

An Integrative Framework for the Educational Interaction Design of AI-Driven Personalized Learning Platforms

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Abstract. Personalized learning platforms powered by AI are transforming the education landscape, but the technical sophistication of the platforms creates experiences that feel disconnected, eroding user trust. This paper addresses this gap by constructing an integrative framework to guide the design and evaluation of these platforms. Informed by an interdisciplinary approach to pedagogy, cognitive science and Human-Computer Interaction (HCI), the framework is grounded in Cognitive Load Theory (CLT) to improve learning. The framework is driven by three strategic pillars: (1) personalization and Explainable AI (XAI) by providing personalized guidance in an effort to foster trust; (2) motivation and engagement enabled by meaningful gamification and immersive technologies; and (3) a balanced approach to agency and collaboration, utilizing a “Teacher-in-the-Loop” (TiL) model. Importantly, there are mechanisms within the framework to address the most pressing ethical challenges, including algorithm bias, privacy concerns and the digital divide. This study provides a systematic learner-centric framework for the design of ethically-aware platforms that facilitate more equitable and effective learning.

Keywords: Personalized Learning, AI in Education, Interaction Design, Learning Analytics, Cognitive Load Theory, Explainable AI.

1. Introduction

Personalized learning platforms based on AI are being used on a scale never before seen, with the goal to disrupt the traditional one-size-fits-all schooling paradigm by customizing learners’ experiences [1]. Similar systems use complex algorithms to analyze student data and automatically adjust instruction content, pace, and difficulty on a continuous basis in order to maximize effectiveness of learning and improve engagement. Despite the exponential increase in such systems, there is still a wide divide between the degree of their technological sophistication and the level of maturity in a theoretically grounded conceptual framework for educational interaction design. For example, existing platforms tend to focus on the technical aspects of a feature and not enough on the role of human-computer interaction (HCI) in determining a feature’s effectiveness [2]. Design challenges—like unsatisfactory feedback mechanisms, labyrinthine navigation structures, and unsustainable extrinsic motivation—all have the potential to wholly undermine the benefits of AI, and its erosion of learner agency. This highlights the pressing call for a unified model that bridges pedagogy, cognitive science, best HCI practice and ethical principles to inform the systematic design of these rich educational ecosystems.

This work sits at the nexus of two key developments: The pedagogical shift away from standardized industrial-age education toward personalized learning, and the technology advances over the last decade in AI, in particular in machine learning (ML) and generative models, which have made it possible to deliver truly adaptive, data-driven instruction at scale [3]. The concept of personalized education is not new, with its historical roots in multi-century old “monitorial systems” and Skinner’s “teaching machines” [4]. However, at that time initiatives were hampered by lack of technology and a positivist behaviorist view of learning, that often-portrayed learners as passive recipients in a managed environment [5]. Modern AI approach may solve a lot of those technical hurdles but it also brings a series of complicated problems like “black box” algorithm, a large number of data privacy issues and potential to amplify existing social inequalities [6]. These challenges require us to fundamentally reconsider how we construct the basic interactions that structure learning.

This article fills an important void in the current literature. Although the literature is rich in details of individual models, e.g., Intelligent Tutoring Systems (ITS) architectures [7], gamification [8], affective computing [9] and algorithmic bias [10], these studies are often stand alone. There is a striking scarcity of a consistent framework that connects these disconnected pieces from an educational interaction design point of view. This paper attempts to fill this gap by developing a unified framework following from a systematic review of cross-disciplinary body of literature. The core argument here is that designing interactive experiences for AI learning platforms is a multidimensional task. It should not just go beyond the what of adaptive content delivery, but also create mechanisms to dynamically control cognitive load, enhance intrinsic motivation and balance user agency with system autonomy to directly include ethical principles of fairness, transparency, and accountability in the user interface and interaction flow. The remainder of this paper will begin by setting out the theoretical framework, followed by a description of the high-level architecture model of adaptive systems, and a detailed description of the three key architectural principles, and the broader ethical framework. The integrated model and suggestions for further research will be recapitulated at the end of the paper.

2. Theoretical Foundations of Personalized Learning

Needless to say, for any tool to be effective, it should have a solid theory that it can be based on. The same goes for AI-based personalized learning platforms, which enjoy credibility only to the extent they align with established principles of pedagogy and cognitive psychology.

The idea of personalized learning has developed from earlier models, including the "monitorial system" and the behaviorist "teaching machines" of Skinner [11]. While they helped to improve teaching practices, they were criticized for treating learning as a machine-like procedure and suppressing student autonomy. This history provides us with an important lesson: modern AI platforms should not fall into the behaviorist trap of only 'controlling' the learner and instead aim at 'empowering' the learner by providing them with a role within cognitivist and constructivist paradigms [12].

