



ILLUSTRATION: ZARIF FAIAZ

Shahir Chowdhury on how ed-tech could transform Bangladesh

Schools gain the tools and platforms needed to modernise curricula and pedagogy. Teachers receive the support and training to deliver effective, technology-enabled instruction. Policymakers access real-time insights that allow for agile, evidence-based governance.

NEXT STEP DESK

Bangladesh is often hailed as an economic miracle, and with good reason. Over the past decade, the country sustained an average GDP growth of 6.4% annually between 2014 and 2023, surpassing regional giants like India, Vietnam, and the Philippines. With a GDP of \$455 billion and per capita income of \$2,600 as of 2024, Bangladesh is shifting from a narrative dominated by low-wage garments and remittances to a nation on the cusp of technological and demographic transformation.

At the heart of this transformation lies an existential crisis: Bangladesh's struggling education system. With 41 million students, 1.2 million teachers, and over 160,000 schools, Bangladesh has the scale—but not yet the systems—to ensure quality education. Shahir Chowdhury, Founder and CEO of Shikho, during his keynote at Startup Connect 2025, says the country is at a pivotal juncture. It must either modernise its approach to education or risk undermining the very growth engine that has powered its recent success. Below are key excerpts from his keynote speech.

The education fault lines

Bangladesh's education challenges fall into three interconnected categories: cost, access, and quality. Education remains prohibitively expensive, especially outside major cities, due to reliance on private tuition, disproportionately burdening low-income households.

Access remains uneven, exacerbated by rural-urban divides and economic migration. Many marginalised families struggle to maintain consistent schooling for their children.

Quality suffers due to undertrained teachers, inadequate infrastructure, and outdated learning materials. Teachers often lack professional development opportunities, while unreliable internet and electricity further undermine educational outcomes.

What ed-tech actually means for Bangladesh
ed-tech—education technology—is more than digitised classrooms; it's a comprehensive reimagining of teaching and learning at scale. ed-tech democratises education, making top-quality teachers, resources, and tools accessible regardless of geography or income.

For students, AI-driven personalised learning adapts to individual strengths, providing real-time feedback and tailored content. Tools like exam preparation aids and doubt solvers enhance critical thinking and active engagement.

For teachers, digital tools for lesson planning, automated grading, and real-time analytics reduce administrative burdens, freeing time for instruction. Online training platforms enable regular professional development.

For institutions and policymakers, robust learning management systems (LMS) offer data-driven insights into attendance, performance, and engagement, enabling efficient resource allocation and policy evaluation.

AI as a co-pilot, not a replacement

AI drives much of ed-tech innovation, such as auto-generated lesson plans, personalised learning paths, and grading assistants offering detailed feedback. These tools augment educators rather than replace them, shifting the focus from rote memorisation to conceptual mastery. Ethical design ensures technology supplements rather than subverts learning.

Scale and momentum

ed-tech traction in Bangladesh is rapidly growing. Registrations on one platform rose from 90,000 in 2021 to 2.5 million in 2024. Although still a fraction of the total student population, this signals immense potential.

Comparatively, Bangladesh's ed-tech sector remains underfunded. India has attracted \$12 billion in ed-tech investments compared to Bangladesh's \$18 million—highlighting both the untapped opportunity and urgency for investment and policy support.

Despite limited capital, Bangladeshi ed-

tech firms have fundamentals attractive to investors: a large market, high gross margins, and products addressing essential educational needs. Chowdhury argues ed-tech could soon become the country's dominant consumer internet sector.

A \$16 billion opportunity

Bangladesh's education market totals \$16 billion, including \$8 billion in private education and \$2 billion in after-school tutoring—areas ed-tech can effectively address. Families already spend a substantial portion of income on education, making affordable digital alternatives crucial.

This intersection of demand and necessity positions education as a key economic driver. An educated workforce is better equipped for the digital economy, resilient to automation, and likely to foster local entrepreneurship.

The triangle of transformation

A tripartite alliance among ed-tech companies, educational institutions, and government policymakers, supported by venture investors is crucial. Schools can modernise curricula and pedagogy, teachers can deliver effective technology-enabled instruction, and policymakers gain real-time insights for agile governance. Investors find strong fundamentals, scalable solutions, and measurable impacts.

A revolution still unfinished

Yet, the ed-tech revolution faces significant hurdles: digital infrastructure challenges, equitable access to devices, and digital literacy issues among educators and students. Regulatory frameworks must support innovation while safeguarding equity and privacy. Most importantly, a national vision is required—one that sees education as foundational to Bangladesh's future growth.

