The Value of Soft Skills In A World Dominated By AI: Why Human Qualities Are More Critical Than Ever?

Liva Adil Shareef

English Language Teaching Department, Faculty of Education, Tishk International University, Iraq, Erbil.
Liva.sharef@tiu.edu.iq

ABSTRACT

Due to the rapid growth of artificial intelligence (AI) in the modern workplace, there is growing anxiety about the possibility of automation replacing human occupations. While AI can execute specialized jobs faster or more precisely than humans, it cannot recreate the complex social and emotional relationships essential in many fields. The importance of soft skills like communication, cooperation, problem-solving, and emotional intelligence becomes clearer in this environment. Many human features and characteristics take time to automate or imitate with AI. As a result, they can supplement AI and assist people in efficiently working alongside it. This paper explores the importance of soft skills in a world dominated by AI and argues that they are more vital than ever for professional success. It will also examine how higher education institutions can support soft skills development in their students, including through experiential learning opportunities, project-based assignments, and extracurricular activities. In addition, the study will provide examples of universities that have successfully incorporated soft skills development into their programs, highlighting best practices and innovative approaches. Ultimately, the goal is to provide a comprehensive overview of the role of soft skills in the modern workplace and to demonstrate the importance of investing in their development.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence, AI-powered tools, Labor market, Soft skills.

INTRODUCTION:

The modern era has seen tremendous technological, scientific, and societal transformations. Humanity has had to adapt to new ways of living and thinking due to these advancements, and individuals must be able to manage these changes to prosper. This includes understanding the challenges and obstacles that have emerged because of progress and being able to address them effectively. Additionally, it is essential to keep track of the latest development in different aspects of life, such as economy, politics, and environmental issues, as these would directly impact the individual's life. Due to those rapid changes, the contemporary age demands a high level of adaptability and continuous learning from individuals to navigate the complexities and challenges of modern life.

The purpose of education is a multifaceted concept that has evolved and is influenced by various factors such as social, personal, and cultural contexts. For example, in ancient civilizations, education was primarily focused on training individuals for specific societal roles, such as becoming a warrior or a priest. In contrast, in modern times, the purpose of education is often seen to gain knowledge and intellectual intelligence, as well as to prepare individuals for the workforce (Brown, 2003, p.143).

In many societies, employment is a primary purpose of schooling. Education is frequently considered a means of learning the skills and knowledge required for a successful career. This concept is particularly true in today's job market more than ever, where employers are increasingly looking for individuals with diverse technical and soft skills. With the rapid expansion of technology in the workplace, the role of soft skills in the job market is becoming increasingly important. It is important to note that soft skills such as problem-solving, communication, and collaboration are becoming highly valued as they are difficult to automate or replicate with AI. Higher education institutions play a crucial role in providing students with the necessary skills to be competitive in the job market (Brown, 2003, p.145).

Moreover, the concept of education extends beyond the usual classroom setting. It continues beyond learning knowledge and abilities for one's future work. Education reform is required to guarantee that students have the skills and knowledge necessary for success in the modern workforce. Revising the curriculum emphasises developing critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication skills. Additionally, it is essential to incorporate hands-on learning experiences and practical applications of coursework to prepare students for the challenges they will face in the real world. Furthermore, reforms should also focus on teacher training and professional development to equip educators with the latest knowledge and techniques for delivering effective and engaging instruction. Consequently, reforms should consider ways to increase access to education, including initiatives targeting under-resourced communities so all students have an equal opportunity to succeed (Rojewski, 2002).