According to the cognitivism learning theory learning is a 'set of internal mental processes including attention, perception, memory and imitation through which knowledge is encoded, stored, and retrieved' influencing the appropriate structuring of content on the learning platform that can lead to the best retention of information [13]. In contrast, the perspective of constructivism assumes that the learner constructs knowledge through their experience with the environment. This would imply that AI systems might become trainers and co-creators of learning environments by offering an environment conducive to exploration and problem-solving rather than being simple repositories of facts.

Among all theories, Cognitive Load Theory (CLT), developed by John Sweller, provides the most critical and actionable scientific basis for interaction design in this context [14]. CLT is predicated on the severe limitations of human working memory, which can only process a small number of information elements at once. Cognitive overload occurs when this capacity is exceeded, crippling learning efficiency. CLT delineates three types of loads: intrinsic load, determined by the inherent complexity of the material; extraneous load, which is non-essential and generated by poor instructional design (e.g., a confusing interface); and germane load, representing the effective cognitive effort used to construct mental schemas in long-term memory [15].

From a CLT perspective, the most important contribution of AI-based personalization is in the capacity to serve as an activity level cognitive optimization technique. With traditional teaching techniques, some students are overwhelmed, some are not challenged to their full potential. The basic cognitive task of an AI system is to control the cognitive load of each learner on-the-fly. It does this by managing the intrinsic load through effective task scaffolding and sequencing, controlling extraneous load through a clear and simple interface design and thus maximizing the cognitive resources available for germane load—the deep processing where real learning occurs [16]. CLT

thereby provides a powerful justification for the need for personalization and shows how AI can meaningfully support it, focusing the design work on how to keep learners productively struggling.

3. An Architectural Model for AI-Driven Adaptive Systems

Before developing interactions, you have to understand the technology behind AI-powered personalized learning systems. Fundamentally, these platforms are adaptive systems where they operate inside a dynamic interaction loop, a concept that can be materialized based on the well-known model from ITS. This model consists of four connected modules where information and the decision-making process are regulated.

The domain model answers the question: "What should we teach? It consists of an organized description of the topic in the form of "granules" termed Knowledge Components, and a specification of their logical relationship [17]. The higher granularity of the model used, the better personalization precision of this model. For example, it could pinpoint the location of a student's misconception at the step level in the process of solving an algebraic equation if it has a very fine-grained domain model and offers laser-focused interventions. The Learner Model – "Whom to teach?", represents a fluid, multidimensional model of the individual student. It includes what is known by their skills, preferences and even emotional condition. This model is the personalization 'engine' that is kept up to date continuously by tracking and analyzing learner interactions [18].

The Pedagogical Model can be expressed with the primary concern, "How to do teaching"? It is the "brain" of the system and it consists of teaching approaches and rules that govern following pedagogical actions based on the input from both the domain and the user models [19]. This is the point where cognitive theories of learning as well as the constructivist learning theory are put into action. And then there is the Interface Model – How to 'interact'? — has the role of the communication agent that communicates the information to the learner and collects their responses [20]. The ultimate efficacy of all sophisticated backend models is expressed through this interface, which is why its design is crucial for keeping extraneous cognitive load to a minimum and manifesting the system's intentions.

These four blocks work in a "closed-loop" process of "feedback". The student engages with the interface, thus creating large amounts of both explicit and implicit data [21]. Learning analytics methods are then used to process that data, estimate the learner's state at the current time and update the learner model. In view of this new profile, the pedagogical model takes a new instructional decision, which is also fed through the interface model to start a new cycle. But hidden behind this technically well-constructed loop are important ethical conflicts. While the learner model is essential for personalization, it is also a locus of surveillance and a place where institutional bias can potentially occur. The amount of personal information being collected is concerning and biased algorithms trained on biased historical data can further reflect and amplify societal inequities, leading to systemic disadvantage of targeted groups of students [22]. This twofold challenge emphasizes the need to bake component principles such as Explainable AI (XAI) and Privacy by Design in the very architecture of the system itself.

4. A Framework of Educational Interaction Design Strategies

4.1. Personalized Guidance and Explainable Feedback

One of the most critical points in nonlinear learning environment is not to make learners get confused. Hence, inspiring the personalized learning environment will support a personal "learning map" that will help learners to know where they are in their learning process, where they are going, and why there are taking this route [23]. Useful visualizations could include networked pathway diagrams or competency maps that draw areas of strength alongside those that need developing, thereby also automatically unlocking content paths. Learning Analytics Dashboards (LADs) are key in this regard [24]. A well-developed LAD is more than a data display; it is a self-regulated learning

(SRL) tool and a metacognitive tool. By providing the learners the ability to track their progress, compare their actions against pre-set targets or the norm of their peer group and analyze their learning strategies, LADs help them to take an active role in managing their own learning processes.

