Chapter  7

To MOOC or Not to MOOC, That Is the Problem: A Learner’s Perspective

Dilrukshi Gamage
University of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka

Shantha Fernando
University of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka

Indika Perera
University of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka

ABSTRACT

MOOCs are found to be next disruption for online education. It provides many avenues to students to who could not be access to world class education. xMOOCs have been experiencing by students since 2012 and courses keep adding every day in many MOOC platforms. However, it was found that not all the courses in MOOC platforms provide student satisfactions and quality. In other words, effectiveness of the courses in MOOCs varies significantly. Many MOOCs fail to meet the user goals. This concerns the MOOC consumers that there is no quality standard followed by the MOOC producers. In this chapter, authors evaluate 20 courses in MOOC platforms by actively participating and experiencing the behaviors. Evaluation is processed using 8 dimensional eLearning framework to explore the quality and readiness on the technology for future. Results expressed that MOOCs need thorough attention in designing so that it meets user goals and be effective to continue keeping the users interest.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of “openness” is changing the world of education in many ways. For some people access to education has been a dream, but with the aid of MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses), this is becoming a reality. MOOCs are giving opportunities to massive crowds to access first class education from elite universities free of charge or at a very low cost. MOOCs are also providing access to areas
of education that an ordinary person could not participate in without prior qualifications, such as to medicine-related courses where prerequisite knowledge of biology and related areas are required. The free and open nature of MOOCs unlocks many educational barriers for many learners. At the same time MOOCs bring a new perspective to online education and distance education. With the development of tools, technology, and networks, the number of students participating in MOOCs increases while the number of platforms and institutions that offer them also increases. Many researchers and educators state that MOOCs provide educational gains for students, or they are very effective and are based on a sound pedagogy (Glance, Forsey, & Riley, 2013). However, some researchers are still skeptical (Bali, 2014). Although it is too soon to predict all the pitfalls, concerns are arising and lead to heated discussion, as many xMOOCs tend to transfer traditional didactic pedagogy into the online learning environment. At the same time, there are serious concerns whether MOOCs can provide students with the necessary skills to meet the challenges of the 21st century, such as creative thinking, and collaborative problem solving. Many xMOOCs consist of small selections of videos, peer-graded or self-graded assignments, quizzes and forums to support peer and instructor communications. xMOOCs are offered in many platforms such as Coursera, FutureLearn, edX, open2study, and NovoEd. Numerous courses are added every day; Coursera, for instance, has more than 1000 courses running at any given time. Nevertheless, the course completion rates of xMOOCs remain in the range on 7-13%, which means many participants leave without completing any of the courses they started. Researchers argue it is merely up to the participant’s interest and personal goals to finish any course, yet others argue it is mainly the lack of quality standards in a course; and that courses also failed to attract and keep the attention of their participants (Liyanagunawardena, Parslow, & Williams, 2014). At the same time, educators and learning enthusiasts are concerned that xMOOCs are practicing a behavioral approach to learning. For many students who participate in MOOCs, the question is of concern as not all MOOCs are equally effective. Even in the same MOOC platform, some courses are highly satisfying and some are disappointing. In other words, it is evident from the low completion rates and the significant number of dropouts in courses that there is a quality variation in MOOCs. Though the New York Times pronounced 2012 as “The Year of MOOC” (Pappano, 2012), it can now be argued that the hype about MOOCs is fading. According to the Babson Survey Research Group’s annual survey in 2012, 28 percent of respondents believed MOOCs were sustainable, while 26 percent thought they were not. However in 2014 Babson’s survey, 16 percent believe MOOCs are sustainable, while 51 percent think they are not (Allen & Seaman, 2014).

Since the MOOC concept is fairly young and is still evolving, quality standards and controls for them are also still evolving. There are many quality frameworks that have been used for previous online learning technologies, and researchers are working to implement and optimize similar frameworks for MOOCs. Researchers have discovered that many platforms that are offering MOOCs have a wide deviation in their quality and their effectiveness. Because MOOCs have such widely varied quality levels, it is a daunting task for students to select courses that will meet their goals. When students select a course, it typically takes 4-7 weeks to complete a course and, unless they enroll in the course and experience it for 1 or 2 weeks, they cannot determine how effective it will be in helping them meet their goals. Sometimes students will tend to pick the trending MOOCs described by various organizations and in reviews such as those found at CourseTalk but those student reviews are not available for all courses. Having that concern in mind, the objective of this chapter is to investigate the quality issues while evaluating the educational technology and MOOC’s readiness and opportunities for growth. The authors’ hypothesis is “if the MOOC provider or the course is fulfilling the goals of the learner and their learning outcomes, the technology is ready and has many opportunities in future”. In order to identify the quality gaps in MOOCs, the authors participated in 20 different MOOCs over the course of two years.