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NEXT STEP

The future of education

In Bangladesh, with the sheer number of universities sprouting in every street corner like mushrooms, the average quality of university education is, arguably, dipping. Even in reputed universities, it is all a matter of luck depending on how good your teacher is and how ardent a student you are to ensure the quality of the education you receive. Add to the fact that there are many courses which are not offered at a lot of the universities and it becomes clear that there is a wide gap between what people want to learn and what is being taught. For burgeoning young professionals who are looking for an edge and who want to stand out in an ever competitive job market or for fertile minds, the internet has the answer and that answer is the MOOC.

What is a MOOC?

I hear you ask. MOOC stands for Massive Open Online Course and while the name is certainly not a pretty mouthful, they are certainly not to be taken lightly. MOOCs are courses offered online by some of the world's most reputed universities and as the name suggests, they are available to anyone with the time and an internet connection. And massive is an understatement; Generally enrollment per course for any MOOC is in the thousands and they deliver a high quality education for free to the people of the world. Depending on the site, there are assignments, tests and of course lectures given. Each site also has a large community, encouraging participation of the students through forums, to help each other out with problem sets and other questions.

History of the MOOC

Distance learning has been in practice throughout the western world for almost a century. Correspondence courses have been taught by radio and by mail for many a

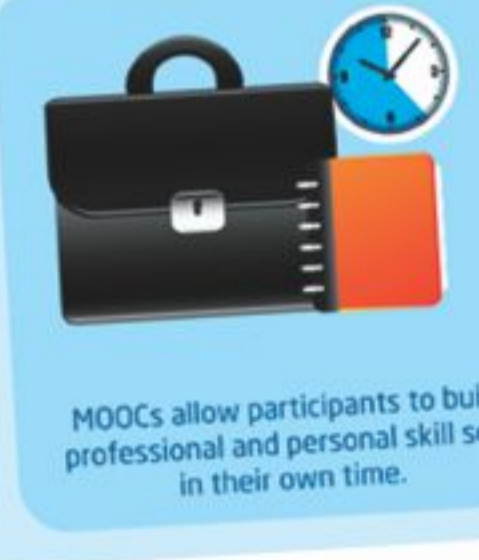
Why Are MOOCs Becoming Popular?



The online experience is constantly improving as technology continues to evolve.

