Exploring the possibilities of OER in improving the effectiveness of higher education and promoting lifelong learning.

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The Background of the study:

With the learner becoming the center of all learning and educators assuming the role of a guide by the side, facilitating learning, MOOCs - Massive Open Online Courses and OER - Open Educational Resources are gaining importance at an exponential pace. The entire focus is on providing enriching experiences where learners learn at their pace, in their time. In this process of developing and deploying learner centered open courses, massiveness is something which needs to be discussed. Talking about massive courses implies that it reaches a large population which is diverse in its socio-cultural, economic, geographic and intellectual aspects. In light of this, massiveness of the courses render them less learner centric. The aspect of Openness in terms of exhaustiveness, cultural and social inclusion, in the pan global context, needs to be studied. This is certainly an over promising venture and needs a careful discussion. With this background, a brief understanding of MOOCs, and its origin is the first thing to be considered.

Having its origin in the field of distance learning, MOOCs are its enhanced form, made possible due to the digital advancement and its application in the field of learning and education. MOOCs undoubtedly tend to create a virtual learning environment, to add meaning to the open educational resources available with an access to reuse, share and distribute freely under open licenses. With a major focus on transfer of information and construction of knowledge through Connectivism led constructivism, MOOCs tend to establish a connection between the facilitator and learner and also among the learners, despite the geographical distances and bridging the physical gaps. This could be a possible reason why MOOCs are gaining ground as an extended and enhanced form of distance learning courses. Distance learning courses mostly do away with proper assignments. Even the contact programmes are most times rendered ineffective due to feeble attendance and lack of interest. Lack of material, untimely exam schedules and questions on quality assessment all portray distance learning programmes less effective in relation to the regular face to face courses. Unlike distance learning courses, which due to these and several other reasons were not readily accepted in the mainstream, MOOCs still have made some place in the mainstream education, even though it is still limited. [1]Open distance learning is a more advanced form of

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[1] (n.d.). Understanding the MOOCs continuance: The role of openness .... Retrieved November 2, 2020, from Understanding the MOOCs continuance: The role of openness and reputation

higher education because it resembles the openness exhibited by individuals in everyday life. MOOCs claim to be quite massive and have a large section of people enrolled at a time. [2]MOOCs are boasting considerable participant numbers, but also suffer from declining participant activity and low completion rates.

Improving conceptual understanding and learning by offering high quality, self paced learning e-content, leads to minimize the costs incurred on self learning and development. This reduces not only the financial costs, but also the costs in terms of time and effort. MOOCs can accommodate thousands of participants at a time and can cater to their needs in a virtual space, with the instructor having to put in minimum efforts for developing and deploying the course, irrespective of the number of enrolments. Educational institutions are under tremendous pressure to open up in reach and accessibility of their educational resources and MOOCs are the latest trend. However, these models are still restricted to obsolete information delivering models and are one-sided to a great extent. Analytics, however, provides large data which may appear encouraging but reach of the content and assessing outcomes of the courses are still unclear. This creates a drastic need to have a proper pedagogical approach and a suggestive instructional approach and/or design to MOOCs and OERs created thereby.

MOOCs have been integrated initially into higher education with lots of variations. One of the most prominent or noticeable variations being integrating MOOCs with formal syllabus but using a flexible instructional strategy involving collaboration making it more activity and reflection based. A part of the syllabus or a major concept is treated with all possible dimensions and details thereby making it more as a form of a blended learning approach, especially in Higher Educational Institutions. Several initiatives such as Open Universities (IGNOU, YCMOU) which provide opportunities for lifelong education. In addition to these formal avenues there are several other short term programmes for engaging learners. In higher education, there are [3]three possible integration approaches: (a) integrating MOOCs in blended learning, (b) integrating MOOCs in flipped learning, and (c) integrating MOOCs in non-formal/informal learning.

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[2] (2017, April 3). A case study on narrative structures in instructional MOOC .... Retrieved November 2, 2020, from A case study on narrative structures in instructional MOOC designs

[3] (2020, May 15). Integration of Formal, Non-formal and Informal Learning .... Retrieved November 9, 2020, from Integration of Formal, Non-formal and Informal Learning Through MOOCs

Blended learning comprises having a balanced and thoughtful combination of face to face learning, using online content as supplementary or supporting material to enrich the content. Screencast videos. Lecture videos, podcasts, presentations and text material, in addition to assignments and quizzes available with an open access in MOOCs are widely used to support classroom learning in various ways, blending it with traditional classroom instructional models.

Blended learning [4]using MOOCs and interactive online technologies in traditional college settings in two ways: one, MOOCs can be used as learning resources, coupling online and in-class components, and the other, this new teaching environment provides two facilitators - one in-class instructor and the other online instructor of MOOC - showing two different points of view on the course content. [5]Taking MOOCs in the large and applying them in the small can create a blended model of education to really reinvent and reimagine what we do in the classroom.

