

# MASSIVE OPEN ONLINE COURSES (MOOCs): A BOON FOR LEARNERS IN INDIA

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## ABSTRACT

*Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) have continued to attract considerable media coverage as Indian government and universities respond to the open and online education movement. Massive open online courses (MOOCs) have drastically changed the way we learn as well as how we teach. The paper explores that MOOCs provide new opportunities to a massive number of learners to attend free online courses from anywhere all over the world. MOOCs have unique features that make it an effective technology-enhanced learning (TEL) model in higher education and beyond. It allows the learner to learn at their own pace and place without attending the formal classroom practices. It also allow the construction of bonds between hundreds or even thousands of students who self-organize their participation, learning goals, knowledge, abilities and interests.*

**Keywords:** *Boon, Massive, Technology-Enhanced Learning (TEL).*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The evolution of distance education and technological advances signify an important opportunity to increase education's access and contribution to the compliance of international commitments regarding education. In this respect, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2002, 2012) has established that free access to educational resources is a strategy to upgrade the quality of education, to facilitate the dialogue about policies, to interchange knowledge and to develop skills.

Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs) are an emerging practice in open learning. It began in 2008, when George Siemens and Stephen Downes offered the course Connectivism and Connective Knowledge in the University of Manitoba in Canada; the course had a duration of 12 weeks and 2,300 students enrolled (Fini, 2009; Wiley & Hilton III, 2009).

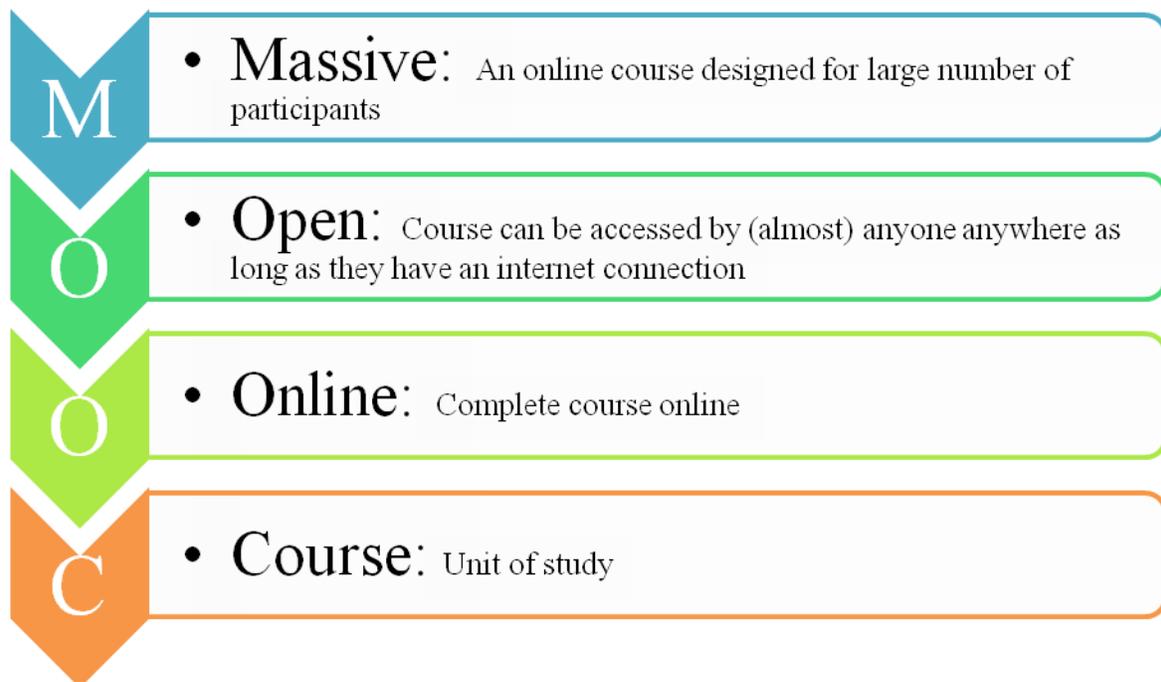
A Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) is an online course aimed at unlimited participation and open access via the web. MOOCs are courses designed for large numbers of participants that can be accessed by anyone anywhere as long as they have an internet connection. MOOCs are open to everyone without entry qualifications, and offer a full and complete course experience online for free. MOOC is a course, is open, participatory, distributed and life-

long networked learning. A MOOC is a course. It has facilitated course material, start and ending and has participants but it is not a school not just an online course but it is a way to connect and collaborate about developing digital skills.

Among their characteristics, MOOCs allow the construction of bonds between hundreds or even thousands of students who self-organize their participation, learning goals, knowledge, abilities and interests (McAuley, Stewart, Siemens & Cormier, 2010). Additionally, their free online access enables the enrollment of a large number of students (SCOPEO, 2013).

## II. MOOC: A BOON FOR TRANSFORMING THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

A MOOC is a model of educational delivery that is, to varying degrees, massive, with theoretically no limit to enrollment; open, allowing anyone to participate, usually at no cost; online, with learning activities typically taking place over the web; and a course, structured around a set of learning goals in a defined area of study. The range of MOOCs embodies these principles in different ways, and the particulars of how MOOCs function continue to evolve.