Education has developed in various ways in the twenty-first century, reflecting society's evolving wants and requirements. Numerous theories and concepts have been proposed, emphasizing the necessity of developing students' emotional and social intelligence and cognitive talents. As technology advances, the need for critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication skills has become more apparent; in other words, 21st-century skill is not limited to the cognitive background but is more likely to soft skills. Education is no longer just about imparting knowledge and information but also about developing lifelong skills and character traits to help individuals succeed in the rapidly changing and interconnected world. The shift in focus from traditional subjects to developing a well-rounded individual is a testament to the changing times and demands of the modern age. It also includes personal development, self-discovery, and higher education institutions vital in providing students with social and emotional intelligence acquisition. This context offers opportunities to develop and enhance their soft skills through various activities and programs, such as experiential learning opportunities, project-based assignments, and extracurricular activities. In addition, the purpose of education is a complex and dynamic concept that evolves and is influenced by various factors. While gaining knowledge and intellectual intelligence is an essential aspect of education, it is also crucial to recognize the importance of developing soft skills to compete in the job market and succeed personally and professionally. Higher education institutions are critical in providing students with the skills and opportunities necessary to achieve these goals (Fernández-Berrocal, 2008).

1. THE INTEGRATION OF TECHNOLOGY INTO EDUCATION:

The educational system has seen substantial changes in the previous few decades. Technology breakthroughs have influenced how we teach and learn. However, the rate at which these changes occur might make it difficult for students to keep up with the educational system's pace. The difficulties that students confront in Iraq are significantly greater. Students cannot adjust to changes in education as rapidly as their counterparts in other countries due to financial constraints, a lack of facilities, and persistent political battles that directly affect the shape of

the ministry of higher education and plans in the educational sector. Access to an advanced learning environment is no different for all students, leading to disparities in educational opportunities. Not all students have access to the same tools and resources necessary to keep up with the latest trends in education.

Another huge issue is that many schools, academic institutions, and educational institutes must use technological instruments or AI systems in their classroom instruction. As a result, pupils are not exposed to such modern technologies at a young age, resulting in a lack of technical knowledge when they join university. The result of all these factors is that students face significant difficulties when exposed to a whole new system at the university level. They may not need to become more familiar with the technical tools and AI systems essential to modern education. This lack of technology exposure can disadvantage students' academic pursuits and careers (Chen & Chen, 2020, p. 275-276). The Bologna process, which aims to harmonize higher education across Europe, has significantly changed the educational structure of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region. However, implementing these changes has not been without challenges. One significant obstacle has been dealing with Moodle and other technical tools that have become essential to modern education. Moodle, an open-source learning management system, has been widely adopted in universities across Europe as part of the Bologna process, likewise in universities that applied the Bologna process in Kurdistan, considering that the system is not applied over the region yet. However, many students in the Kurdistan governmental region are unfamiliar with this technology, which can create confusion and challenges for them (Ade, 2021, p. 80-81).

Moreover, the difficulty is not wider than technical systems. However, the shift towards visual and technical materials in modern education has replaced traditional written and printed ones, which has caused significant challenges for both teachers and students. While visual and technical materials have the potential to enhance the learning experience, they also require a different approach to teaching and learning. For teachers, transitioning to visual and technical materials requires new skills and techniques to effectively communicate complex concepts to students. The reliance on written and printed materials has been a long-standing tradition in education, and breaking away from that approach can be challenging.

Additionally, using visual and technical materials requires access to advanced technologies and tools that may not be readily available in all educational settings, particularly with the instability of electricity power in the country. The shift towards visual and technical materials can overwhelm students, particularly those unfamiliar with these tools. Visual and technical materials require a different set of skills than traditional written and printed materials, such as the ability to analyze and interpret data presented in charts, graphs, and diagrams using; also, it can be more time-consuming for students who may need to navigate complex software and interfaces to access these materials (Facer, 2011, P. 18-20).

1.1. ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) IN EDUCATIONAL CONCEPTION:

When it comes to the use of artificial intelligence in education, a controversial argument arises. Chen & Chen (2020, P 277) argues that AI hurts learners, making them overly reliant on devices and sources instead of developing their intelligence and skills. This can result in

learners becoming skilled in using devices and AI tools, but their interpersonal skills may not be developed.

