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Revamping Rote Learning in Bangladeshi Universities: AI and Engaged Learning in the Arts and Humanities Education

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ABSTRACT

In Bangladesh, summary-based learning and attendance-focused classroom participation reflect persistent pedagogical challenges in universities. This paper explores how integrating AI-driven tools and active learning strategies can reshape Arts and Humanities education, encouraging deeper engagement and skill development. By analyzing current challenges and examining global and local case studies, the study highlights how personalized, AI-assisted learning materials and innovative teaching methods can transform the academic experience. While the findings emphasize benefits like reduced teacher workload and tailored resources for diverse learners, challenges such as infrastructural gaps and ethical concerns, including data privacy, are also considered. The study concludes with actionable recommendations for curriculum reform, teacher training, and assessment redesign, offering a practical framework to modernize education in universities of Bangladesh and equip graduates with competencies to meet the demands of the 21st century.

Introduction

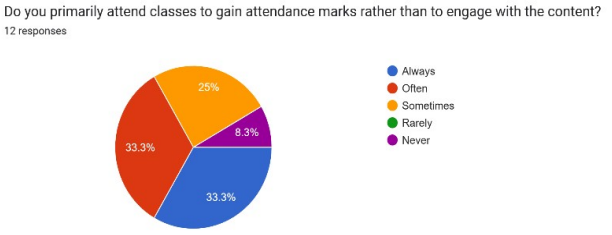
In Bangladesh's higher education system, particularly in the Arts and Humanities, traditional pedagogy continues to rely heavily on rote memorization, summary-based learning, and attendance-driven classroom participation. Such outdated practices often limit opportunities for students to think critically, explore ideas creatively, and actively engage with course content. “The method of instruction by which teachers of Bangladesh provide education to the student is exclusively teacher-centered. The teachers, like political leaders, deliver their speeches before students. Here, students are passive listeners and hardly participate or involve in the learning process.” Where global education embraces learner-centered models, the persistence of passive, lecture-heavy, attendance-focused approaches in Bangladesh reveals a dire necessity for pedagogical reform. The teachers merely “fill” the students with the contents of his narration-contents. This environment leaves little room for students to critically engage with texts, ask reflective questions, or apply interdisciplinary thinking. Such pedagogical models hinder cognitive growth and demotivate learners as Paulo Freire says that "words" that are told to students "are emptied of their concreteness and become a hollow, alienated, and alienating verbosity.” As a result, student performance becomes a measure of memorization rather than understanding, leading to shallow learning and disengagement. The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into the teaching-learning process could serve as one of the promising avenues. AI-assisted and active learning strategies have the potential to shift the educational experience from passive reception to interactive and personalized engagement. Globally, AI is already transforming education by supporting diverse student needs through tools that foster autonomy, track learner progress and personalize content. Platforms such as Nearpod, Edpuzzle, and Quizlet enable educators to create multimodal study materials that combine visuals, interactivity, and adaptability, making learning more engaging, accessible, and responsive to diverse student needs.

This study investigates how such tools and strategies can be adapted to the Bangladeshi context to counter the dominance of rote learning and promote more meaningful educational practices in the Arts and Humanities. Specifically, the research asks:

- What are the current challenges in creating engaging and adaptive study materials?
- How can AI driven tools help overcome these challenges?
- What are the potential impacts of AI-assisted learning materials on student engagement and academic outcomes?

Reviving the Roots: Traditional Pedagogies in Arts & Humanities

Bangladesh's higher education system, particularly in the Arts and Humanities, has long been characterized by traditional pedagogical approaches. Classroom participation is frequently reduced to mere physical attendance. And, course content often emphasizes summaries and pre-prepared notes. One of the most used pedagogical practices in Bangladeshi education system is the “banking system”. The "banking model of education," coined by Paulo Freire, describes a teaching method where the teacher acts as a knowledge depositor, filling students' minds with information, while students are seen as passive recipients. This model, often found in traditional education systems, emphasizes a hierarchical teacher-student relationship where the teacher is the sole possessor of knowledge. This approach that sees students as containers into which knowledge is deposited by teachers. Moreover, attendance-focused participation further hinders students’ mental growth as they lack the actual need for concentration.



A survey conducted on students of different department of Arts and Humanities shows that 67% students attend their classes just to get attendance. Their focus is more on attendance than on class content. Such practices limit students' critical thinking, creativity, and engagement.

Assessments predominantly test recall abilities, and classroom participation frequently lacks meaningful engagement. This approach hampers the development of essential skills like analytical reasoning, problem-solving, and effective communication.

