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What students want from universities and employers in the age of AI

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ILLUSTRATION: **SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR**

Artificial intelligence (AI) entered our lives on tiptoe, then suddenly, it writes emails, edits videos, schedules meetings, screens CVs, and recommends what we should read next. For Bangladeshi students, it is already shaping how knowledge is produced, how work is evaluated and how opportunities are distributed.

What students want from universities and employers is to stop lagging behind the reality that is increasingly relying on AI. However, rather than being a current administrative and pedagogical tool, the discussion surrounding AI in education frequently stays superficial, framed either as a threat to academic integrity or as a futuristic luxury. Although committees are established and policies are discussed, students' real-world experiences seldom show significant change.

Afrina Sultana Ariya, currently in her final semester of her master's degree in mass communication and journalism at Dhaka University (DU), puts it plainly.

"I want my university to be more

SUMMARY

1. University systems remain painfully slow despite rapid technological change.

2. AI affects students' lives, but institutions lag in using it meaningfully.

3. Inefficient processes make students feel their time is unvalued.

4. Education and job-market skills remain poorly aligned.

5. Students want AI to support fairness, efficiency, and human judgement.

efficient in handling administrative work. Introducing automated systems would reduce bureaucratic red tape and eliminate the unnecessary delays students face in completing even simple tasks," says Ariya, pointing out that while private universities have embraced digital systems, public universities still struggle to keep up. In a context where AI enables the processing of thousands of records within seconds, prolonged delays in transcript corrections and routine approvals appear increasingly unreasonable to students.

When a university refuses to modernise, it inadvertently teaches its students a lesson that is both cynical and soul-crushing. They learn that their time does not matter. Efficiency is sometimes not just about convenience. Ariya connects this administrative inertia to a larger failure.

"Employers demand skills that graduates are not adequately equipped with, which creates serious challenges during the hiring process," she explains. Many graduates remain unemployed not because they lack ability, but because they have not been trained for the realities of work. Her expectation is reasonable and radical in its implications. Employers, she argues, must take responsibility for training recruits, while universities and industries must collaborate more seriously. AI, used well, could bridge this gap by aligning curricula with labour market data, forecasting skill demand and creating adaptive learning pathways that evolve with the economy.

Students outside Dhaka echo similar sentiments, often with sharper urgency. Sadman Sajid, a student at Rajshahi University (RU), discusses the uneven distribution of opportunities: "We know AI is changing everything, but our universities still teach as if the job market is frozen in time."

Sajid wants access to AI tools within classrooms, as instruments for learning data analysis, research design and problem-solving. From employers, he expects transparency: "If companies use AI to screen us, they should tell us what they value. Otherwise, it feels like we are being judged by a system we were never taught to understand."

From Chittagong University (CU), Rafia Tarannum frames the issue as one of trust.

"Universities should teach us how

to work with AI ethically, not fear it or misuse it," she says. Tarannum imagines courses where students learn to question algorithmic bias, protect data privacy, and apply technology responsibly. Her expectations from employers are similarly grounded. She wants training that treats AI as a shared tool rather than a gatekeeping mechanism, and contracts that are clear enough to reduce the constant anxiety of disposability.

The striking thing about the student demand for AI is that nobody is actually rooting for the machines to win. They aren't looking to trade their professors for a series of circuits or their managers for a piece of code. Instead, they are simply asking for a version of the world where the systems actually work. By letting algorithms handle the mind-numbing friction of routine paperwork and rigid hiring filters, universities and employers could finally get back to the actual business of being human.

If the administrative "busy work" vanished, a university might actually have the time to offer mentorship and academic care, the kind of nuanced, irreplaceable judgement that doesn't come with a software update. It turns out that when you automate the tasks that make people miserable, you create the space for the kind of long-term development that a short-term efficiency fix can never provide.

For finance student Zobair Tawhid Opurbo, from DU, the problem is the lack of emphasis.

"Besides bookish knowledge, I want

my university to focus on students' skillsets," he says. Workshops, business case competitions, exposure to real decision-making—these are not luxuries but necessities. Human value lies increasingly in judgment, interpretation and ethical reasoning in the age of AI. Zobair wants employers to open their doors earlier, through company visits and internships, so students can see how theory behaves when placed under office lights.

Sumaiya Sultana, another finance student, keeps it even simpler. She wants well-structured courses that cater to our potential careers and help us learn real-life skills. She also hopes employers will hire based on skills and professionalism rather than experience. It is an expectation influenced by the reality of AI-driven recruitment systems, in which algorithms already scan CVs for keywords and competencies. If machines can assess potential, she suggests, humans should be willing to look beyond years of experience and invest in growth.

At Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP), Sarah Mahbub, a first-year student, has already seen what structured engagement can achieve. She describes a career and education fest where dozens of companies met students, CVs changed hands, and hundreds reportedly secured jobs before graduation. What she hopes for from employers is patience—the time to learn, adjust, and grow. She wants a workplace free of politics and toxicity, with training programmes

that recognise that learning does not end at graduation. AI may accelerate processes, but Sarah expects that it should also create space for mentorship rather than erasing it.

Private universities, often seen as nimbler, are not exempt from scrutiny. Nafisa Mahjabeen, a pharmaceutical science student at North South University (NSU), speaks with optimism. Her insistence on humane conditions feels like a reminder that progress is hollow if it forgets people. She has watched managers and directors visit her campus, conducting interviews and seminars, and hopes that by the time she graduates, these opportunities will be more robust and inclusive. Yet her expectations from employers go beyond job offers. She wants stability, safety and recognition.

"I want a stable job in a safe environment where I can give my 200 percent dedication," says Mahjabeen.

What emerges from these voices is an acceptance of technology, but a demand for coherence. Students are already using AI to study, to write, to learn. What frustrates them is that institutions pretend otherwise. Universities still assess learning as if information scarcity were the problem. Employers still recruit as if potential were invisible. Meanwhile, algorithms make decisions that make or break the students' futures. Adaptation begins with rethinking structures. Automated administrative systems are not glamorous, but they matter. Industry-academia collaboration sounds dull until you realise it can prevent years of unemployment. Ethical AI training may seem abstract until biased algorithms decide who gets shortlisted.

There is also a different expectation running through these conversations. Students want to be taken seriously. They want institutions to acknowledge that the world has changed, and that pretending otherwise is a form of negligence. They want employers who understand that innovation without accountability leads nowhere good.

The challenge today is deciding what we do with it. Bangladeshi students are asking for education that prepares them, and workplaces that respect them. We need to stop talking about AI as if it's a poltergeist. It's a tool. It's a very fast, very efficient hammer. AI can help with it all, if used thoughtfully. Or it can deepen existing inequalities, if treated as a magic fix. At this pivotal moment, the choice belongs to universities and employers. Universities should be using it to kill the bureaucracy that eats up students' time. Employers should be using it to find talent in places they usually forget to look.

ILLUSTRATION: **ABIR HOSSAIN**