

MOOCS in Higher Education: Prospects and Challenges Ahead of Future Generations

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I. INTRODUCTION

India has a rich tradition of learning and teaching right from the ancient times. These were handed over generations to generations either through oral or written medium. **Education means studying the subjects for deeper knowledge and to understand the various subjects which are going to utilize in our daily life.** In the Ancient times the term education was not restricted to our academic knowledge but it stood for knowledge that is obtained and experienced by us outside the books or classrooms. Thus Education changes our perspectives to live the life. Education gives us knowledge of the World around us. It prepares us to face the challenges of the world. It changes us for better and provides us for prosperous Life.

The entire progress of the nation is dependent on her literacy rates. But unfortunately, today education is not free of cost for all. It is neither easily accessible nor affordable to some sections of Society. Education, for most, remains a distant dream. ¹Education is the foundation of the progress of a country. Education can help people choose their desired skills and career paths. With high literacy rates, any country can have happy and healthy citizens. Thus Education is the backbone of any developing country and hence sustainable development of economy is directly proportional to the number of educated citizens in that country.

Good education helps us in understanding many prospects of life such as enrichment of the personal advancement, increased social status, social health, helps us progress economically, setting goals in life and escalates our awareness towards prevailing social issues. Presently the modern education system has removed few of the complexities with the introduction of distant learning programmes. It is fully capable to withdraw the prevailing social issues of bewilderment and discrimination done among people on the basis of caste, race, religion and creed.²

1.1 Traditional Education Vis A Vis On-Line (Distant) Education

Traditional education refers to the basic conventional teaching-learning process that takes place physically in a classroom environment. The teacher and students meet physically and do face-to-face teaching and learning. The learning materials are provided physically, and students get live feedback. Moreover, the teacher can supervise and assist students' work. Often, traditional education mainly practices teacher-centered learning. Traditional education emphasizes direct instruction and learning for students. Students mainly learn by listening and observation in a physical learning environment. However, they get the opportunity to discuss the details of the work and clear any doubts they have. This will help to improve the performance and competence of the students more effectively. With new educational reforms, student-centered learning is also encouraged in physical learning environments.

In Distant education or in online education, all the learning materials are provided virtually, and the teacher can share what she or he teaches using screen sharing. At the same time, students can also engage in group work using various options. Therefore, online education can give students an experience similar to that of a physical learning environment. With the emergence of the COVID 19 pandemic in 2019, online teaching and learning have been promoted all around the world. Not only teaching and learning but also the evaluation process happens virtually in many educational institutes around the world.

¹ N.Kavita ,MOOCS in Indian University Education System: A study on awareness and motivation among students and teachers of Indian Universities (2015).

² Dr.Rupak Chakravarty. MOOCS in India: Yet to Shine. International Journal of Information Studies and Libraries. 14.Retrieved from www.researchgate (2016).

The key difference between online education and traditional education is that online education takes place in a virtual environment while traditional education takes place in a physical classroom environment. In traditional education, students directly engage with teachers while whereas in online education the students do not get to interact with the teacher and other students directly. Moreover, traditional education provides hands-on experience for students in their learning processes, whereas online education does not provide hands-on experience. Although textbooks and printed materials are provided in a traditional classroom environment, the materials needed for online education are provided virtually, usually in the form of digital files like PDFs, audios, videos, etc. In addition, online education tends to be more convenient than traditional education since students do not need to travel. They only need a device to connect to the internet and a stable internet connection. However, some online courses may be expensive, whereas traditional education is inexpensive, letting anyone take up a course.

