



PHOTOS: GRAMEENPHONE

## GRAMEENPHONE ACADEMY

### Bridging education gaps in Bangladesh

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MD. RIDWAN SAKIB ANJUM

According to the Population Census, in the past decade, Bangladesh's literacy rate has gone up from 51.77% in 2011 to 74.66% in 2022. However, this success in education has not directly translated into employment opportunities for graduates. According to reports from the World Bank, the unemployment rate among educated youth in Bangladesh has tripled during almost the same period.

This paradox highlights a critical gap: the disconnect between educational curricula and modern industry demands. Additionally, even those with skills often cannot effectively use these abilities in our competitive job market. That's where Grameenphone Academy comes in. This initiative, powered by Grameenphone, stands out as a unique platform offering free education focusing on practical skills tailored to bridge the existing skills gap in the local job market.

Grameenphone Academy was initially conceived to keep youth engaged and

it trained 345 students in essential skills such as communication, entrepreneurship, and digital marketing.

This phase was critical for refining the curriculum and honing the delivery methods to ensure the effectiveness and broad accessibility of the platform. By late 2021, Grameenphone Academy was ready to scale its impact and officially launched its platform. It was fully equipped to offer large-scale education that was free and accessible to anyone with internet access.

Moving into 2022 and beyond, the academy shifted its focus. Now, it's about creating measurable impacts by providing hands-on training to develop highly competent freelancers capable of competing in a global marketplace. The aim was to deepen the impact of the academy's programs by linking in-house training with real freelancing opportunities and expanding its reach through strategic partnerships with various edtech firms.

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Farhana Hossain Shammu, Head of Grameenphone Academy, expressed her enthusiasm about gender inclusivity, stating, "Achieving 47% female certifications organically is a significant milestone for us. It's truly heartwarming to witness these women empower themselves and positively impact their lives."

Their engagement initiatives, including 30 campus town halls and masterclasses, further enhance this commitment to fostering an inclusive learning environment. These events provide real-time, interactive learning experiences, bolster direct engagement, and help GP better understand its users' needs.

Shammu explained, "We don't just focus on digital learning. Our mix of in-person events and online courses drives forward a comprehensive educational experience that prepares our learners for the real challenges and opportunities in the marketplace." She further stated, "The in-person events also help us understand our students on a much better level."

After the success of the digital courses and in-person events, GP Academy has taken on its latest challenge: the Freelancing Factory. This initiative is tailored to address the pressing challenges and opportunities within the

Bangladeshi job market.

With an annual challenge of integrating 1.9 million young individuals into the workforce, the need for practical and marketable skills is more crucial than ever. Through the Freelancing Factory, GP Academy aims to transform this demographic challenge into an opportunity by equipping youth with skills directly applicable to the global digital economy.

But what's the challenge here? Shammu highlighted the program's ambitious goals: "Out of 600 applicants, we carefully selected 100 students for the Freelancing Factory. We are training them to initially earn \$100 in three months and aim for \$1,000 in eight months through freelancing." She added, "The hardest phase is often the zero-to-one transition, and we want to help these students through that."

GP Academy is more than just an educational platform. Teresa summed up the academy's vision: "It's a movement to empower the youth of Bangladesh with the knowledge and skills they need. From the GP Startup Accelerator to the GP Academy, we are cultivating a culture of growth and opportunity that extends beyond our corporate boundaries and truly grows our future."

This vision is illustrated through the success stories of GP Academy. Success stories of individuals such as Khadija, an economics student at Begum Badrunnessa Govt. Girl's College, who became an expert in Facebook marketing and MS Excel. Now, she earns BDT 10,000 - 15,000 per month from her small setup. Or take Muntasir, for example. He went from financial instability to becoming a mentor at the Freelancing Factory's web development course.

These are not just one-off stories. In a country of billions, there are millions of Khadija and Muntasir waiting for the opportunity to learn and grow. That's what GP Academy offers.

Ankit Sureka, Head of External Communications at Grameenphone, reflects, "Where we live and work, it's easy to take education for granted. However, education is a privilege that should be available everywhere for everyone. At GP Academy, we operate on a non-profit basis to ensure that learning reaches every corner of society regardless of the obstacles."

In a country where practical and accessible education often does not go hand in hand, initiatives like Grameenphone Academy are vital in bridging the gap within our educational system. However, the biggest highlight of GP Academy is the people behind it. It is their collective enthusiasm towards their inclusive goal: education for all, at no cost at all.



productive during the Covid-19 pandemic. The journey began in late 2020 with a concept testing phase that involved just ten students from the Islamic University of Technology (IUT), focusing on online training in design thinking.

