

# Artificial Intelligence, Automation and Employment: a View from an Oregon High School Senior, Class of 2020

Awareness about the growing threat of AI in the workforce is spreading, and studies have shown that the jobs at most risk are the low-wage, low-skill level positions. A less-discussed topic surrounding this issue is that the jobs students generally hold are low-wage, low-skill level ones, the very jobs that are at the highest risk of being replaced by AI. These students hold jobs not just for income, but in order to gain life experience, social skills, and technical skills.

I wanted to explore this gap in the current research on AI and the job market, so as part of a research study for the AP, I surveyed students aged 14-24 attending high school or college in Central Oregon. I asked “how will the technological unemployment of the fourth industrial revolution affect working young adults between the ages of 14-24?” I connected my survey results to previous studies’ statistics to find some hard data—mainly using the analyses and results from the Intelligensia.ai, McKinsey Global Institute, and Oxford University studies.

I found that many of students’ jobs are at risk of automation; 31% are highly augmentable according to Intelligensia.ai research, 72.4% are in high risk industries according to Oxford University, and the average probability of automation for all respondents’ jobs was 75.8% according to Oxford University statistics.

Although these numbers are worrying, the major concern that stemmed from my results how misunderstood the threat of technological unemployment was. Expectations can vary from high risk of replacement to no threat at all, where people do not believe it is possible for a machine to undertake a series of complex tasks. This misunderstanding can be seen in a series of examples from my survey, in which I allowed the respondents to freely discuss the issue at hand. For example, one student respondent stated, “I will start cooking a lasagna but then be requested by my boss to do something else and have to do both at the same time;” however many machines today are able to perform multiple tasks simultaneously and this skill is only

improving. Other responses suggest that students think machines cannot perform “hands on work” or “manually put parts together,” yet machines are advancing in dexterity and are currently capable of doing complex physical tasks.

In order to solve this problem, we need to put an emphasis on educating youth about AI and robotics as early as possible. It is vital that we properly prepare the next generation for a workforce where AI and mobile robotics are integrated into most jobs.

My research indicates that there could be valuable investment opportunities in initiatives such as:

- training frontline workers in how to identify the opportunities for automation that augments their skills and increases efficiency, productivity, and value;
- training young people in skills that machines cannot compete in, as well as design, ethics, and other non-technical or coding aspects of AI and robotics;
- focusing more education on entrepreneurship and innovation so more people can participate in the automation economy.

Workers aged 14-24, generally students, are at high risk of augmentable and automatable jobs. We need to focus our efforts in educating youth about this issue and raise awareness of technological advancements, but more importantly we must prepare the next generation for the technology-ridden workforce that they will have to face through emphasising the skills that will become vital to human employment in the next decade.

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