On the other hand, there is a growing agreement that developing AI-powered instruments that aid learners to be more productive and efficient will contribute significantly to the educational system. Using artificial intelligence has the potential to revolutionize the way we learn, offering personalized and adaptive learning experiences that can cater to each individual's unique needs and learning style. In addition, AI-powered tools can help educators identify areas where learners need additional support, such as personalized feedback and assessments, and provide real-time feedback to enhance their learning outcomes (Chen & Chen, 2020, p. 278). AI can also help educators identify student performance patterns, which can inform the development of targeted interventions and resources. Moreover, AI can provide learners access to vast amounts of data and information that would be impossible to access otherwise. This can allow learners to explore new topics and ideas and develop a deeper understanding of the world around them. However, using AI in education also brings various ethical challenges that must be addressed. As AI becomes more prevalent in the educational system, raising awareness and promoting AI ethics that address fairness, transparency, and privacy is essential.

One of AI's most significant ethical challenges in education is the potential for bias in the algorithms used. AI algorithms are only as unbiased as the data they are trained on. If the data used to train the algorithm is biased, it can result in biased outcomes. This could lead to unfair treatment of students, particularly those from marginalized or underrepresented communities. Another ethical challenge is the issue of transparency. Students, educators, and parents need to understand how AI is being used in the educational system, what data is being collected, and how it is being used. Lack of transparency can lead to mistrust and create barriers to adopting AI in education. Moreover, there are concerns about privacy and the security of student data. As AI-powered tools collect more data on students, there is a risk that this data could be misused or fall into the wrong hands. This highlights the need for robust privacy policies and data protection measures (Borenstein & Howard, 2020, p. 61–65).

2. ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE:

Another ethical issue that arises with employing AI in education is academic integrity. The growing use of AI-powered tools in grading and assessment raises concerns about academic integrity, particularly when students can manipulate AI-powered tools to obtain higher grades. Students, for example, may try to fool plagiarism detection algorithms by utilizing paraphrase or citation manipulation tactics. This can result in false negatives or positives, unfairly impacting a student's academic performance. Moreover, using AI in grading raises concerns about the accuracy and consistency of grades. There is a risk that AI-powered grading tools may not be able to assess certain types of assignments accurately or may not consider the nuances of student work. This can lead to unfair treatment of students and undermine the credibility of the educational system.

To address these concerns, developing AI-powered tools designed with academic integrity in mind is important. This includes implementing robust plagiarism detection algorithms that are capable of detecting sophisticated manipulation techniques, as well as developing grading algorithms that are transparent and accountable. Furthermore, educators can play a critical role in promoting academic integrity by educating students about the importance of academic honesty and the risks of cheating. By fostering a culture of academic integrity, we can ensure

that the use of AI in education supports, rather than undermines, the integrity of the educational system (Moya, 2023, p. 59-75).

Using writing tools is not a new trend in education; throughout history, various writing tools and grammar detector tools have evolved to assist students with educational purposes. Initially, the tools were limited to spelling correctors, grammar checkers, and writing style modifiers, significantly improving non-native students' writing. Those tools greatly impacted students' productivity, and a piece of writing could be completed in a shorter time with no mistakes yet original and out of the writer's creativity.

Later on, alongside the development of artificial intelligence in different fields, the educational aspect witnessed changes as well. The tools have been developed with unbelievable features and privileges. For instance, the various paraphrasing tools shifted from correction to invention. However, these tools discourage students from producing original written works. In other words, using artificial intelligence (AI) in education has brought about new tools that can assist students in improving their writing skills. From the early days of spelling correction and grammar checkers to the latest AI-powered writing tools, these tools have helped students to be more productive and efficient in their writing. One of the main concerns with AI-powered writing tools is their potential to discourage students from producing their original written works. Some researchers have argued that these tools encourage a culture of plagiarism and can lead to students relying on technology instead of developing their critical thinking and analytical skills (Perkins, 2023, p. 24).