Regarding the initiative, Farhana Islam Teresa, Head of ESG at Grameenphone, said, "We initially started by training just ten students. Seeing that first group's remarkable success and transformation truly inspired us and lit a fire beneath us." As the year progressed, the academy expanded its reach in the beta testing phase. In partnership with top edtech providers,

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## AI startups to watch out for in 2025

MAISHA ISLAM MONAMEE

**As we navigate through 2025, the startup ecosystem is experiencing a transformative era, with emerging technologies reshaping industries and daily life.**

This dynamic environment has led to a surge in venture capital investments, with a notable focus on AI-powered solutions. As such, here are some of the most promising AI startups, from around the world, to watch out for in 2025.

**Worth AI**

Founded by fintech veterans Suneera Madhani and Sal Rehmetullah in 2023, Worth AI is a SaaS platform that leverages artificial intelligence to provide inclusive financial underwriting solutions. Its flagship product, the Worth Score, offers a single, AI-driven credit score by analysing data from multiple sources, aiming to bring clarity and consistency to credit scoring. According to the company's LinkedIn page, it raised \$2.5 million in seed funding in August 2024.

**Mirador Therapeutics**

Founded by Mark C. McKenna, former CEO of Prometheus

Biosciences, in 2024 with \$400 million in funding. Mirador Therapeutics utilises advancements in human genetics and data science to develop precision medicines targeting inflammatory and fibrotic diseases. According to the company's official website, its proprietary platform harmonises millions of patient molecular profiles to discover and validate genetic associations with immunofibrotic diseases, thus identifying novel therapeutic targets and tailored treatments for patients.

**Safe Superintelligence Inc. (SSI)**

Established by Ilya Sutskever (OpenAI co-founder), Daniel Gross, and Daniel Levy in 2024, SSI aims to develop safe superintelligent AI systems. As per public statements by the company, it is focused on developing advanced AI systems that are both highly capable and safely aligned with human values. Operating from Palo Alto and Tel Aviv, the startup raised \$1 billion in cash in September 2024.

**Gradient AI**

Gradient AI, founded by AI veteran Stan Smith in 2018, is an enterprise software provider specialising in artificial intelligence solutions tailored for the insurance industry. The company offers AI-powered underwriting and claims management software designed to enhance risk assessment, improve pricing accuracy, and reduce claim costs and durations. In July 2024, Gradient AI raised \$56.1 million in Series C funding.

**Figure AI**

Founded in 2022 by tech entrepreneur Brett Adcock, Figure AI is a robotics startup with funding of \$675 million from the likes of Jeff Bezos, Nvidia, Microsoft, and OpenAI, with a total valuation of \$2.6 billion as of April 2024. Last year, it unveiled Figure O1, a general-purpose, autonomous, commercially viable humanoid robot that can help with a variety of tasks from daily chores to industrial labour, as per the company's official website.

## Microsoft to invest \$3 bln to expand AI and cloud services in India



NEXT STEP DESK

Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella has announced plans to invest \$3 billion in India to expand its capacity for artificial intelligence (AI) and Azure cloud-computing services. This investment marks Microsoft's largest single expansion in India, according to a report by Reuters.

In addition to the financial commitment, Nadella announced Microsoft's goal of training 10 million people in India in AI

## JOBS SPOTLIGHT

### United International University (UIU)



Lecturer, CSE (CSE Background)

Deadline: February 3

## Eligibility:

• 4-year Bachelor/ Master Degree in Computer Science and Engineering, with a CGPA no less than 3.5 on a scale of 4.0 or less than 1st Division/Class in any stage of education.

Minimum experience: N/A

## Optimizely

Senior Software Engineer (.net)



Deadline: N/A

## Eligibility:

• Bachelor's degree in Computer Science or similar, or corresponding level of relevant education.

Minimum experience: 5-7 years

## IDLC



Finance PLC

Legal Officer

Deadline: January 20

## Eligibility:

• Graduation/Post Graduation degree in LL.B or LL.M from a reputed university.

Minimum experience: 1-2 years



## Walton Hi-Tech Industries PLC.

Business Expansion Officer, Walton/ Marcel Distribution Network

Deadline: January 22

## Eligibility:

• Bachelor's degree in any discipline with prior experience in these business areas: Manufacturing (FMCG), Electronic Equipment/Home Appliances, Group of Companies.

Minimum experience: 1-5 years

FOR MORE DETAILS AND THE APPLICATION LINKS, SCAN THE QR CODE BELOW.



“I'm a great believer in luck, and I find the harder I work the more I have of it.”

THOMAS JEFFERSON