Feedback is the key to a fruitful learning, and the ability of AI to provide personalized feedback instantly and actionably, is one of its biggest assets [25]. To be most effective, feedback should move beyond corrections to include explanations about why an answer is wrong and concrete guidance on how to improve. Generative AI makes it possible to provide this kind of feedback in a natural, conversational, and structured way.

But the opaque nature of many AI systems can erode user trust. It is in here that Explainable AI (XAI) becomes a design decision not only an optional feature [26]. The goal of XAI is to make AI decision-making transparent and understandable to users. In educational dimension the fusion of XAI in the interface enhances feedback from a mere "notification" toward a substantial "explanation". This contrasts with simply telling a learner that an answer is wrong to actually showing in explicit terms the computed assessment (eg "The system has flagged this as wrong because of an arithmetic mistake at this point") [27]. Likewise, when presented with a new task by the system, the system can explain its choice (e.g., "In light of your prior struggles with the last three similar problems on this topic, the system recommends the following introductory video to you"). This explanation capacity is indeed a powerful pedagogical tool: it builds trust, reduce confusion, and assist learners in gaining a more accurate evaluation of their current knowledge base. Table 1 provides a framework for designing explainable feedback.

Table 1. A Design Framework for Explainable Feedback.

Pedagogical Goal	Learner's Core Question	Feasible XAI Technique	UI Implementation Example
Clarify Misconceptions	"Why was my answer wrong?"	Local surrogate models (e.g., LIME), feature attribution.	Highlight the specific term or code line in the student's submission that most contributed to an "incorrect" judgment, with a tooltip explaining its impact.
Justify Path Adaptation	"Why is the system giving me this task now?"	Rule-based explanations from decision trees, causal inference.	Display a brief notification: "Since you've mastered 'Skill A,' the system has unlocked the next challenge: 'Skill B'" or "Difficulty detected with 'Concept Z,' let's review this first".
Build Trust in AI Assessment	"How was my essay graded?"	Natural Language Explanations, model-agnostic summaries.	Generate a summary report listing scoring dimensions (e.g., argument clarity) and citing key sentences from the student's text that the AI used to support its rating.
Promote Metacognition	"What is my most common type of error?"	Pattern recognition and summarization.	Visualize recurring error types on a personal dashboard with an explanation: "The system has noticed a recurring pattern related to subject-verb agreement".

4.2. Enhancing Motivation and Deep Engagement

A technically sound platform that fails to engage students is ultimately ineffective. This pillar focuses on designing strategies to stimulate and sustain learner motivation. Meaningful gamification

is a critical tactic, one that necessarily extends beyond Points, Badges, and Leaderboards (PBL) [28]. Extrinsic incentives can undermine intrinsic interest in learning, increase anxiety in low-achieving students. Instead, these have to be guided by psychological principles, like Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which postulates three basic human needs: competence, autonomy, and relatedness [29]. Meaningful gamification aims to cater to these needs by including, for example, transparent progression markers to increase perceived competence, meaningful options in learning paths to support autonomy and creating collaborative challenges to enhance perceived relatedness.

Learning is an emotional process as well as a cognitive one, and states such as frustration, boredom, and joy have direct impact on outcomes. Affective Computing, also referred to as emotional AI, refers to systems that are able to perceive, interpret, and respond to human emotions. By leveraging multimodal cues such as facial expressions and vocal prosody, a platform can graduate from being a mere tool, to acting as an empathetic learning companion [30]. For instance, should it detect on-going frustration, the system may proactively give a user resources, hint at a solution, or suggest taking a break. On the other hand, a bored learner may lead to a higher challenge level of difficulty being assigned or a switch to a more fun activity mode, which will in turn enable affective-adaptive interaction for helping learners to control their emotional states or remove barriers.

Last, Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) immersive learning offers unique possibilities to design extremely motivating educational experiences [31]. Incorporating learning in context and enabling learning by doing, they can lead to very high learning retention and understanding. VR allows for safe models of high-risk circumstances (e.g., medical procedures or chemical experiments) while AR can augment the real world with digital information (e.g., showing the internal parts of an engine). If brought together with AI, these technologies become “adaptive immersive environments.” The system is able to observe user activity in the virtual world and use this information to further develop the learner model, thus adapting the challenges and support in the virtual world dynamically and in real time to a greater degree of personalization [32].

4.3. Balancing Agency and Fostering Collaboration

This last pillar relates to larger structural concerns of control and social learning. Central to Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) is the tension between user control and system autonomy [33]. An adaptive interface challenges the design principle of consistency, because it dynamically changes based on the learner model, which can lead to user confusion and a reduced sense of control when the interface behaves differently from one session to the next. The answer does not and cannot come from tipping the balance all the way one way or the other, but in a Human-Centered AI (HCAI) mindset with a mix of high human control and high computer automation [34]. Here, the user sets high-order goals, while the AI takes care of low-level, real-time adjustments.