Despite these concerns, there are also potential benefits to using AI-powered writing tools. For example, AI-powered writing assistants can help students identify errors in their writing and suggest improvements in real-time, which can help them improve their writing skills over time. Additionally, some AI-powered writing tools offer features such as paraphrasing and summarizing, which can be useful for students learning to write in a new language or struggling to understand complex texts. It is important to note that using AI-powered writing tools should not replace the need for students to develop their writing skills and critical thinking abilities. Instead, educators should encourage students to use these tools to supplement their learning and emphasize the importance of academic integrity and originality in their writing. Furthermore, educators should actively develop AI-powered writing tools to promote creativity and critical thinking rather than simply correcting errors and generating content (Perkins, 2023, p. 26).**2.1 ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE VERSUS REAL INTELLIGENCE:**

Civilization's progress has resulted in various technologies to increase the quality of life and save time. These groundbreaking discoveries have simplified and, in some cases, made life possible. Nonetheless, artificial intelligence has recently dominated technical growth (AI). While developed by humans, AI has the potential to compete with real intelligence, causing individuals to be concerned about the future of labor markets due to the significant shift toward automation. AI has already begun transforming various industries, such as healthcare, finance, and transportation. For instance, self-driving cars have been developed with advanced AI technology, which can make decisions and drive without human intervention. Similarly, in

healthcare, AI can assist in diagnosing diseases and analyzing medical images with high accuracy (Korteling, G. C., Blankendaal, Boonekamp, & Eikelboom, 2021, p. 8).

Despite the benefits of AI, its use raises ethical concerns, including the possibility of machines replacing human workers. In particular, the growing use of AI in the labor market has sparked concerns about job loss, income inequality, and economic impact. According to (Szabó-Szentgróti, Végvári, & V, 2021, p. 13) , a report by the McKinsey Global Institute, up to 800 million jobs could be displaced by automation by 2030. As AI technology continues to develop and integrate into various industries, it is crucial to consider its impact on society and the potential ethical implications. While AI can potentially increase efficiency and productivity, it is important to ensure its implementation is done to benefit society and minimize the negative impact on individuals and the labor market.

3. THE IMPORTANCE OF IMPLEMENTING SOFT SKILLS:

The importance of soft skills grows in tandem with the rapid evolution of AI-powered tools. Soft skills are generally necessary for the twenty-first-century labor market. The work environment's ideology saw significant alterations. Besides hardness and technical history, soft skills have become necessary for standing out among coworkers. Several studies and reports have emphasized these skills' importance for workplace success. According to a report by the World Economic Forum, the top ten skills required in the job market in 2025 will include critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, emotional intelligence, and leadership skills, all of which fall under the umbrella of soft skills. In addition, a study by LinkedIn found that the top five most in-demand soft skills in 2021 were creativity, persuasion, collaboration, adaptability, and emotional intelligence (Whiting, 2021).

Furthermore, with the increased integration of AI-powered tools in the workplace, the relevance of soft skills has only grown. While AI can outperform humans in many activities, it is still limited in its ability to understand and respond to complicated human emotions, behaviors, and relationships. Soft skills become crucial in this situation, allowing individuals to negotiate interpersonal interactions and effectively connect with colleagues and clients. As a result, cultivating soft skills has become critical for individuals to succeed in the twenty-first-century work market. This can be achieved through various means, such as participating in group projects, practicing effective communication, and seeking opportunities to develop leadership and problem-solving skills (Schulz, 2008, p 146).

Soft skills implementation is becoming increasingly important in Malaysian institutes of higher learning as the government and educational institutions recognize the need to produce graduates who are not only academically competent but also have the necessary soft skills to succeed in the workforce. In Malaysia, the Ministry of Education has designated soft skill development as a national priority and has launched many efforts to promote and improve these talents. One such initiative is the Malaysian Soft Skills Index (MSSI), a tool that assesses soft skills among students in higher learning institutions. The MSSI was developed by the Ministry of Higher Education in collaboration with industry experts, and it provides a comprehensive framework for developing soft skills in students. The MSSI covers five key soft skills domains:

communication skills, teamwork and collaboration, problem-solving skills, leadership skills, and social responsibility. In addition to the MSSI, Malaysian universities and colleges incorporate soft skills into their curriculum through various courses. The University of Malaya, for example, offers a leadership and teamwork skills course, while the Multimedia University offers a communication skills course (Shakir, 2009, p. 309-315). These courses are meant to equip students with the skills they need to excel in the workplace and prepare them for leadership positions in their chosen industries. Furthermore, Malaysian schools of higher learning offer students the opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities supporting soft skills development. Several universities, for example, include clubs and societies focusing on community service, sports, and cultural activities, allowing students to build leadership, teamwork, and communication skills.

