

Newsletter on European education

BY CORNERSTONE EU

OVERSTIMULATED MINDS



Take three deep breaths. When is the last time you paid attention to your breathing? How many times a day do you stop and be present?

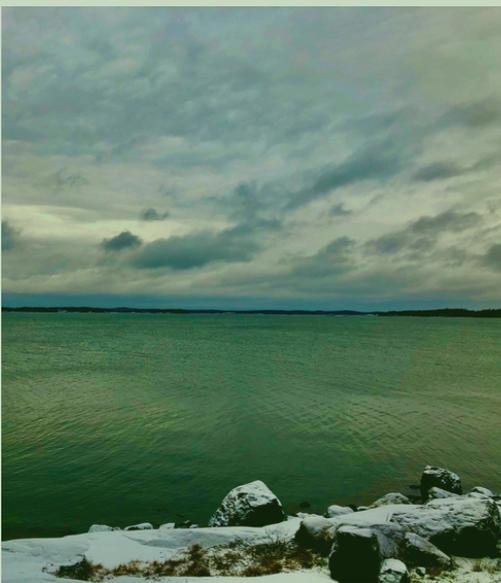
Yesterday I took my grandma to a meditation event.

First we sat for 40 minutes, then we walked reeeeeaaally slowly and consciously and then sat 20 minutes more. She said she felt peaceful, but that it was hard for her to just sit still. I felt the same.

Being present is one of the most important skills we should be cherishing in our hectic lives filled with multitasking and distractions, **where we are expected to be always available for others but rarely for ourselves.**

I feel overstimulated all the time, being on my phone, multitasking (also when making this newsletter, looking for sources, chatting with AI, reading the news and chatting with people).

I'm lucky to have been born in Finland, a culture where we value being present a lot, **especially when we are spending time in the nature or in sauna.** I'm trying to walk in the forest as much as I can, as it really has an effect on my mood and wellbeing. Big recommendation. Ok now let's talk about cognition and overstimulation and present the latest on education. Can't wait.



OVERSTIMULATION AND LEARNING

We tend to think of learning as something that improves with more: more information, more tools, more stimulation. But cognitive science suggests the opposite is often true. When our environments become too stimulating with constant notifications and rapid task-switching, learning quietly degrades. At the core of this is attention, a finite cognitive resource. Present moment lasts for about three seconds, and multitasking means switching your attention every three seconds: it's impossible to be focused on two things at once. Human attention is not designed for continuous novelty. Research in cognitive psychology shows that learning depends heavily on working memory, which has strict limits. When those limits are exceeded, information is not encoded into long-term memory at all. It feels like learning, but little sticks.

OVERSTIMULATION AND FOCUS

Both overstimulation and understimulation reduce children's (and adults') capacity to sustain attention and perform cognitively demanding tasks. *Research shows that overstimulating environments (like excessive screen usage or sensory clutter) tax attentional resources and can lower focus, making it harder to stay on task or absorb material.*

In addition to sleeping problems: digital environments are optimized for engagement, not understanding. Notifications, open tabs, background media, and algorithmic feeds fragment attention into short bursts. Each interruption carries a cognitive cost: attention must be disengaged, redirected, and re-stabilized. Studies on task switching consistently show that this process reduces accuracy, slows comprehension, and increases mental fatigue.

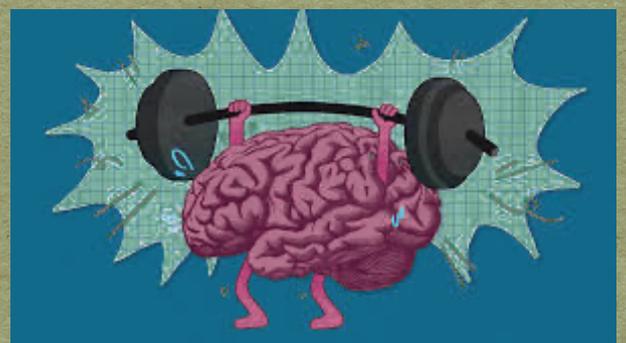
In addition, digital overstimulation, particularly at night, disrupts sleep cycles and lowers melatonin, which can reduce cognitive functioning the next day. Poor sleep is tightly linked to fatigue, irritability, and difficulty with emotional self-regulation, all of which undermine learning.

COGNITIVE OVERLOAD

What is cognitive overload? Cognitive overload occurs when too much digital, sensory or informational input overwhelms the brain.

The concept of cognitive load is useful here. Learning works best when excess load like unnecessary stimulation, visual clutter, irrelevant information) is minimized, allowing the brain to focus on the material itself.

Many modern learning and work environments do the opposite: they increase excess load while demanding deep thinking. This is simply harmful for the brain and cognition long-term.



WHAT CAN WE DO?



Strategies for Schools & Learners

1. **Mindful classroom design & sensory breaks:** create calmer learning spaces with reduced noise and visual distractions, and integrate short movement or breathing breaks to help students reset attention and reduce overload.
2. **Teach focus & time-management skills:** Encourage strategies like time-blocking, single-tasking, and prioritising tasks to help learners avoid multitasking and cognitive overload.
3. **Mindful technology usage:** Set clear expectations for tech use during lessons and homework, for example device-free phases, scheduled check-ins, silent notifications or even phone-free zones to reduce constant stimulation and support sustained engagement.



