

Youth upskilling in the age of AI: where to begin?

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For today's youth, the future no longer arrives quietly. It updates itself overnight; one morning, you wake up to find that a task you spent years learning can now be done by a machine in seconds, and by evening, there is a new tool promising to do even more.

Today, a four-year degree no longer guarantees a job. In fact, in 2024, Bangladesh had around nine lakh unemployed graduates. With artificial intelligence (AI) creeping into our lives, more entry-level jobs are bound to disappear. For young people in Bangladesh and across the world, this has created a peculiar mix of anxiety.

While AI offers unprecedented access



ILLUSTRATION: MONG SHONIE

SUMMARY

1. AI is transforming jobs, making traditional degrees less reliable for employment.
2. Upskilling is essential, focusing on creativity, judgment, and human-centred skills.
3. Digital literacy—understanding AI, data, and ethics—is now a basic requirement.
4. Continuous learning, including learning, unlearning, and relearning, is crucial.
5. Technical skills are valuable but should complement human skills and personal interests.

to knowledge, productivity, and global opportunities, it has also unsettled the old promise that education naturally leads to stable employment. Basically, degrees still matter, but they no longer guarantee relevance.

Hence, upskilling, once a corporate buzzword, has now become a survival strategy in the age of AI and rapidly evolving technology. But when

everything seems important, where does one even begin?

UNDERSTANDING THE SHIFT BEFORE CHASING SKILLS

The first mistake many young people make is treating AI as a list of tools to master rather than a structural change to understand. Learning how to use one popular platform may help today, but it offers little protection tomorrow.

What AI is really doing is automating routine work, accelerating decision-making, and raising the baseline of what is considered "basic competence". In practical terms, this means tasks that are predictable, repetitive, and rules-based are disappearing fastest. At the same time, roles that require judgment, creativity, context, and human connection are

becoming more valuable.

For instance, data entry jobs are disappearing because they are repetitive and rules-based. However, leadership roles are now in demand because you need excellent leadership skills to navigate the changing dynamics of the workplace and work culture.

Upskilling, therefore, is not about racing machines at what they do best,

but about leaning into what they cannot easily replicate. So, before signing up for yet another online course, young learners need to ask a more fundamental question: what kind of thinking does this skill train?

DIGITAL LITERACY IS NO LONGER OPTIONAL

If you think that the starting point for upskilling in the age of AI is advanced coding or machine learning, you're wrong. Basic digital literacy is where you start your upskilling journey in this age. This includes understanding how algorithms work at a conceptual level, how data is collected and used, and how digital platforms shape behaviour and decision-making.

Many young people in our country, as well as around the world, use AI tools daily without understanding their limitations. Be it ChatGPT or an AI image generator, they trust outputs without questioning sources, assume neutrality where there is bias, and confuse fluency with accuracy.

Digital literacy is as essential as reading and writing once were. This does not mean everyone must become a programmer. It means everyone must become an informed user. Knowing when to rely on AI, when to double-check, and when to apply human judgment is a skill in itself one that employers increasingly value.

LEARNING HOW TO LEARN AGAIN

Perhaps the most underrated skill in the AI era is the ability to learn continuously without formal instruction. Traditional education trained students to complete syllabi, sit exams, and move on. Bangladeshis, in particular, are fixated on this education model, thinking that this approach is what will guarantee skills and, eventually, jobs.

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- BPharm Professional
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- BS in Microbiology
- BS in Environmental Science and Environmental Management
- Bachelor of Public Health (BPH)
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