From Passive to Passionate: Activating Learning Through Engaged Pedagogies

The shift toward active learning has been gaining momentum globally as educators recognize its capacity to foster critical thinking, collaboration, and autonomy. Rooted in constructivist theories by Piaget and Vygotsky, active learning encourages students to construct knowledge through interaction, problem-solving, and self-reflection. Felder and Brent (2009) define active learning as "anything course-related that all students in a class session are called upon to do other than simply watching, listening, and taking notes"(p. 2). In other words, active learning is "anything that involves students in doing things and thinking about the things they are doing" (Bonwell and Eison 1991,2). Paulo Freire’s concept of critical pedagogy, where education becomes a practice of freedom, further challenges the “banking model” of education dominant in rote systems- that approach to learning that is rooted in the notion that all students need to do is consume information fed to them by a professor and be able to memorize and store it. In practical terms, engaged pedagogies can take the form of project-based learning, peer-led discussions, flipped classrooms, and interdisciplinary modules. As hooks (1994) explained, engaged pedagogy involves journeying “with students as they progress in their lives beyond our classroom experience. In many ways, I continue to teach them, as they become more capable of teaching me. The important lesson is that we can learn together, the lesson that allows us to move together with and beyond the classroom, is one of mutual engagement” (p. 205). Student involvement in learning process ensures their engagement in higher order thinking tasks like analysis, synthesis, and evaluation which is more necessarily needed in Arts and Humanities education. Globally, universities have adopted these methods to make Arts and Humanities education more inclusive. But in Bangladesh, while some institutions have experimented with debate-based assessments or seminar-style discussions, such practices remain limited and largely dependent on individual instructors.

Intelligence Reimagined: Exploring AI's Transformative Role in Education

Artificial Intelligence is transforming education, breaking down traditional barriers in teaching and learning. While science and technology fields have quickly adopted AI, arts and humanities—especially in Bangladeshi universities—are still figuring out how to adapt to this change. Traditionally, the Arts and Humanities rely heavily on critical thinking, interpretation, and deep reflection—skills seen as uniquely human. However, AI tools like large language models (LLM), and intelligent tutoring systems are opening new doors. AI technologies are revolutionizing the academic landscape, offering unprecedented opportunities for personalized learning, administrative efficiency and improved educational outcomes. These technologies help students learn at their own pace by adjusting lessons to their needs. "AI may improve a technology's ability to meet students where they are, build on their strengths, and grow their knowledge and skills." (Cardona, Rodriguez, and Ishmael). It helps students, teachers, and schools—especially those with limited resources—achieve better outcomes.

AI can be used to develop localized content in Bangla and English, design assessments aligned with national curricula, and offer scaffolded materials that bridge students from rote learning to conceptual understanding. For students of literature, philosophy, or history, AI can offer dynamic ways to analyze texts, trace historical data, and even generate alternative readings that challenge established interpretations. For arts and humanities educators, AI-powered tools are opening new possibilities to enhance creativity and streamline teaching. Platforms like Canva Magic Write assist in designing visually engaging presentations and lesson materials, while DeepL helps translate and analyze texts for comparative literature or cultural studies. Turnitin's AI detection ensures academic integrity in student submissions, and ChatGPT can generate discussion prompts or simulate historical dialogues for immersive learning. Tools like Otter.ai transcribe lectures, making content accessible, and MidJourney/DALL-E inspire visual arts classes with AI-generated imagery for critique and reinterpretation. These technologies don't replace artistic teaching—they amplify it by automating administrative tasks (grading, transcription) and fostering interactive, interdisciplinary approaches. By integrating such tools, arts faculty can devote more time to mentoring, creative collaboration, and deepening students' critical engagement with culture, history, and expression.

Teachers can also use AI to tailor materials for learners with different paces, backgrounds, or linguistic proficiencies, addressing diversity more effectively than standardized resources. For students, AI-enhanced materials tend to be more relatable, visually stimulating, and cognitively engaging. These tools can help demystify complex texts, offer instant clarification or elaboration, and foster independent exploration. "This combination of AI and classroom teaching application makes AI's use in education not just the use of tools, but also a revolution in teaching methods, driving the overall improvement of educational quality." [9]

Tools like ChatGPT and Grammarly can assist students with writing support and critical feedback, while platforms like Quizlet and Kahoot! promote interactive and game-based learning. Platforms like DreamBox and Smart Sparrow analyze student responses in real time to adapt lessons dynamically which enables every student to master concepts at their own speed. International case studies demonstrate the successful integration of AI in classrooms—for example, Finland's use of AI-based personalized feedback systems in writing instruction. In Bangladesh, platforms like Studyfoo, uPresenter, etc have emerged, offering AI-driven tools that assist students in tracking study time, generating custom quizzes, and accessing tailored learning materials. Such technologies can cater to individual learning needs, allowing students to progress at their own pace and focus on areas requiring improvement. Ultimately, AI supports a more responsive, learner-centered model of education—one that aligns well with the critical, reflective ethos of the Arts and Humanities, while moving beyond the rigidity of rote-based approaches.