The tools are ready, the need is evident, and the stakes could not be higher. Now, Bangladesh must align vision with execution to transform an educational crisis into its greatest opportunity.

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Deadline: April 29

Eligibility:

🔗 Master's/Graduate degree in Business Administration/Logistics/Supply Chain/IT with prior experience with UN agencies or non-governmental organisations.

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“Perseverance is failing 19 times and succeeding on the 20th.”

JULIE ANDREWS



Vibe coding: what is it?

SAMIN SHAHAN RAHMAN

If you've been browsing tech news or developer forums lately, you might've come across a curious term: 'vibe coding'. At first glance, it sounds simple—maybe even a bit mysterious—but it's gaining traction among beginners and seasoned developers alike. But what is it, and why are so many developers embracing the vibe? Let's take a look.

What exactly is 'vibe coding'?

Vibe coding is a way to program using Artificial Intelligence (AI), specifically Large Language Models (LLMs). The term gained attention through Andrej Karpathy, co-founder of OpenAI, who described it as trusting the “vibes”—letting AI handle the coding details. He said it feels like: “It's not really coding—I just see stuff, say stuff, run stuff, and copy-paste stuff, and it mostly works.”

This method involves using plain language to instruct the AI, heavily relying on AI to write code, and focusing less on exact coding rules and more on outcomes. A significant concern, noted by researchers like Simon Willison, is using AI-generated code without fully understanding it—distinct from using AI merely as typing assistance.

Vibe coding utilises various AI tools. Code editors with AI assistance, like GitHub Copilot, Cursor, or Replit Agent, act as coding partners, translating descriptions into working code. Additionally, general AI models like Claude or ChatGPT and new tools like Lovable or Softr are specifically designed for vibe coding.

Explaining the sudden buzz

Vibe coding is popular because it lowers barriers to software creation. Even those with little coding experience can now build basic applications, making software development more accessible.

It also accelerates progress for both beginners and experts. AI quickly generates standard code or complete app structures, allowing developers to focus on bigger design ideas and complex issues. Today's advanced AI makes “programming in plain English” realistic, letting creators prioritise product feel and functionality over coding specifics.

Finally, quickly seeing something work feels rewarding, especially for smaller or personal projects. That immediate satisfaction contributes significantly to vibe coding's appeal.

Security is another big risk. AI doesn't truly understand security needs; it just copies patterns. It might create code that works but has serious security holes, putting data or users at risk. Using such code without careful checks can lead to security disasters.



ILLUSTRATION: ZARIF FAIAZ

The drawbacks that come with it

However, vibe coding carries risks. Users might end up working with code they don't fully understand, resulting in superficially functional but fundamentally weak applications.

Fixing bugs becomes challenging without understanding the original logic. AI-generated code may also be disorganised, causing future difficulties or even requiring complete rewrites.

Security is another major risk. AI-generated code might include hidden vulnerabilities, as AI replicates patterns

without genuine security awareness, potentially causing serious issues if unchecked.

AI-generated code quality can vary significantly, making it unreliable without verification. Overdependence on AI may also limit learners' development of deeper coding and critical thinking skills. Without the struggle and practice essential for mastering logic, debugging, and design, their growth could be compromised.

Team collaboration might also suffer if the AI-generated code lacks clear structure or explanations for others to follow.

When to use vibe coding (and when not to)

So, is vibe coding revolutionary or risky? It's probably both. It's particularly useful for quickly building basic prototypes (MVPs) or testing ideas without significant time investments.

This rapid prototyping capability makes it ideal for experimenting with concepts. For personal or educational projects, it reduces barriers, allowing creators to focus on outcomes rather than complicated syntax rules.

It helps non-coders turn ideas into reality and enables experienced developers to automate routine tasks, explore new languages, and rapidly adopt new tools—provided they review and understand the AI-generated output.

However, for significant software projects requiring security, reliability, and maintainability, traditional coding practices remain essential. Understanding, planning, thorough testing, and security remain non-negotiable. Relying solely on vibes won't suffice for critical projects.

Vibe coding marks a significant shift driven by rapid AI advancements. It likely won't replace traditional coding immediately, but it is reshaping software development and broadening access. It suggests a future where everyday language increasingly instructs computers.

The key is wisely matching these powerful tools to appropriate tasks, leveraging their speed and simplicity, while continuing to use thoughtful planning and tested techniques to build trustworthy software.