Flipped learning model on the other hand mixes e-content and digital assessments and quizzes to provide freedom to students to learn at their pace, in their time and this is later extended to classroom activities, discussions and presentations, guided and supported by the facilitator. Most MOOCs tend to develop and offer this e-content with open access. [6]Then the resulting high quality materials will be used by distributed facilitators / teachers, who will personalize them by considering the particularities of their flipped classrooms. In most cases teachers use parts of MOOCs in their courses just as collections of digital resources, not synchronizing their students' activities with the cohort activities in the central MOOC (discussions, assignments), so the social features of MOOC are not used.

An education model with a rigid structure and well defined curriculum and syllabus put across in a formal setting is a formal education model. Teachers, students and institutions are actively involved and engaged in the teaching learning process and work in close association with each other. Students are basically taught the syllabus in a formal education. Short term MOOCs related to the curriculum are developed and offered in the form of MOOCs to enable students to have an extended learning of the topic/concepts.

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[4] (2018, February 5). Integrating MOOCs in traditionally taught courses: achieving .... Retrieved November 10, 2020, from Integrating MOOCs in traditionally taught courses: achieving learning outcomes with blended learning

[5] (n.d.). Integrating MOOCs in Blended Courses - Academia.edu. Retrieved November 11, 2020, from (PDF) Integrating MOOCs in Blended Courses | Carmen Holotescu and Antoanela Naaji

[6] (n.d.). Integrating MOOCs in Blended Courses - Academia.edu. Retrieved November 11, 2020, from https://www.academia.edu/6503489/Integrating_MOOCs_in_Blended_Courses

In-formal education, on the other hand, goes in parallel to formal education as an extension of a defined learning environment like schools, colleges and universities. The work space is out of the structured classrooms, ranging from home/family, community to blogs and other social media platforms. It is here that the learning is discussed, debated, expressed or documented. These are the things which students learn most of the time even without realizing that the learning is happening. Learning could be initiated from student-led discussions, sharing real life experiences of the students, case studies and creating audio-visual material and podcasts.

Non-formal learning comes from conducting the daily life activities as they are. It is completely unstructured and unorganized, having no specific objectives but most times outcomes from the learning is evident. The learning is passive in the sense that the learner learns all this without any particular intention of learning. Activities and lessons are outside the school, college or university settings and most times self-guided and self-directed, depending upon the interests and requirements of the students. [7]When the needs and interests of the students are taken into consideration, the student will be more interested and more willing to participate in the activities.

[8]With the growing number of MOOCs since 2008, it has been noticed that they are split into two main types : cMOOCs which were developed by George Siemens and Stephan Downes based on the philosophy of connectivism, and extended MOOCs or shortly xMOOCs, which are based on classical information transmission (Hollands & Tirthali, 2014). [9]Different ideologies have driven MOOCs in two distinct pedagogical directions: the connectivist MOOCs (cMOOC) which are based on a connectivism theory of learning with networks developed informally; and content-based MOOCs (xMOOCs), which follow a more behaviourist approach. In India, xMOOCs are popular among the students. xMOOCs are offered under NPTEL and SWAYAM which are backed up by the Ministry of Education. Some colleges and universities provide brownie points/credits on completion of these courses when they produce a certificate of completion. For

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[7] (n.d.). Non-formal education vs. formal and informal education .... Retrieved November 9, 2020, from Non-formal education vs. formal and informal education – Traditional Wooden Constructions of Europe

[8] (2017, April 3). A case study on narrative structures in instructional MOOC .... Retrieved November 4, 2020, from A case study on narrative structures in instructional MOOC designs

[9] (n.d.). MOOCs and open education: implications for higher education .... Retrieved November 4, 2020, from MOOCs and open education: implications for higher education

obtaining the certificate, they need to appear for a formal online test for which a nominal fee is charged. After successful completion of the test, a certificate is awarded to the learner. These courses are generally curriculum driven and provide a scope to explore the concepts at deeper levels and gain a considerable mastery over it. These courses also tend to build a strong content base for a student who wishes to specialize in a particular topic. These courses are also popular among the people who are in their early stages of teaching. They enrol for the course and make use of the content in different ways to aid their classroom facilitation. They generally do not need a certificate. They focus only on knowing the content and perhaps the style of delivery of the content. This could possibly explain the gap between participant enrolments and actual completion of the course.

.Objectives

1. To study the implications of changing role of educators from information providers to facilitators of knowledge
2. To assess the involvement of instructors in e-content curation and creation.
3. To analyse the challenges faced during deployment and delivery of the MOOCs.
4. To evaluate learning environments of the participants to reach them better
5. To assess the quality and adaptation of the OER in the learner perspective.

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