

Digital Transformation in Higher Education PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES OF THE FUTURE

Digital Bangla text



EARLIER if you wanted to digitise a magazine article or a book you had to spend hours typing the content and correcting the typing mistakes. You can use a scanner or a digital camera to create an image or a snapshot of the document but the content cannot be edited.

Now, Optical Character Recognition (OCR) software has made it possible to convert any written, printed or image character into machine-readable text files which can be edited and searched very easily.

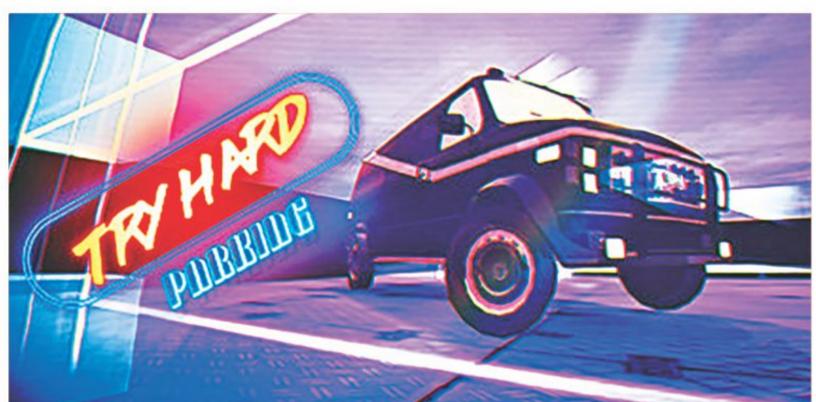
Although OCRs have been available for English text for quite some time, there was no such software for Bangla. But recently, United International University's (UIU) CSE Department developed the first-ever Bangla OCR software. The research project was granted Tk 2.3 million from the service innovation fund of a2i programme. The OCR will enable digital archiving of new and old Bangla publications. It will also save a lot of time and effort when creating, processing and repurposing various documents.

Learning through gaming

COMPREHENSION, imagination and implementation are three key things that lie at the heart of science and technology education. As the current education system is more geared towards knowledge through memorisation, students lack logical thinking and imagination. Independent University of Bangladesh has undertaken a laudable initiative to address this gap by establishing the Center for Cognitive Skill Enhancement (CCSE). The Centre was established with the support of UGC's HEQEP project.

The Centre is introducing students to the exciting world of logic, rationalisation and decision-making through games, apps and research. Regular workshops are being conducted in CCSE on game development to encourage students in this emerging software industry. A young researcher of CCSE has developed the game Try Hard Parking which is the first commercial independent game from Bangladesh to be on STEAM, one of the two most prestigious global games platforms.

CCSE is also working on natural language processing (NLP) which is concerned with



interactions between computers and human (natural) languages. Dr Ali Shihab Sabbir, Director of the Centre, informs that they are incorporating and promoting the use of Bangla in their NLP research topics. Recently, they developed a full-fledged hangman game (educational word puzzles) in Bengali. It is avail-

able on Google Play Store.

Dr Sabbir shares that they are now looking into Virtual Reality development, Big Data and Internet of Things for the near future. He underscores the importance of establishing more and more such high-tech labs to boost digital education in Bangladesh.

University mobile apps

IF a university wants to engage with students, it must go where students are most accessible. It is not possible from behind a desk. Students who are growing up using mobile apps will find websites archaic because they can be slow to load and have too many pages to find information instantaneously.

For convenient access a university app is the best option to integrate all educational requirements—student schedules, reading materials, admission and exam information, emails, newsfeeds and alerts, and even bus schedules.

BRAC University has recently launched

their mobile app named BRACU Mobile. Professor Syed Saad Andaleeb, the VC of the university, shares that through this app they are providing information that a student can use to track lifecycle issues:

grades, courses taken, schedules and classrooms, library connectivity and more. He adds that with the push notification, they can send out messages to students instantly, enhancing connectivity and convenience for students. "Through this app we are planning to introduce new services including healthcare, safety, and access to various facilities," informs Professor Andaleeb.



Internet of educational things

THE Internet of Things (IoT), the connection of devices (beyond computers and smartphones) to the internet, is poised to radically transform every aspect of our life including our learning process. It will virtually connect everything that can be connected.

In Bangladesh, some laudable initiatives have been taken to realise the potential of IoT. An IoT lab has been established in Mirpur. DataSoft and University of Liberal Arts (ULAB) are overseeing this lab. IAT and BUET are conducting the training programmes. Bangladesh Hi-Tech Park Authority and ICT Ministry are funding this lab. The whole project is being supervised by Professor Michael Wang of Columbia University.

Professor Sazzad Hossain of Computer Science and Engineering Department, ULAB informs that students from any university can access the lab if they fulfill certain educational requirements. He shares some of the ongoing projects in the IoT lab: Indoor location map which can track movement of any person in certain areas; smart garbage management system which will send a signal to the municipality



authority when bins are filled with garbage; and a smart lamp post which will automatically turn on and off the street lamps when necessary.

Professor Sazzad adds that higher educational institutions can be greatly benefitted by

using IoT in their regular educational activities. It can be used to improve safety of the campus and students, keep track of key resources including teaching staff and students, and enhance access to information.



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