Crossing Wires: Unpacking the Complexities of AI Integration in Classrooms

While the promise of AI in revitalizing Arts and Humanities education is substantial, its implementation within Bangladeshi universities is not without significant challenges such as "accessibility issues, data privacy and security concerns, the digital divide, and potential biases in AI algorithms."[5] Many educational institutions lack the necessary technological infrastructure, including reliable internet connectivity and access to digital devices, AI literacy, essential for implementing AI tools effectively. As Arts and Humanities educators have limited exposure to AI technologies or digital pedagogy, there is a notable shortage of educators trained in integrating AI into their teaching practices. **"**Most universities in Bangladesh, especially the public ones, lack high-performance computing infrastructure, data labs, and software tools which are essential for effective AI education." Classrooms are often overcrowded, and the student-to-teacher ratio makes personalized instruction difficult even with technological aid. Budget allocations for the Arts and Humanities are typically lower than those for STEM fields, resulting in limited investment in digital learning tools or teacher training programs. Resistance to change is also a challenge. Arts and Humanities often value human-centric, interpretive learning—some educators may see AI as a threat to originality or authenticity. Moreover, Most AI tools are English-dominant, offering limited support for Bangla or regional dialects used in cultural studies and literature or translation studies. Again, Most of the AI platforms are trained on Western-centric datasets, which may not reflect local history, culture, or values accurately. However, ethical and pedagogical concerns also arise in this context. Easy access to AI writing tools (like ChatGPT) raises questions about originality and academic integrity. Students can misuse AI by submitting assignments created by ChatGPT or QuillBot without understanding the course content. According to Ramchandani, excessive dependence on AI for grading and assessment can overlook the nuances of student work and critical thinking skills. For example, AI grading essays without understanding context or creativity. In creative writing, art, or philosophy, using AI to produce original works can raise serious questions about authorship, originality, and artistic honesty. However, the potential for transformation is evident, and frameworks already exist to support these changes.

Recommendations

To address these obstacles, a set of practical and context-sensitive recommendations is necessary. Universities must invest in comprehensive training programs to equip faculty with both technical and pedagogical skills related to AI. Workshops, hands-on labs, and ongoing support systems can help reduce anxiety and build confidence among educators**.** To modernize higher education in Bangladesh and equip graduates with essential 21st-century competencies, universities should adopt a comprehensive, AI-integrated framework. Below are some detailed, actionable recommendations aligned with these objectives:

Establish a Comprehensive AI Usage Policy

Universities must create clear, institution-wide guidelines regarding the use of AI in teaching and learning. This policy should define ethical boundaries, data privacy protocols, acceptable uses of AI-generated content, and academic integrity standards. A formal AI policy ensures consistency across departments, protects both students and faculty, and prevents misuse or overdependence on technology. It should also include consent-based use of student data and transparency in AI-driven decision-making systems (like AI-based assessments or feedback mechanisms).

Implement Structured AI Training for Faculty

Faculty members need systematic, ongoing training to use AI tools effectively and critically. One-time workshops are not enough—universities should establish tiered training programs that include beginner, intermediate, and advanced levels. Training

should cover both technical skills (e.g., how to use AI writing assistants, adaptive platforms) and pedagogical strategies (e.g., how AI can support active learning). Peer-to-peer mentoring and communities of practice can also be encouraged, where tech-savvy teachers support others in gradually adopting AI-based methodologies.

Ensure Equitable Access to Digital Infrastructure

Access to AI-enhanced education must be democratized. Universities need to invest in strong internet connectivity, updated computer labs, access to licensed software, and smart classroom technologies. Importantly, these resources should be equitably available across all faculties—not just limited to STEM or business departments. Special provisions should also be made for students from underprivileged backgrounds to avoid widening the digital divide. Infrastructure upgrades must prioritize affordability, accessibility, and sustainability.

Monitor and Evaluate AI Adoption

Universities should form dedicated committees to monitor AI integration, using evaluation metrics such as teacher satisfaction, student outcomes, engagement levels, and ethical compliance. Regular feedback through surveys, interviews, and observations can guide refinements.

Promote a Culture of Responsible Innovation

Institutions should foster a culture where AI serves as a collaborative educational tool—not a replacement for human intellect. This requires integrating ethical discussions, addressing biases, and encouraging critical engagement to ensure technology aligns with human-centered learning values.

Conclusion

This study has examined the transformative potential of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in reshaping Arts and Humanities education in Bangladeshi universities. Findings suggest that AI can move learning beyond passive memorization toward dynamic, student-centered pedagogies by enabling personalized instruction, interactive experiences, and automation of routine tasks. For students, this fosters critical thinking and creativity; for educators, it reduces administrative burdens and enhances mentorship opportunities. At an institutional level, AI integration could modernize curricula, bridge interdisciplinary gaps, and strengthen digital infrastructure—ultimately cultivating a more innovative and inclusive academic culture. However, challenges such as infrastructural limitations, financial constraints, ethical dilemmas, and resistance to change must be addressed. Future research should explore AI's long-term impacts in Bangladesh. Key focus areas include affordable solutions, culturally adapted tools for humanities, and ethical safeguards. Such studies could guide effective AI integration in Global South universities. The goal is not to replace human teaching but to empower it—to shift the learning culture from one of rote learning to one of critical engagement, creative exploration, and meaningful collaboration. Ultimately, with the right support and vision, AI can be a transformative ally in this pedagogical journey.

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