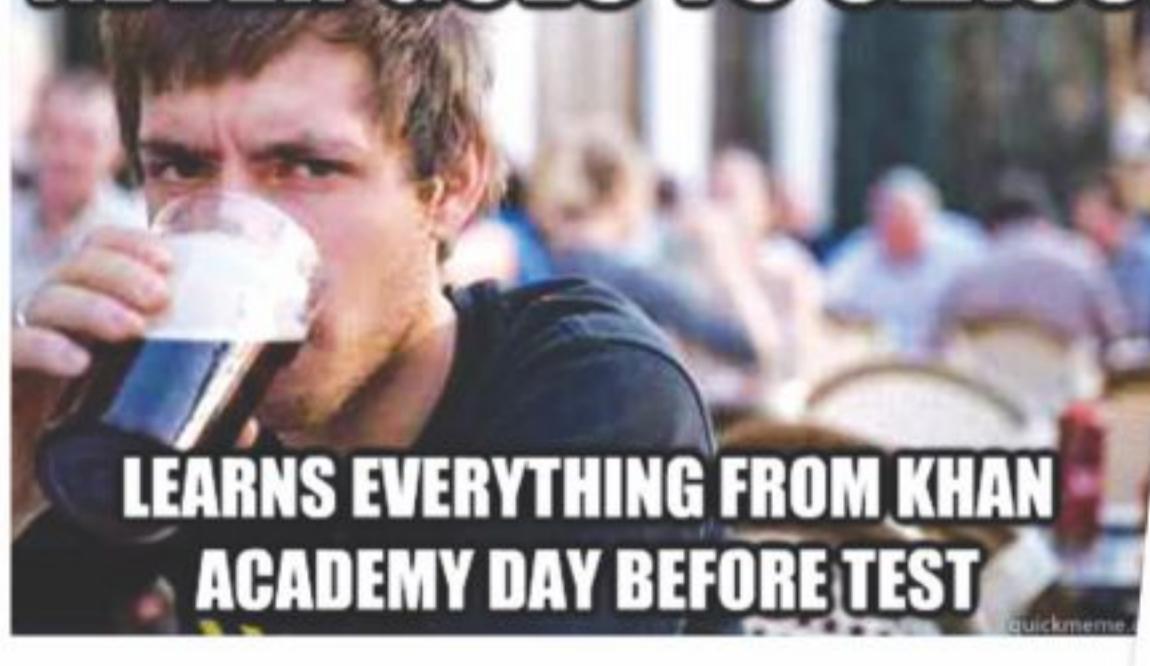


The increasing costs of higher education force some to look for less expensive alternatives.



MOOCs allow participants to build professional and personal skill sets in their own time.

NEVER GOES TO CLASS



year and in 1994, a seminar taught by James O Connell was streamed to five hundred students using the internet. From there, with the inception of websites such as Khan Academy, which focuses on short focused videos for high school and college students, the idea of online education through short videos gained traction. The first MOOC, in industry literature, was founded in Ireland in 2007 and is named ALISON (Advance Learning Interactive Systems Online). From there, the MOOC bubble expanded. Big name universities like Harvard and MIT have joined the MOOC band wagon with edX and even Stanford University recently offered all of its courses online for free.

Some MOOCs do not follow the free education band wagon and offer both free and paid courses as well.

Where can I get me some?

The top content providers are Coursera, Udacity, UdeMy and edX. As of April 2014, Coursera has 7.1 million users in 641 courses from 108 institutions. Udacity has 1.6 million users and is much more computer programming related. They offer 12 full courses and numerous courseware, though they do focus more on computer programming and mathematics courses. EdX offers the curriculum of Harvard and MIT and offer a wide range of courses which would be

Famous MOOCs

<p>Udemy: Founded in February 2010, Udemy offers more than 6,000 courses and 25,000 total lectures. Some courses are free, others are paid.</p>	<p>Udacity: Co-founded by Stanford professor Sebastian Thrun, Udacity's 11 free courses include Intro to Computer Science, Artificial Intelligence and more.</p>
<p>edX: MIT and Harvard have partnered to create edX, where the universities will offer courses online for free. It's scheduled to launch in the fall of 2012.</p>	<p>Coursera: Several top universities have partnered to offer free online courses on Coursera, which was founded by Stanford computer scientists Daphne Koller and Andrew Ng.</p>
<p>Khan Academy: Focused on mainly K-12 courses, Khan Academy offers more than 3,200 videos on a number of topics for free.</p>	<p>European Union: Education officials overseas say they are also considering starting their own MOOCs in the next few years.</p>

found in any traditional university. Udemy offers more vocational courses; courses in Yoga, home decorating and photography can be found quite abundantly on the Udemy site.

Is it right for me?

It depends on how diligent of a student you are and how ardently you wish to learn the course material.

MohsinaZaman, A CSE student from North South University had this to say.

"I did a course on Coursera. Compiler construction. I watched the lectures mostly and I didn't do any of the assignments. Mainly I used the lectures to better understand the course material that was being taught in class but I never completed it."

When asked why she didn't complete it, she said "there is only so much studying I can do. I had my university workload and I couldn't handle any more with that."

That is the main caveat with MOOCs; having the tenacity to finish them. Whilst the number of students who enroll in any given class in the thousands, the number of people who actually finish them are significantly smaller. Out of 10000, only a few hundred will complete all of the assignments and sit for the final exam. Experts cite that the main reason for this is that there is nothing to lose by not completing the course. Since the process is largely voluntary, a student is free to come and go whenever he chooses.

What about job value?