In an educational setting, the power relations are developed into a triadic between the student, the AI and the instructor. A good architecture proposes separate interfaces and control procedures between objects having distinct roles, leading to the notion of distributed agency. The “Teacher-in-the-Loop” framework represents a concrete realization of this line of thinking, where AI is seen as an enabling tool but not as replacement of the teacher [35]. In this context, the AI takes care of repetitive and data intensive activities like grading and progress tracking, and reports insights and recommendations to the teacher via a specialized dashboard. The teacher subsequently integrates these evidence-based insights with her or his professional judgment or contextual knowledge, to make decisions about instruction. This model is grounded in the co-design of tools with educators who are regarded as key stakeholders and whose (pedagogical) expertise is carefully embedded in the design and operational logic of the system.

Besides one-to-one tutoring, AI has large potential to improve Computer-Supported Collaborative Learning (CSCL) [36]. Informal interaction strategy can hardly be efficient and may create problems like social loafing. An AI agent inserted within a collaborative environment can act as an intelligent “scaffold.” Possibly the tutor can also act as facilitator by analyzing group discussions and providing guiding questions, if necessary, as a team-builder, by recommending, according to a learning model,

the best possible grouping of learners, or as a virtual tutee asking questions in a way that causes the learners to help in response, through “teaching” the AI, a very strong, “learning by teaching” method. Studies have shown that collaborative learning with the aid of AI can improve performance far beyond what is possible with typical CSCL with support for personalized, and now also socialized, AI support [37].

5. Ethical Challenges and Mitigation Strategies

AI-enabled personalized learning brings about the significant ethical questions and dilemmas, which we should proactively address in the design of the system. All responsible frameworks must address algorithmic bias, privacy of data and digital divide [38].

Algorithmic bias occurs when decisions of AI systems unfairly and disproportionately harm particularly marginalized groups [39]. In an academic environment, it may exhibit as the prescription of lower complexity level routes or assessment of lower score for certain student groups; in fact, in this case, this could introduce a new hidden aspect level of bias or systemic discrimination. This bias can come from biased training data or from a poorly designed algorithm.

In technical terms, this may involve preprocessing of the data in order to ensure fairness, including fairness-related constraints in the model-training process, or post-processing of the outputs to eliminate bias [40]. Integrating explainable AI (XAI) at the design level is crucial. Designing the transparent interfaces for educators to monitor AI’s decisions is an important protection against bias.

Data privacy and security is a major concern as educational technologies collect significant amounts of sensitive student information, including academic performance alongside behavioral and emotional data. A system breach might have devastating ripple effects. Such regulations, e.g., Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) [41] in the USA and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) [42] in the European Union, should be adhered to as a matter of principle. This highlights the importance of a “Privacy by Design” philosophy.

Technical solutions involve end-to-end encryption, data anonymization, and new paradigms, such as Federated Learning which can be used to train model on user devices while raw data is kept in device and not centralized [43]. Design-related interventions should be aimed to have clear privacy policies, granular user consent controls and strong authentication procedures. From an organizational viewpoint, it is essential to define explicit data governance rules and to include in contracts with service providers an extensive contract.

Finally, talk about AI in education assumes equitable access to digital infrastructure, though the digital divide is still very real. Without proactive interventions to close this gap, cutting-edge educational technology may well serve as an “inequality accelerator,” furthering the divide between haves and have-nots. Low-bandwidth modes, offline functionality, and support for older and less expensive devices should be a part of building educational platforms. Prioritizing open source would also help lower the barriers of entry for schools. A foundational set of technical and design principles, coupled with publicly funded infrastructure and access, are necessary in order to ensure the benefits of AI in education are available to all.

6. Conclusion

This paper has made the case that “personalized learning” systems based on AI present a winding design challenge that touches on topics in cognitive science, pedagogy, human-computer interaction, and ethics. This research reiterates Cognitive Load Theory as a cornerstone to enhance learning and suggests an integrated framework based on three pathways that supply Clear Guidance and Explainable Feedback through tools (e.g., Explainable AI / XAI), facilitate Deep Engagement through meaningful gamification and immersive technologies, and foster a balance of agency under the “Teacher-in-the-Loop” model while supporting collaborative learning. Crucially, these design approaches have to be embedded in a strong ethical framework that will preemptively address the

risks of algorithmic biases, the abuse of data privacy and the deepening of the digital divide. The key contribution of this work proposes a systematic and comprehensive framework, which serves as a complete guide for practitioners, educators, and researchers. It moves the discussion beyond individual elements towards a learner-centered, theoretically grounded and ethically aware design process. Future work should explore the empirical validation of these integrated strategies in authentic educational contexts, the implementation of context-aware XAI for pedagogical explanations, and ongoing tool design which truly empowers teachers and promotes equity for all learners.

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