manifestation has this particularity: the true effects of learning are manifested throughout life, but not the same for everyone, and especially with superior effects that can appear not just once, but decades after the first book was read.

The need to educate young people was never misunderstood or rejected, as various naïve people believe. However, the technological realities of the times initially meant that certain countries had a better capacity for innovation in paper production (the cases of Egypt and China are the most well-known), and the printing press was invented only in the 15th century. Until then, all books were written exclusively by hand, which slowed both the speed of knowledge dissemination and the number of people who could actually read a book, the purchase costs being high. Thus, we note that only from the second half of the 18th century, after the invention of the steam engine, did printing speed increase and book costs decrease, which raised both the number of printed books and newspapers, which in the 19th century reached circulations of hundreds of thousands of copies per day, and in some cases over a million (Slauter, 2015).

By lowering the costs of access to reading, it became easier for ordinary people to understand the whole world, but from that moment on, public pressure grew for the establishment of compulsory education systems and, as far as possible, free for everyone. There is also a particularity here, which depended on two inescapable elements: demographic density and the cost of teachers and books themselves. Where demographic density was lower, the cost of setting up schools was higher, and it was therefore more difficult for governments to provide free education beyond the elementary level; for anything else, it was

necessary to go to larger cities where residents, housing, and educational buildings, including libraries, could be concentrated. However, this move to the city was not cheap for residents of small towns or villages, which made their access to universities much lower than that of young people born in larger cities. Practically, the financial barrier remained very strong throughout the 19th century worldwide, and only the technological developments at the end of the century would bring education to a new perspective and, above all, to a different legal framework.

The 19th century is known for two fundamental issues regarding education – in fact, this century create the framework of our contemporary society, changing in a fundamental manner the medieval approach main parts.

First, we note the development of a system of public libraries, opened to the general public for the first time. They existed before, either as private homes or in universities, but access was limited to those who had the right to live or study there. However, the increase in book print runs made them cheaper, thus easier to buy, and Western European and North American governments (predominantly) understood that the emergence of public library systems reduced their own costs of educating the population, also contributing to the long-term education of adults – not coincidentally, this concept appeared in the same 19th century (Jakeman and Brake, 2024) and allowing many poor children to have some access to education, where the costs of good books were still prohibitive. The example of Andrew Carnegie stands out, who from his own money built and equipped over 3000 public libraries in the USA (Carnegie Corporation, 2025), thus raising the education level of the population and implicitly helping people increase their incomes based on the information acquired – which they later used in family businesses.

The second fundamental aspect of education will be its incorporation into legislative and especially constitutional forms in most independent countries (in that century). While the legislative process was simpler, since normative acts are not necessarily difficult to adopt, integration into the norms of fundamental laws was more challenging (Richter, 2012). We will mention that the first reference to compulsory education appears in the Constitution of Belgium from 1831 (which

would serve as a model for the Romanian Constitution of 1866), as well as in the constitutions of France around 1848 (the impact of this year on the idea of compulsory education was immense) and Prussia – which provided in article 21 that it was free and compulsory. Finally, we will mention that in 1881 France adopted the law that established free, compulsory, and secular state education.

However, this aspect was not identical in the United States of America, because in the 19th century states were still being added to the union, and distances plus a specific societal typology – ranging from religion to racial issues – meant that education was not free. Still, it should be noted that the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 did emphasize education as important for statehood, in the process of admitting new states to the United States, which practically mandated compulsory education, but not its costs.

Free education is not an easy matter to implement at all levels, because there is a difficult issue to address throughout the 16 or 18 years of schooling, namely the standardization of subjects. While in the primary and middle school cycles things can be more easily set through budget planning, difficulties arise once young people's specialization begins in high school and especially at the university level. High school and university study profiles can be influenced by governments and the economic environment – for example, laboratories can be equipped and scholarships offered in certain fields of science at a level above average – but the competition among candidates fluctuates due to economic interests or demographic capacities of a country, and the number of those who drop out of these studies is much higher than that recorded in the lower cycles.

What does free education mean? First of all, it covers the actual schooling costs – that is, paying teachers and study materials in a school or university – but also other related costs, such as transportation to the educational institution, accommodation costs (very important and expensive in the case of universities), and food expenses. Without full coverage of these from the public budget, education is not completely free.

However, there is another dimension of education that we want to briefly discuss, namely the "at home" study materials, which are the property of the student. The education dimension implies a certain standardization, as we mentioned above, and this is expressed by the appearance of school textbooks approved by various public institutions in this field (ministries, most concretely). They are supplemented by the resources of school libraries, which must be adapted to the requirements specified in the study programs. Nevertheless, libraries do not always have enough copies of the books required in the mandatory bibliographies, and this is seen in smaller localities, farther from large urban centers, but especially in poorer countries. Thus, the cost of education begins to rise, because top education implies not only study in the classroom/course and library but also at home, reducing free time. Now, this individual study at home depends first and foremost on the availability of teaching materials, which is not identical for all students, and even less so in the university cycle, where quantitative differences (to learn) and financial differences (the cost of valuable books) suddenly separate young people, changing their chances of success in life.