II. CONCEPT OF MOOCS

A Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) is a web-based platform which provides unlimited number of students worldwide with a chance of distance education with the best institutes in the world.³ The term of MOOC was coined and employed by David Cormier and Bryan Alexander in 2008 and it gained momentum in 2012 as a popular learning tool.⁴ Many MOOCs have communities that have interactive sessions and forums between the student, professors and Teaching Assistants (TAs) along with the study/course material and video lectures. The Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) movement is playing a pivotal role in transforming the higher education. Courses designed for large numbers of participants that can be accessed by anyone, anywhere as long as they have an internet connection, are open to everyone without entry qualifications, and offer a full/complete course experience online for free. At present, NPTEL, mooKIT, IITBX, and SWAYAM are the platforms used in India for offering online courses.⁵

As more initiatives are launched, millions of people around the world carry on participating in MOOCs through a growing diversity of courses and platforms. Such initiatives continue to attract a high level of interest from reputed educational institutions, senior politicians, policy-makers and popular media houses. The different interest groups and stakeholders have quite different reasons for promoting MOOCs and consequently these education agenda must be seen alongside powerful forces that consider online learning as a means of intellectual development, enhancement in self esteem. This results ultimately in the increasing competition between institutions which started introducing new business models with low-priced public funding for universities and creating a global higher education digital marketplace.

2.1 Features of MOOCs:

Moocs provides following features as a Modern Teaching mode:⁶

- i) The Diversity of Courses which is of the student's interest and Value added to their Degrees is the first outstanding feature of Moocs. In respect of language of Teaching, these courses covers various languages including foreign languages also. In the Field of Displines, It includes not only theoretical subject but also Practical oriented subjects also like photography, nutritional courses Occupational therapy also.
- ii) The Autonomy is one of the features run through the Moocs. The Student can choose subjects of their own interest. A science student can choose a subject like philosophy or Psychology. Thus he gets rid of Traditional University Schedule. The student can choose his or her Suitable time even in evening also. The student can join the Class from any place. This will increase efficiency of Students. At the end student can go for online examination to get Certificate for the Course. Some Universities adopted Moocs courses in their curriculum and gets transferred the Moocs score into credits of university.

³ Wikipedia (2018). Massive open online course [EB/OL]. [2018-11-29]
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Massive_open_online_course

⁴ H. Fournier, and R. Kop, MOOC learning experience design: Issues and challenges, International Journal on E-Learning, vol. 14, issue 3, pp. 289-304, 2015.

⁵ M. H. Baturay, An overview of the world of MOOCs, Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences, issue 1, pp. 427-433, 2015.

⁶ S. Cooper, and M. Sahami, Reflections on Stanford's MOOCs, Communications of the ACM, issue 2, 2013.

iii) The ‘Openness’ is another feature of Mooc. Courses on the Moocs are shared on Internet Platform and learners can make their Choice of Time, Place at their own will. Most of the Courses are free of Charge like Coursera.

2.2 Opportunities for Higher Education

The traditional method of learning is often teacher- textbook oriented. That means students learn knowledge under the guidance of teachers who considers textbooks as the guide. In today’s information age it is impossible for higher education to avoid the huge wave of knowledge available on Google. Probably this may be the background for teaching innovation in today’s universities. The fast spreading of MOOCs since the year of 2012 has been causing historical changes to higher education and bringing in golden opportunities for its development.

The traditional teaching style can no longer meet the requirement of higher education in the modern era with the information technology as the outstanding feature. Today, the aim of education in universities is to construct the “community”, where both teachers’ and students’ get an opportunity for innovation and improvement which is highly appreciated.⁷This results in the harmonious development of teaching, research, its application in industrialization which aims at service towards society. In this way, the disagreement between teaching and researching finds an effective way-out. With the integrated system of homework, exams and discussion, these courses spread quickly and attract more and more students and universities. The academicians and teaching experts in universities began to recognize that the rise of MOOCs will definitely bring the reforms in university teaching. The wave of curriculum innovation introduced by MOOCs is still playing a considerable role in higher education. Thus the Benefits of Open Online Courses can be summarized as follow;

1. Work from anywhere, at any time
2. Review lectures instantly
3. Less intimidating
4. More time to think before sharing
5. Focus on ideas
6. Group communication
7. Flexible learning schedule
8. Instructor availability