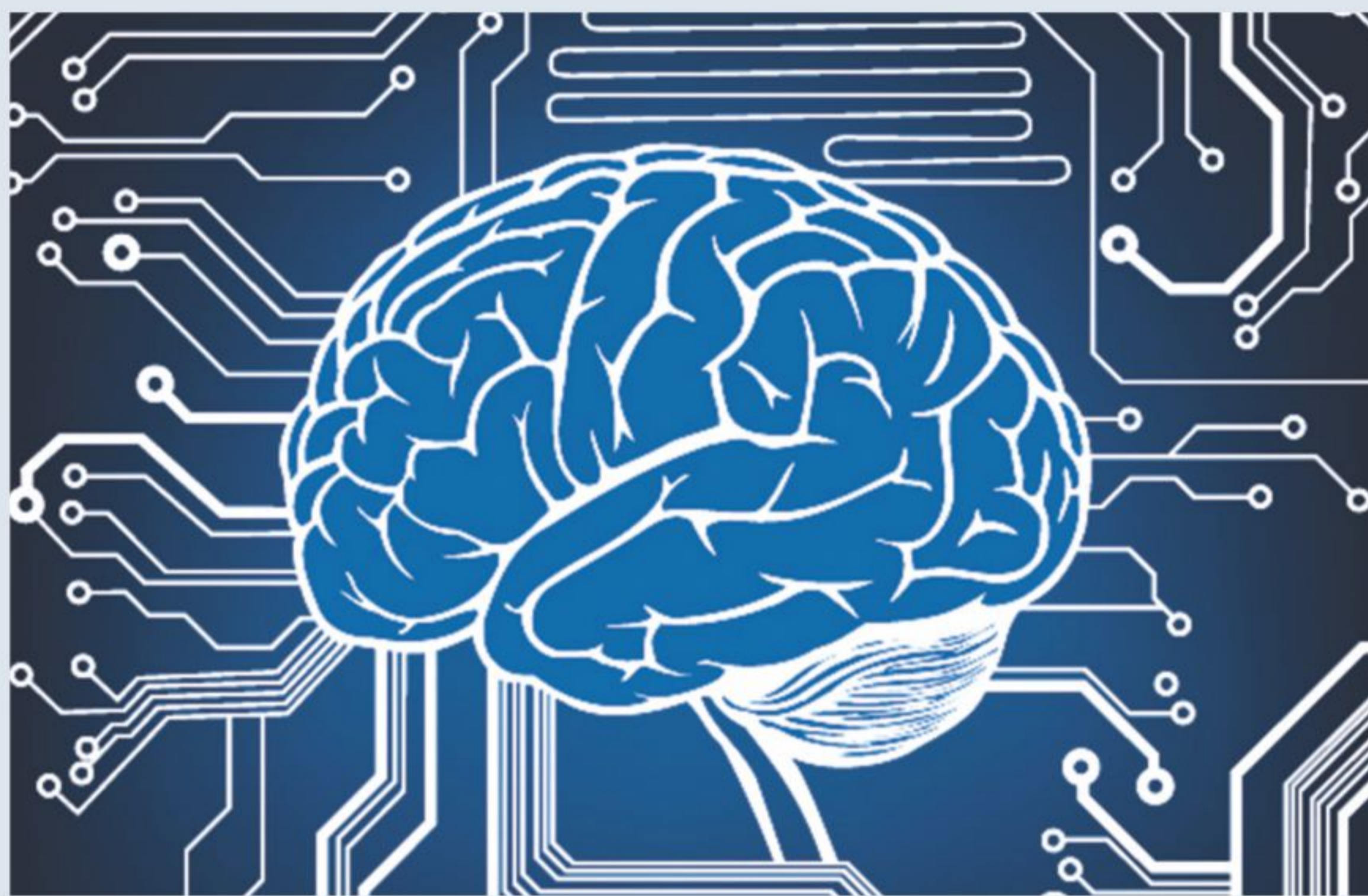
Sadly, the universities involved do not offer any form of accreditation for completing the courses. Unless, of course, one pays for it. At Coursera, a certification, upon completion of the course will cost roughly a hundred dollars. Ultimately, it is the skills you learn from the courses which are going to determine how much value you are to your employer.