At this moment, we need to introduce the Internet and Artificial Intelligence (AI). Both technologies – without going into their detailed differences – have the capacity to provide every computer owner with access to an enormous amount of information, something not even imagined at the beginning of the communication revolution (the invention of the telegraph in the first half of the 19th century played this role).

Education no longer necessarily becomes free simply through access to important data, but primarily shifts towards a biological, quantitative dimension, so that good students will not only be able to pass various exams with high grades but, more importantly, will be capable of reading as much of the available information as possible. Although it may seem – and to a large extent is – a threat to human cognitive abilities (Kosmyna et al., 2025), no one will be able to oppose recognizing the value of intellect and the quantitative dimension of the information read by the human mind, especially since there are times when access to information technologies is difficult or impossible. In any case, it is

necessary that, in searching for data from the Internet or AI, the most concrete requests for solving tasks be formulated correctly and precisely, and this will be difficult to achieve for those who have not read.

We are now facing a new dimension of free education. Today, the Internet is a huge library – for better or worse, with good content protected or not by copyright, etc. – and for not very large sums, there is access to an immense amount of data that can enable a diligent child/young person to become very well prepared in almost any profession. Obviously, professionals – adult education, more concretely – are able to use the library called the Internet even better, being able to progress spectacularly, working even from home. And now Artificial Intelligence can teach, can be a very good teacher (Cardona, Rodríguez and Ishmael, 2023) – although in some respects it does too much, affecting the learning processes of children and adults. Still, if we analyze, scanning many old books and access to new ones – at least those published in the last two decades – offers anyone the chance to know both great literature and quality scientific and practical information, which could be a huge opportunity and could constitute a big step forward.

From this perspective, the question arises: what else can free education cover? The issue arises especially in the university environment, where the maturity of students can allow even distance courses with teachers who are not necessarily human.

What remains of university education if Artificial Intelligence can today be both teacher and data provider, almost equivalent to an entire educational cycle? It is assumed that an adult is capable of learning more and more independently, and since many university studies are a continuation of high school ones, it shouldn't be a big problem when AI can be so advanced in pedagogical techniques. Obviously, this would imply reducing the number of university faculty positions, especially those who lack charisma and the ability to be more adaptable in delivering messages (more versatile, almost like actors playing a role in front of an audience that can intervene up to a certain point in the script).

Would there thus be a shift in funding solely towards the purchase of books and new scientific journals, as well as the acquisition of databases? What do we do in terms of funding students' accommodation if we can educate them at any point on the planet, with the help of AI and the Internet?

Then, there is a clear distinction between the humanities and the technical fields, where experiments and exercises play an important and significant role in the academic year. Within the humanities, internal study in the library takes up more time, and practical applications have a smaller share, which would allow for greater flexibility regarding having human or non-human professors.

All these issues should lead to a broad and deep discussion about what learning and the education system will be in the future, but this seems impossible to achieve by a large part of today's society.

The quality of such a debate will be evaluated fundamentally on two terms: how much education should still be paid for by students, and especially, what do we do with graduates of many types of studies, who in the new type of economy that is emerging will no longer be truly necessary for the labor market?

We should keep in mind that in some countries the costs of education are too high compared to what is actually offered didactically, with ideology and conformity to certain wills – political or religious – being considered supreme values, rather than learning and pushing knowledge beyond all previously reached limits. Also, the costs of higher education can require political interventions, which can be sensible but can also be politicized. It is worth noting that in the USA the Supreme Court canceled former President Biden's plan to cancel significant portions of university fees (Supreme Court of the United States, 2023), but the reasoning still does not answer the question: why should studies be paid for, especially in the richest country in the world, when poorer ones subsidize most of theirs?

I believe that free education should be the rule, but at the same time, we must consider first and foremost a support issue: yes, the easiest thing is to store information in computers and tablets, but the intellectual development of children and young people is affected if they use them

too often (Liu, 2022). And then, the correct proportion must be found between education carried out with printed books and electronic books, keeping in mind that there are not enough trees for how many possible printings and reprintings would be needed.

Conclusions

Education is not always a pleasure, because the volume of knowledge that must be absorbed is large, and this learning has to be done in childhood and youth, when the desire to play is greatest, and the sense of responsibility is at lower levels. However, it is necessary, and the schooling cycles must be completed with determination and precision, because decades depend on it – ours, but also those of the society we live in.

We cannot fail to notice, though, that recent years have allowed the creation of quality support devices and technologies, making the work much easier for those who study conscientiously. At the same time, the logic of the times says that institutions (including educational ones) never reduce their fees (in our case, tuition fees).

However, the Internet and Artificial Intelligence today offer real competition to the traditional style of education, at modest costs, which breaks the same logic of increasing tuition fees, and this must be understood by lawmakers, in order to adapt the legal framework of education to reality, even leading to an increase in free access for students.

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