2.3 Challenges of MOOCs

Recently MOOCs have been extensively applied in higher education and benefited a lot of learners and teachers. In the meantime they are faced with some challenges:

One of the distinctive challenges lies in the high rate of dropout as compared with the high rate of enrollment, which requires the suggestions from the curriculum designers and researchers to find out the reasons behind it. One possible reason is that the courses cannot meet students’ personalized learning needs. In the design of the current MOOCs, courses are not updated according to students’ instant needs. As a result, it is necessary to improve students’ online learning experience by predicting their learning needs on the basis of their learning behavior data. The openness and the sharing features of MOOCs are a double-edges sword, which offers both conveniences for learners and instructors but becomes a challenge for the teaching management in MOOCs. The lack of positive motivation, self-stimulation and effective interaction are some of the reasons for students’ dropout from MOOCs. Other reasons include the low coverage of credit certificate and the most important one is the differences of learners’ knowledge background and learning needs.⁸ An engineer student and arts student has different analytical grasping,if they chose one course may result in lack of interest for Arts student.

Another challenge comes from the evaluation system. The traditional one mainly focuses on whether students have mastered the knowledge in textbooks or provided by teachers via comparing students’ homework or examination papers with the standard answers. This kind of evaluation pattern is similar to the production of goods in assembly line in

⁷ J. Summit, global citizenship demands new approaches to teaching and learning: AASCU’s global challenges initiative, Change the Magazine of Higher Learning, issue 6, 2013.

⁸ R.Chakrabarti, &A. Ghosh, Are MOOCs the answer? The Hindu [New Delhi]. Retrieved from <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tpfeatures/tp> (2013, August 5).



factories. Its major shortcoming is students' passive role as "being evaluated" and teachers' boring and repetitive work. When it comes to MOOCs, students are much more flexible than the ones in traditional classes for the freedom from the restriction of time and place, which makes it impossible for teachers to supervise their learning process. Besides, MOOC learners are various in both learning manners and learning purposes. The differences and complexity among the learner groups makes the evaluation of their learning consequences a hard job. It is urgent to introduce the modern technologies such as artificial intelligence, cloud computing and big data into the evaluation system of online courses, which requires the blending of the new generation technology and the evaluation pattern.⁹

III. CONCLUSION

MOOCs have brought in both opportunities and challenges to learners and teachers around the world. There are certain problems which deserve the suggestion from the instructors and researchers, such as how to keep MOOCs' sustainable development and how to get out of the current difficulties in higher education improvement. On one hand, with the multiple research perspectives, most studies on the theory and practice of MOOCs are still at the preliminary stage resulting into lack of systematized research idea. Hence researchers should focus more on MOOCs' educational value and switch their research from the individual course to the comparison among different learning situations. On the other hand, studies on MOOCs' application and practical pattern are not sufficient. Most current research on MOOCs mainly focuses on the theoretical discussion, management evaluation and investigation on learners' acceptability and satisfaction.¹⁰ As an important drive in higher education reform, MOOCs help to reconstruct the education service pattern, realize the talent cultivation aim and improve learners' spirit of innovation. Some enlightenment can be gained from the reflections on MOOCs and traditional teaching. For example, the relationship between them is complementation rather than substitution and the combination of the two can make both of them play their roles effectively. MOOCs' functions are multiple: they can help students prepare themselves well for a new term, they can improve universities' popularity, and they can also provide the online learning data to improve traditional courses. As a result, researchers should keep pace with the times and regard MOOCs as the means to reform educational technology. MOOCs comply with the trend of education development in the era of internet and the popularity of information technology makes the cultivation of international talent a mission for more universities. The openness and cultural diversity of MOOCs bring in a series of questions requiring our further research and exploration, such as how to ensure the teaching quality of MOOCs with so many online learners, how to integrate the cross-cultural concept into MOOCs in different courses, and how to improve learners' cross-cultural capability. In future research, more efforts should be paid to enhance the learning opportunities provided by MOOCs. There is strong need to do research for reducing the percentage of dropout from the Courses.

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