How you can reduce overstimulation yourself:

1. **Build digital rhythm & gentle dopamine resets:** schedule intentional screen-free periods throughout the day. Slowing down the pace of stimulation allows the brain's reward system to recalibrate, making sustained focus easier over time.
2. **Improve focus and time-management skills:** Encourage strategies like time-blocking, single-tasking, and prioritising tasks to help avoiding multitasking and cognitive overload.
3. **Limit instant feedback loops:** Reduce reliance on ultra-fast reward loops, like TikTok, reels and endless scrolling, or constant notifications. To prevent the brain from becoming desensitised to dopamine and preferring only high-intensity stimulation.

I've turned off all my notifications and I'm trying to only check my messages at spesific hours of the day and respond everyone at the same time. **You don't need to be available 24/7.**

International Day of Education 2026 (24 Jan)

UNESCO HIGHLIGHTS THE NEED OF PARTICIPATING YOUTH IN PLANNING OF EDUCATION

On 24 January, UNESCO marks the International Day of Education 2026 under the theme **“The power of youth in co-creating education.”**

This global celebration highlights how young people are shaping the future of learning and how everyone can help amplify their leadership. The article provides ways to contribute such as sharing your opinions and hosting events.

The European Digital Education Hub community wraps up 2025

OK THIS IS AN US ARTICLE SO WE KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON: COMPETITIVE RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES AND DIVERSITY GOALS SHAPES HIGHER EDUCATION OUTLOOKS

TLDR; Increased regulatory and compliance pressure, Policy shifts affecting higher-education financing, enrollment challenges, especially international student uncertainty (in the US). *Long-term post-pandemic impacts on operations and student support.*

The European Digital Education Hub community wraps up 2025

IN 2025, THE EUROPEAN DIGITAL EDUCATION HUB BROUGHT TOGETHER ALMOST 7 000 EDUCATORS, TRAINERS, POLICYMAKERS, AND DIGITAL EDUCATION FANS FROM ALL OVER EUROPE.

AI in the classroom: What students are saying (survey)

MOST STUDENTS ARE USING GENERATIVE AI FOR COURSEWORK, BUT MANY ARE DOING SO IN WAYS THAT CAN SUPPORT, NOT OUTSOURCE, THEIR LEARNING.

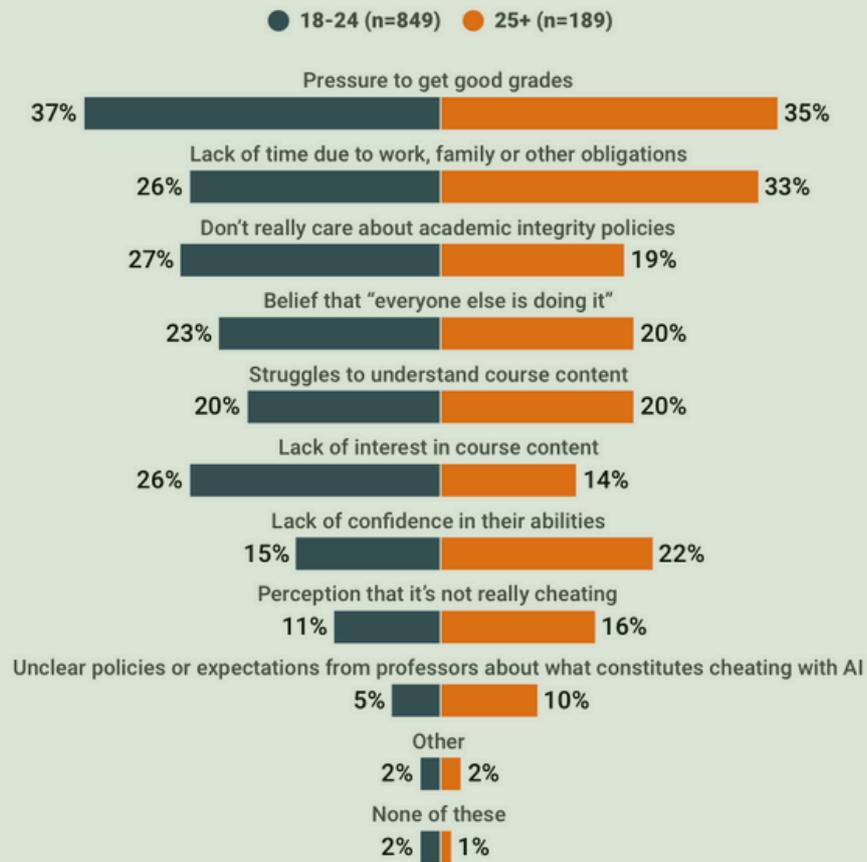
The survey had interesting results on students using generative AI for coursework. Performance pressures, among other factors, are driving cheating (see next page).

LINKS TO ALL CITED SOURCES CAN BE FOUND ON A DOCUMENT LINKED BELOW

AI in the classroom: What students are saying (survey)

Why Students Cheat

Students on why some peers use generative AI in ways that violate academic integrity policies, selecting up to two reasons, by age



Source: Student Voice flash survey on AI, July 2025 • n=1,047 • Inside Higher Ed x Generation Lab. **Question:** Why do you think some students use generative AI in ways that violate academic integrity policies? Select up to 2 reasons that are the most important. **Note:** Chart excludes nine respondents under 18.

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