

# How online certificates can upskill you

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In a corporate jungle, only the best survive. If you do not upskill, you might not last very long. While attending classes and taking up a full-time course may not be suitable if you are already employed, an online course can help you. These courses are also a good option for those who could not get admission to regular courses. They also offer an alternative to those who find the high fee of a regular programme unaffordable. For instance, an executive diploma in human resource development from XLRI costs Rs 4 lakh, while its online PG diploma costs Rs 2.23 lakh.

To expand the reach of online courses, the Ministry of Human Resource Development has announced introduction of massive open online courses (MOOCs) by premier institutions such as the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and the Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) from the current academic year. The University of Delhi is also expected to launch its MOOC programmes by the end of this month. MOOCs are typically free-of-cost short-term courses that provide online certifications across subjects.

Many international universities, including Ivy League colleges, also offer these programmes. Coursera.org, a platform for MOOC, launched just two years ago, has one crore-plus active users. It offers 839 courses from 114 institutions. EdX is another such popular platform created by Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).

MOOCs are open-for-all and you do not have to pass an entrance test or have any special qualification to join a module. Each programme has a set of pre-recorded lecture videos, which you can download or stream and learn at your own pace. However, these are specialised courses and you need to have some background knowledge to understand the syllabus and pass the online tests. Course durations vary from a couple of weeks to a few months. You have to spend an average of 6-8 hours a week on lecture videos and assignments.

While enhancing one's knowledge can be beneficial, a distance learning certificate does not carry the same weight as a regular one. Will MOOCs be viewed differently? Can these free certificates help you climb up the career ladder? Switch roles or industry? Here's what recruiters have to say:

## **A question of credibility**

The USP of MOOCs is that they offer quality education at no cost. While an on-campus 5-day certificate programme in finance or operations from the Indian School of Business will cost you Rs 75,000, a six-week online course from Wharton in these subjects is available for free. However, attending these modules does not make you an alumnus of the university. Hiring managers, therefore, do not assign very high weightage to these courses.

Also, these are virtual classrooms where you sign in with a password, verifying a student's identity is problematic. Though some universities have now introduced e-verification methods—unique typing pattern recognition with photo identity proof and webcam verification—to increase the credibility of such programmes, recruiters remain skeptical. "There is no way to actually track who is taking these tests, if the degree is authentic or not. Even if the certificates are genuine, they do not guarantee skills," says Rituparna Chakraborty, co-founder and Senior Vice-President at Teamlease Services.

Therefore, when it comes to MOOCs, the brand matters. A premier name signifies quality of the education. "The key is the certification itself and the credentials of the institute. So, with institutions like the IITs entering the space, online education in India will definitely get more credibility," says Shiv Agrawal, founder, HeadHonchos.com.

### **Why you may opt for them**

Online courses are not substitutes for a qualification you may need to land your first job. However, recruiters look at these courses as 'skill enhancement tools'. For instance, big data analytics is an expanding business domain, but you will only find online courses that offer certification on the subject. For instance, in April 2014, IIT Delhi offered a 9-week certificate course on Web Intelligence and Big Data via Coursera.org. It does not offer any such regular course.

"These certificate courses are used to rank candidates who have been shortlisted for a job," says Agrawal. So, they help you gain an edge over your peers.

However, all programmes do not enjoy the same level of acceptance among recruiters. Those that require a certain minimum admission criteria or some technical know-how are considered more valuable. "The certification for a six sigma (black belt) compulsorily needs a six sigma (green belt) or specific experience in quality management. Such a course is in demand and the certification adds significant value to the profile of the candidate," says Agrawal.

MOOCs can also be a cost-effective upskilling tool for those trying to join the workforce after a break. "They bring immense value, particularly in the senior hiring space where knowledge acquired 10-12 years ago may be past its expiry date," says Agrawal.

Agrawal warns that if executives view these programmes as an instant guarantee for a better job, they will be disappointed. It's better to think of MOOCs as something that will pay-off over time.