Overall, implementing soft skills in Malaysian institutes of higher learning is an essential component of the education system, as it equips graduates with the necessary skills.

4. CONCLUSION:

Finally, the rapid growth of artificial intelligence has resulted in considerable changes in the educational system and labor market. While AI-powered tools might increase productivity and efficiency, they cannot replace the value of soft human abilities such as communication, critical thinking, teamwork, and leadership. Soft skills are critical for success in the job market of the twenty-first century, as the work atmosphere has evolved toward a more collaborative and dynamic approach.

Several universities and colleges worldwide, including Malaysia, have established various initiatives and programs to help students develop soft skills in response to these changes. Malaysian colleges of higher learning aim to ensure graduates have the required soft skills to flourish in their future employment, from specific soft skills centers to integrated curricular components.

While developing soft skills is vital, addressing the issues that may occur when integrating AI into education is crucial. To ensure that the integration of AI-powered tools in education is done ethically and beneficially, ethical challenges, academic integrity, and the impact of AI on teaching and learning processes must be carefully evaluated and addressed.

Overall, incorporating soft skills development and carefully considering AI integration in education will improve student outcomes and ensure that graduates are prepared to succeed in today's work market.

REFERENCES

Ade, J. H. (2021). Challenges in the Implementation of the Bologna Process: Focusing on Three Universities of Kurdistan Region of Iraq. *Polytechnic Journal*, 80-81.

Borenstein, J., & Howard, A. (2020). Emerging challenges in AI and the need for AI ethics education. *Springer Nature Switzerland*, 61–65.

Brown, P. (2003). The Opportunity Trap: education and employment in a global economy. *European Educational Research Journal*, 143-145.

Chen, L., & Chen, P. (2020). Artificial Intelligence in Education: A Review. *IEEexplore*, 275-278.

Facer, K. (2011). *Learning Futures Education, Technology and Social Change.* New York: Routledge.

Fernández-Berrocal. (2008). Emotional intelligence in education. *Electronic Journal of Research in Educational Psychology*, 425- 427.

Korteling, J. E., G. C., v.-V., Blankendaal, R., Boonekamp, R., & Eikelboom, A. (2021). Human- versus Artificial Intelligence. *Frontiers in Artificial Intelligence*, 7-9.

Moya, B. A. (2023). Academic Integrity and Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education Contexts: A Rapid Scoping Review Protocol. *Canadian Perspectives on Academic Integrity*, 59-75.

Perkins, M. (2023). Academic Integrity considerations of AI Large Language Models in the post-pandemic era: ChatGPT and beyond. *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice*, 1-26.

Rojewski, J. W. (2002). Preparing the Workforce of Tomorrow: A Conceptual Framework for Career and Technical Education. *Journal of Vocational Education Research*, 7-35.

Schulz, B. (2008). The Importance of Soft Skills: Education beyond academic knowledge. *Journal of Language and Communication*, 146-150.

Shakir, R. (2009). Soft skills at the Malaysian institutes of higher learning. *Education Research Institute*, 309-315.

Szabó-Szentgróti, G., Végvári, B., & V, J. (2021). Impact of Industry 4.0 and Digitization on Labor Market for 2030-Verification of Keynes' Prediction. *Economic and Business Aspects of Sustainability*, 1-19.

Whiting, K. (2021). What are the top 10 job skills for the future? . *The Jobs Reset Summit.* World Economic Forum.