



In a world where people spend up to two hours a day chatting with AI "friends" like the Character.ai chatbot, there is a need to be aware of when AI helpers can manipulate or misguide users, says the writer. ST FILE PHOTO

Singapore's youth use AI every day – but most don't know what it's really doing

AI is transforming the job market. Is Gen Z prepared for it?

Zara Khanna

As I scroll through my Spotify account every morning, I see that a playlist of upbeat tunes has been curated for me: Taylor Swift's album 1989 and SZA's SOS – a cheerful mishmash of my recent favourites. Through its analysis and monitoring of my activity, artificial intelligence (AI) has successfully broken down my music taste to a science.

But it's more than just music. From Alexa to Instagram, AI is an integral part of my daily routine. In fact, it has crept into every corner of my life.

At age 16, my peers and I, who are part of Generation Z, have grown up with one-click access to technology and are surrounded by AI. But most of us haven't been taught to consider how it works beyond our surface-level interactions.

We occasionally discuss the use of ChatGPT at the international school I go to in Singapore, and my local school friends have talked about more recent conversations in their school on the overuse of AI.

But AI is still relatively new during the time of our schooling. Education on the responsible use of AI tools has not yet become a key pillar of tech education.

We trust chatbot responses from tools like ChatGPT when doing research or writing essays, without questioning their accuracy or noting inaccuracies and falsehoods. We also don't often ask if it shares our values – or who even decides these values in the first place.

But the question matters more than ever, as companies are using AI to make deeply important decisions: marking student papers, determining who

qualifies for loans, even deciding who gets hired for jobs.

Working with AI requires asking deeper questions. Where did this data come from? Who's missing from it? What happens if the system gets it wrong? It's vital that schools teach not only the technical aspects of AI, but also how to use it critically, responsibly and ethically.

GEN Z IN THE AI WORKPLACE

A 2023 study by professional services firm EY found that despite using AI more and more, Gen Z often overestimates its understanding of AI.

This is exacerbated by how massively AI and automation are changing the job market. The World Economic Forum estimates that by 2030, AI will drive the disruption of 92 million jobs, but will simultaneously create 170 million new ones.

Singapore is already experiencing AI's reverberations in its economy. The country's biggest bank, DBS, hired more technologists and data scientists than banking staff in 2023. This raises the question: What will DBS and other banks look like in 10 years, when my generation is in the job market?

My generation will play several roles in relation to AI: We could be the ones building AI systems, working alongside co-pilots (AI-powered assistants), or simply using AI in everyday life as it increasingly becomes embedded in the digital tools and systems we rely on.

But this exposes us to the powers that control how we interact with it. AI can end up reinforcing biases, making unfair verdicts, or spreading misinformation without anyone really noticing.

For example, a 2025 Nature Medicine study found that AI in healthcare was more likely to recommend advanced testing to wealthier patients. In 2024, US software vendor Workday faced a

class action lawsuit because its AI-powered recruitment software was found to discriminate against applicants based on race, age and disability.

And perhaps most disturbingly for students, plagiarism detection service Turnitin has reported a higher incidence of "false positives" in its AI writing detection feature, incorrectly flagging original work as AI-generated.

These cases show that we as users need to know the limitations of AI in order to ensure that AI systems respect and mirror values like fairness, accuracy, transparency and privacy.

We need to start noticing how AI systems respond to us: Are they overly confident, too agreeable or missing nuance in their responses? What are the AI systems we use optimising for, and given that, what perspectives might they be missing?

OpenAI chief executive Sam Altman recently admitted that ChatGPT can sometimes be sycophantic, agreeing with users too readily, as its goal is to get more short-term engagement. These kinds of disingenuous exchanges can reinforce our existing beliefs or problems – even when they're flawed – instead of challenging them.

In a world where people spend up to two hours a day chatting with AI "friends" like the Character.ai chatbot, we also need to be aware of when AI helpers can manipulate or misguide users.

The haunting case of a teen in Florida who died by suicide after confiding in an AI companion – one that never flagged his mental decline to his parents – shows just how little regard some of these systems pay to ethics.

RETHINKING AI EDUCATION

The Government is moving quickly to integrate AI into education. This year, "AI for Fun"

modules, jointly developed by the Infocomm Media Development Authority and the Ministry of Education, are being rolled out across primary and secondary schools, introducing students to core AI concepts and ethics through interactive, hands-on experiences such as the training of smart robots.

At the tertiary level, polytechnics offer programmes in AI and analytics to meet the growing demand for practical AI expertise across industries. The National University of Singapore just introduced a new Bachelor of Computing in Artificial Intelligence, which will help aspiring AI engineers learn both AI concepts and principles of responsible AI design.

These initiatives are timely and promising – but they may not be enough in terms of speed and design compared with those in other countries.

China will be offering AI classes to pupils as young as six by September, while Nanjing University has implemented a compulsory AI general core module for all undergraduate students to foster AI literacy across disciplines.

In the United States, California has passed legislation to embed AI literacy across its public school system and President Donald Trump has signed an executive order directing federal agencies to prioritise AI education in K-12 schools (kindergarten to 12th grade).

AI education in Singapore must be holistic and balanced, helping students grasp both how AI tools work and how to recognise when they mislead or fail.

Singapore primary schools have begun introducing concepts in AI through fun exercises in coding such as making games. But it's equally important for pupils to consider the implications of their actions, such as why games should not be made too addictive.

In secondary school, students should be introduced to deeper fundamentals like algorithms, while also learning about the importance of having unbiased data to feed that algorithm.

AI modules can also become more context-specific and specialised to the interests and career aspirations of each student.

For example, secondary students who are aspiring lawyers will likely be using AI assistants like Harvey in trial cases. They shouldn't have to wait until college to learn how to effectively and responsibly converse with AI. And in law school, they should be trained not just in using AI co-pilots for drafting contracts, but also in critically questioning AI recommendations that feel biased or unjust.

For artists and other creatives, internships and specialist programmes should both give experience with the latest AI tools like Runway and highlight legal and ethical questions around creative ownership when it comes to AI-generated content.

Polytechnics, ITE and universities in Singapore should have mandatory courses on AI – tailored to suit specific study areas like law, medicine and architecture – that teach both how to work with AI and how to ensure that AI aligns with professional ethics and standards.

Through this multi-layered approach to AI education, Gen Z will gain both the technical competence to work alongside AI and the ethical awareness to govern it.

This preparation comes at a critical moment. After all, the world is changing rapidly, and young people stand to gain – and lose – the most from how AI develops. The competitive advantage won't come just from who can use AI the fastest, but from who can shape it thoughtfully, question it critically and design it to serve people better.

That's the kind of future young Singaporeans can build – if we are given the education to do it right.

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