

E-learning makes basic employment skills available to all

By [Dr Elsamari Botha](#)

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The exponential rate of information has led to the creation of a new kind of educator: low-cost, on-demand, short-length education providers, providing courses on everything from gardening to robotics at lower costs than traditional universities and colleges.



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These are generally divided into two types: immersive educators such as Hack Bright that tend to focus on computer programming and massive open online courses (MOOC) such as Coursera that focus on collaborative and individualised learning.

The growth of immersives and especially MOOCs around the world is a sign of how quickly digital innovation is changing the world and jobs market. The skills required for the new jobs on the cutting edge of innovation are changing rapidly and new job types are being created all the time. As innovative as the alternative educators have been, they have targeted the higher-income population group.

The University of Pennsylvania published the results of a study in 2013, conducted amongst 35,000 MOOC students across 32 countries, that found that most were already well-educated young men looking to advance their careers. In Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, 80% of all students came from the wealthiest 6% of the population.

“Far from realising the high ideals of their advocates, MOOCs seem to be reinforcing the advantages of the ‘haves’ rather than educating the ‘have-nots’,” wrote the study’s author, Ezekiel J Emmanuel, according to Wall Street Journal. He went on to say that better access to technology and improved basic education were needed worldwide before MOOCs could live up to their promise.

In South Africa, the high level of mobile penetration means that online education can now also be targeted at the low-income market with success.

New courses aimed at typical workers

This is the model followed by the newly launched digital education provider Educate24. It provides courses pitched at entry-level skills, either with a vocational focus such as domestic work and secretarial work, or a life-skill focus such as an introduction to Western literature.

These courses were designed to be mobile friendly, allowing everybody access to top educators and professionals across the country and are designed to be completed at a pace set by the student, giving them the flexibility to study from wherever they want. They’re priced to the income level of a typical South African (most workers are employed in work such as teller and cashier, with a salary of about R5,651 per month, according to Career Junction).

Courses are also very short: the information that conveners give is only the most relevant, meaning that these courses can be completed in days or weeks, rather than months, as is usual. It does provide courses aimed at higher-income level people as well. The courses help students build a portfolio of competencies that will equip them for their employment needs and for life's needs as well.

It also has courses, which focuses on subject areas that one does not find with other digital educators, including the basics of customer service, domestic work and even childcare. These courses are suitable for people looking for career advancement or self-improvement or both. They also allow entrepreneurs (especially small business owners) to get to grips with all the different components of running their business.

The company is helping to deliver on the promise of connectivity – bringing affordable and accessible education and upskill opportunities to everybody. It aims to be the next step in the career of people looking to improve themselves and their lives.

For more information, go to www.educate24.co.za.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr Esamari Botha is the head of Academic Development at [\[www.educate24.co.za Educate24\]](http://www.educate24.co.za).

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