Massive open online courses (MOOCs) have attracted a great deal of interest in educational institutions. MOOCs anticipate leading the new revolution of technology-enhanced learning (TEL), by providing new opportunities to a massive number of learners to attend free online courses from anywhere all over the world (Liyanagunawardena et al., 2013). Over the last few years, the MOOCs phenomenon has become widely acknowledged as crucial for freely accessible high quality courses provided by international institutes for informal as well as formal education (Brown, 2013). A MOOC throws open the doors of a course and invites anyone to enter, resulting in a new learning dynamic, one that offers remarkable collaborative and conversational opportunities for students to gather and discuss the course content. Online course offerings transcend the boundaries of time and space, creating new opportunities for students, faculty, and educational institutions (Mayadas, Bourne & Bacsich, 2009).

### III. BENEFITS OF MOOC

Online Education has become an important mode of education and transforms the look of how the universities teach and students learn. Technology has a significant impact on higher education. In fact, technology will become a core differentiator in attracting students towards a unique way of learning. Since the regular courses in India are getting very expensive and highly competitive, distance and online education is fast developing as an amazing option for the students. Here we try to list some of the benefits of MOOCs:

- **MOOCs bring people together:** from all over the world and encourage engagement between staff and students of a given university/ institution to interact with the wider public.
- **MOOCs keep the competitive edge:** Offering diverse classes on different topics makes it easy for learners to keep up with the latest news and trends and be on top of their professional field.
- **Learning at your own pace and place, following your own schedule:** In other words learning happens in a more informal setting, at a place of your convenience and often around your own schedule
- **Choose your language:** A lot of MOOC classes are offered in different languages. It doesn't matter if you speak English, Chinese, French or Arabic. Subtitles are available for hundreds of courses and they are just a click away.
- **Anyone can sign up for a MOOC class:** You don't need a degree or previous knowledge to follow a course, only the willingness to learn.
- **No distance constraints.** You want to take free courses offered by universities from Germany, USA, China, and Austria? No problem! Just browse the offerings on the topics you are interested in. It has offered an opportunity to all individuals irrespective of his/her economic background and physical location to pursue his/her education.
- **Making classes more attractive and more meaningful:** MOOCs have great potential to expand knowledge and perspectives.

- **Distributed learning:** Participants help each other interpret the material, seek out different or related sources, and use social networking to share their interpretations. Through this distributed learning, participants gain a better understanding of the material and can get immediate feedback if questions arise.
- **Higher Education getting more advanced:** The best thing about MOOCs is; it has given a new dimension to higher education. Courses that fall under this online learning are offered by some of the best institute with good online facilities and teaching faculty.

#### IV. CHALLENGES AND CRITICISMS

Although MOOCs offer a lot of advantages, there are still some grey areas in MOOC that need to be addressed:

- **No Established Courses:** The major hurdle which is faced is the standardized and proper structure of the course. Generally, MOOCs don't have proper set of learning objectives that can go well with all participants. With having lack of proper assessment and variety of learning objectives making it difficult to learn.
- MOOC style of education will **gradually kill the care, empathy and respect** involved between teacher and students in a physical classroom. It only increases the virtual social community.
- **No proper evaluation methods** are there as automatic machine assessments and evaluations are not effective. **Peer evaluation** sometimes lead to discouragement among students which lead them to dropout from the course.
- **Very Few Completing the Course:** Presently, there are thousands of students who take up MOOCs course through overseas universities, but there are only few who could complete the course entirely and others don't continue with the course for some reasons.
- **Relying on Multimedia Content:** This is yet another problem which the user faces. As the entire course is offered online, both faculty and students have to rely on multimedia content. The course contains presentations, audio lectures, etc, all these through online medium. Not every student has the access to such multimedia and engages to it entirely.

#### V. WHAT CAN BE DONE? (RECOMMENDATIONS)

MOOC as an online learning scenario in India is still growing and at an experimental stage. Online learning is not only inexpensive, but also convenient. Yet there are huge digital divides which need to be bridged on an urgent basis.

Technical difficulties are the major hurdle that both the universities and students go through. In due course, MOOCs may undermine the physical classrooms and local colleges and exacerbate educational inequality. For MOOCs to provide equitable path addressing India's higher education challenges, following are some of the ways ahead:

**Firstly**, the technological infrastructure of universities and colleges needs to be upgraded; **Secondly**, the MOOC provides should be able to leverage the mobile phone revolution; **Thirdly**, the largest demand for courses in India is of technical and professional fields. MOOCs that are geared towards these disciplines can really ease the burden over existing institutions.

**Lastly**, there is a need of greater investment in the field considering the fact that India has one of the largest numbers of students accessing the MOOCs.

So in order to make MOOC a successful online learning platform the above mentioned things should be taken into consideration so that the students shows their interest to take up online courses for their higher studies.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The MOOC has ushered in an era of global access to higher education to anyone with an internet connection. For the independent, lifelong learner, the MOOC presents a new opportunity to be part of a learning community, often led by key voices in education. It proves that learning happens beyond traditional school-age years and in a specific kind of room. Its low barrier to entry invites those who may lack the confidence to attend for-credit classes and those who cannot afford more traditional college opportunities. By providing a no-risk option for learning, MOOCs also encourage participation from those who lack time because someone facing a job changes, a move to a new residence or it may be because of any other reason. But perhaps the most significant contribution is the MOOC's potential to alter the relationship between learner and instructor and between academe and the wider community by potentially providing a very large and diverse forum and meeting place for ideas. Those enrolling in a MOOC are likely to discover learning at its most open on a platform that invites the world not only to see and hear but also to participate and collaborate. Overall, MOOCs has its pros and cons. However, with time all MOOC providers are trying to reduce these disadvantages by offering several incentives to the students.

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