Chapter 19

MOOCs Global Digital Divide: Reality or Myth?

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to help address the question of global digital divide and provide the readers with scholarly information to help them reach their own conclusions, and to answer the question, “Is there really a MOOC global digital divide or is it just a myth?” The methods used included a critical review of the literature and a non-traditional open approach to research, which included utilization of websites, blogs, MOOCs website articles, peer-reviewed scholarly journals, books, and platform website information. Findings include total number of MOOCs users, platform providers, and the countries involved with learning using MOOCs.

INTRODUCTION

The question of digital divide has been researched extensively, “Whether one buys into the notion of a digital divide with substantial societal consequences is not of simply intellectual curiosity. It has very substantial economic and political implications: from taxes on telephone service that are targeted to fund remedies in rural areas and poor neighborhoods to the broader skills that will be available in the workforce” (Compaine, 2001, p. xii). The advent of the satellite and cellular phone utilization has revolutionized the world through cost effective accessibility measures and digital communication availability. For example in 2012, “there were almost 1.5 billion mobile internet subscriptions worldwide” (Marceax, 2013). The gap created by the digital divide due to technological advances is once again being revisited through the creation of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) as a global educational resource to the world population in general and in developing countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the research is to establish the extent of the MOOC digital divide and to demonstrate from the literature reviewed the technological gap that is present in rural and urban settings and in
low and medium income countries. In addition, the research seeks to address strategies that should be explored to reduce the level of digital divide in the use of MOOCs to develop workforce competencies world over. A platform and affiliation table has been developed to use as a resource for informational purposes concerning MOOCs and a general list of the universities that are working on creating and/or have developed courses for instruction via online learning. Furthermore, a MOOC framework components diagram has been created. Future possibilities of gaining an educated and trained workforce may help the labor market gain skilled employees for businesses and government entities.

Research Questions

To address the intent of this research, the following questions were developed to inform the review of literature.

1. What is happening on a global level with regard to MOOCs providers and students enrolling in MOOCs based on literature?
2. What efforts have been documented in literature to address the problem of MOOCs digital divide?
3. What strategies should be implemented to successfully design and deliver MOOCs in Africa and other low and medium income countries?

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

The premise of the conceptual framework guiding this research is based on Kolb’s Experiential Learning theory, which encompasses a four stage process consisting of: Concrete experience, Reflective observation, Abstract conceptualization and Active experimentation (Kolb, 2005). Figure 1 provides a practical understanding of how Kolb’s Experiential Learning theory relates to MOOCs.

Kolb’s theoretical model is relevant to the MOOCs global utilization in the following ways:

1. Concrete experience stems from the direct academic and practical knowledge of the MOOC developer/designer. Concrete experience is based on academic and practical knowledge that the instructor can provide as part of their professional experience.
2. Reflective observation which is based on world digital divide in regions such as, Africa, South Asia, and Latin America. Reflective Observation is based on digital accessibility and MOOC course development process and process improvement done through observation which leads to change.
3. Abstract conceptualization relates to the vision of a MOOC development. Abstract

Figure 1. Experiential learning with MOOCs, information derived from Kolb (2005)
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