Chapter 10

Learning without Boundaries

MOOCs in Malaysia: Design and Implementation

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ABSTRACT

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) have been the focus of mainstream media which promises to change the entire world education and create a meaningful impact for all. This book chapter reports on the design and implementation of Malaysian MOOC. Malaysia is the first country in the world to implement the MOOCs initiative for public universities. This new platform of learning is also in line with the National Higher Education Strategic Plan that includes life-long learning, e-Learning, internationalization, and knowledge transfer.

INTRODUCTION

The use of ICT in the Malaysian education system is relatively modest. Many plans to introduce ICT at the school-level were announced at the onset of the establishment of Multimedia Super Corridor 1 (MSC) in 1996, such as the “Smart School” project – an effort to encourage ICT integration in school-based learning; the “SchoolNet” initiative – a project to provide broadband Internet to Malaysian schools; and “EduWebTV” – a YouTube-based portal for educational videos for consumption by school teachers and students (see MSC, 2011).

At the higher education level, Siti Rafidah et al. (2009) found that ICT resources were modest in both public and private higher education institutions, although usage of ICT, either for communication or information retrieval, was common amongst faculty members and students. The level of ICT proficiency amongst faculty members was good, although those in public universities tended to be more cautious and resistant to use ICT in their teaching activities. These observations demonstrate that to a notable extent, technology has played a relatively limited role in teaching and learning, both at the primary and secondary school and higher education levels. The initial interest in MOOCs within the last two years

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suggests that Malaysia is open to exploring the use of MOOCs in higher education, although currently there is no indication if Malaysian MOOCs will take the form of currently prominent platforms such as Coursera, edX and Udacity. This is not necessarily a negative observation, as the adoption of MOOCs in Malaysia may have very different connotations than those of the North American-based providers. The pervasiveness of ICT, which has had its own tremendous impact in higher education, is a disruptive force that cannot be ignored. Higher education institutions must learn to adapt and innovate to ICT, or run the risk of being rendered obsolete or irrelevant. We view MOOCs as one such positive disruption that can hopefully lead to a modernised, effective, and compatible higher education model in Malaysia, although it must be acknowledged that the greatest contention at this point is whether or not Malaysian academia can deal with the threat of such an innovation that is represented by MOOCs.

**BACKGROUND**

The landscape of the open education movement is changing every day and is gaining momentum throughout the world. Terms such as Web 2.0, social media, OCW, OER, and the latest one, MOOCs, have been the focus of mainstream media stories on education, including those posted on educational websites and blogs. The emergence of MOOCs—or Massive Open Online Courses—is a phenomenon that has the potential to disrupt the education world and to significantly impact achievement of the ‘Education for All’ movement of the United Nations.

MOOCs are simply online courses aimed at large-scale participation that are available by open and free access via the Internet. They are similar to university courses but currently do not tend to offer academic credit unless explicitly stated. The whole idea of MOOCs is to empower interested learners from around the globe who lack access to higher education.

The first MOOC was offered by the University of Manitoba in 2008 (Fini, 2009), and since then MOOCs have been gaining momentum as two trends converge, namely the inability of physical campuses to cater to the higher education needs of the growing world population and the maturity of the technology that makes broadband internet more accessible and reliable.

A number of leading world universities are offering a growing number of courses to a worldwide audience, and many others are seriously considering joining the movement. MOOCs are delivered over a number of platforms; some of them are widely available, such as Coursera, Udacity, Canvas, OpenLearning, and Course-Builder (by Google), whereas others are institution-specific platforms, such as Edx (jointly developed by Harvard and MIT) and Class2Go (developed by Stanford) (Pappano, 2012). Although the MOOC approach is currently not as common as that of traditionally offered courses, it is being heralded as the beginning of a revolution in the education industry. As Seth Godin (2012), an American entrepreneur, noted, the future of education is flexibility and mobility. The traditional approach to education appears to be no longer viable for the future in which we will be living. With that being said, there is still no clear and sustainable model of MOOCs in terms of education and technology. Hence, universities worldwide seem to be riding the wave of change without proper direction.

Malaysia currently is ranked seventh in Asia with regards to Internet penetration, with an estimated figure of 67% of the citizens who use the Internet (Zainol-Abidin et al., 2014). This puts Malaysia in a good position to harness the power of online learning to widen access to good quality content, en-