But for people who love to learn and who want an edge at work, a MOOC is a great place to go. It is an excellent and more importantly free way to augment one's education and even dabble in something new. For the purposes of this article, I took a course at Udemy on Photography and I can say that the course has greatly improved my skills. I now have a better understanding of my camera and can shoot in manual pictures which are not completely underexposed or blurry.

ZUBIER ABDULLAH

The machines are taking over

When Finance Minister A M A Muhith unveiled the budget for the 2014-15 fiscal year it was met with both raised eyebrows and a resigned sigh contemplating the fact that budgets in recent years have become more the stuff of fairy tales than real life. It is the largest budget ever to be proposed with some Tk.2505 billion appropriated to the developmental and non-developmental sectors of the economy. While defense and transport have taken precedence in the media limelight, the education budget remains a bone of contention with researchers and academicians. With the rate of unemployment still going strong at 14.2% and 2.2 million youths adding to the job force in search of jobs every year, it cannot be stressed enough how instrumental a sound educational policy is crucial for the future of the nation.



The job market is now a competitive and unforgiving place and often times finding a job is harder than counting all the stripes on a zebra. A quick and easy step is to dissect the education budget tabled by the minister is to gauge the direction in which the economy is being taken by the government. Discovering nascent job markets before their explosion can be helpful for both job-seekers and job-givers. Take the finance and marketing sectors as examples. There has been an explosion of marketing majors pouring into the market looking for jobs fueled by the demands of recently made corporate houses. Where do you train your sights this time around? More of the same? Perhaps not, if you are to study the budget for fiscal year 2014-15 carefully.

The unique thing in this budget is that education and information technology were appropriated under the same bracket. And in his speech during the budget, Muhith talked of his wish to implement ICT courses in schools from a very early age. This is the biggest suggestion that the government wishes Bangladesh's burgeoning job market to shift focus from tertiary jobs into the e-tertiary sector which now constitutes a rather

large part of the world's job force. These two sectors combined were given Tk. 12,598 million in this year's budget. The allocation for education, in fact, has decreased in percentage from previous years with the government keen on providing vocational and technical education to enhance skill-sets rather than learning.

So, given the current trajectory the government is taking, what is the cardinal sin you as a job-seeker can commit? Being technologically handicapped. The prospects of finding a job appears to be bleak for people like yours truly who have difficulty in forwarding e-mails. And while I am set to be marginalized and removed from what is going to end up being the biggest job market in the country, you can do it differently. Start by taking basic IT courses and just dabble around with a computer until someone takes pity on you and gives you a job. For the rest of us, we wait in the hope that perhaps the IT job-market will stretch to include jobs where you only need to share and like things on Facebook. Wait a minute. It already does. And I can't do that properly, either.

AHMAD IBRAHIM

Bangladesh StartUp Cup

The best will last American investors invest in Bangladeshi Startups

After 3 months of grueling training and business building, top 15 startups are now fighting for investments from guest US investors and the right to go to the next stage of the 2014 Bangladesh StartUp Cup 2014. Five seasoned mentors, five hard-nut judges and five guest investors from the US are all geared up for the second round of the Cup that began in April earlier this year.

"Startups are the future of Bangladesh and we have dedicated ourselves to train and take them to the market" - Minhaz Anwar (Chair)

Bangladesh StartUp Cup 2014 is a 7 month long contest which helps entrepreneurs still at the idea stage to define their product or service, build a business around it and sell it in the market.

"This event has been extremely helpful in actualizing our ideas" - Dan J Mustafa (Participant)



The participants were mentored by some of the most seasoned names in the Bangladeshi entrepreneurship world, including Rashedur Rahman, Manager of Bkash, and Shawkat Hossain, Managing Director of BD Ventures. Yves Badaroux, former GM of YBX Consulting, and Wes Warner, Manager of Solutions Delivery, are just two of the guests and investors for the event.

"I am not here to see your presentation, I am here to hear and judge your ideas through which my invested money won't be in vain".

Wes Warren on watching a pitch The presentations went through a dynamic series of questions from the judging panel and fought to survive the upcoming round that will lead to the semi finals.

