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MOOC : A NEW DIMENSION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

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Abstract

Education is the first equalizer of all human beings. It is said if people cannot reach education, education must reach the people. MOOC is serving the same purpose and has opened the new vistas of higher education for masses. The present paper has taken a brief review of the primary stage MOOCs in India.

Keywords : MOOC, NPTEL, SWAYAM

It is said Education is the gateway to the American Dream. Today India's higher education system is the third largest in the world, next to the United States and China. In India, modeling on the London University the British empire established the three universities at Mumbai, Calcutta and Madras now Chennai in 1857. These universities are the foundation of new higher education system in India. As of 2016, India has 799 universities. Among which 44 are central universities, 540 state universities, 122 deemed universities, 90 private universities, 5 institutions established and functioning under the State Act, and 75 Institutes of National Importance which include AIIMS, IIT's, IIEST and NIT's. Other institutions include 39,071 colleges as Government Degree Colleges and Private Degree Colleges. It includes 1800 exclusive women's colleges, functioning under these universities and institutions as reported by the UGC in 2016. Some of the Colleges providing technical education as well as courses from arts, humanities and commerce are autonomous. They are empowered to examine their own degrees, up to PhD level in some cases. In non-autonomous colleges examinations are under the supervision of the university to which they are affiliated. In either cases, degrees are awarded in the name of the university rather than the college.

Concept of Higher Education

Higher education means the education beyond the level of post higher secondary education. it refers to colleges and universities. But in fact higher educational institutions include professional schools in the field of Law, Theology, Medicine, Business, Music and Art. It also includes other institutions like Teachers' Training Schools and Technological Institutions. Moreover, institutions for training of highly skilled specialists in the field of economics, science, technology and culture of various types of higher levels are treated as Higher Educational Institutions. Those students, who have completed their study at the H. S. level, are allowed to get entry in these campuses.

After India became free the ministry of education took the step in the higher education appointing a commission on university education under the chairmanship of Dr. S. P Radhakrishnan to report on Indian University education. The recognizes that "If India is to confront the confusion of our times, she must turn

for guidance not to those who are lost to the exigencies of the passing hour but to her men of letters and men of science, to her poets and artists to her discoveries and inventors. These intellectual pioneers of civilization are to be found and trained in the universities, which are the sanctuaries of the minor life of the nation." The report of Kothari Commission (1964-66) said about the universities that they are the dwelling places of ideas and idealism, and expect high standards of conduct and integrity from all their members. Two decades later, the Govt. of India undertook a comprehensive review of the nation's education policy. The policy statement which emerged following this review reaffirmed: "Education is a unique investment in the present and the future." This cardinal principle is the key to the National Policy on Education. Higher education, according to the 1986 policy provides people with an opportunity to reflect on the critical, social, economic, cultural, moral, spiritual issues facing humanity. The country paper (Govt. of India's) articulating the vision of India on higher education in 1998 reflected the following views:

Education aims at liberation (from bondage, ignorance, backwardness and gravitation pulls of the lower human nature). Education, being an evolutionary force that enables both the individual and collectively to evolve various faculties and to integrate them by the superior intellectual, ethical, aesthetic and spiritual power, should aim at developing a new type of humanity highly humane, cultured and integrated.

Education should be so designed as to become a powerful carrier of the best of the heritage and it should, therefore, aim at transmitting to the new generations the lessons of the accumulated experiences of the past for further progress in the present and the future."

To strengthen these views, as per 'Digital India' Initiative; Government of India is emphasising on the use of ICT for education in a big way. The University Grants Commission (UGC) along with the HRD (Human Resource Development) Ministry has launched the MOOC program in India for higher secondary, bachelors and masters degrees. This will cover a wide range of subjects that may or may not be taught in regular campus studies. There are various notable institutions, both non-profit and commercial, that offer these courses worldwide with the help of MOOC providers. **NPTEL and SWAYAM are the leading MOOCs in India.**

NPTEL

NPTEL is an acronym for National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning which is an initiative by seven Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT Bombay, Delhi, Guwahati, Kanpur, Kharagpur, Madras and Roorkee) and Indian Institute of Science (IISc) for creating course contents in engineering and science. NPTEL began offering open online courses in March 2014. NPTEL as a project originated from many deliberations between IITs, Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) and Carnegie Mellon University (CMU) during the years 1999-2003. A proposal was jointly put forward by five IITs (Bombay, Delhi, Kanpur, Kharagpur and Madras) and IISc for creating contents for 100 courses as web based supplements and 100 complete video courses, for forty hours of duration per course. Web supplements were expected to cover materials that could be delivered in approximately forty hours. Five engineering branches (Civil, Computer Science, Electrical, Electronics and Communication and Mechanical) and core science programmes that all engineering students are required to take in their undergraduate engineering programme in India

were chosen initially. Contents for the above courses were based on the model curriculum suggested by All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) and the syllabi of major affiliating Universities in India.

Implementation of NPTEL

There are two committees, the National Programme Committee (NPC) headed by the Joint Secretary, Higher Education, MHRD and the Programme Implementation Committee (PIC), headed by Professor M. S. Ananth, Director IIT Madras and Professor in Chemical Engineering. The NPC oversees implementation of the programme and offers policy guidelines and financial structure. Some of the NPC members are also members of the PIC. The PIC enables the smooth functioning of the project in several phases and takes care of content creation and technology implementation. Members of the PIC meet periodically (about once every three months) to study the progress and issues related to coursework development. In each IIT/IISc faculty are nominated as TEL coordinators to interact with their colleagues and encourage them to prepare course materials and offer technical and financial assistance using funds sanctioned for that purpose. In addition, two National coordinators, one for web based development and one for video lectures offer assistance and oversee the National programme. Groups are formed for solving specific technology or pedagogy related issues and arrive at general guidelines for faculty preparing course materials. In the first phase of the programme about 350 faculty members in all partner institutions worked together to deliver lecture contents. In the next phase this is likely to increase to well over 1000 faculty. Other Institutions such as NITs and major University faculty are also likely to participate. As on Aug 2015, we have 420 web courses and 509 video courses developed and hosted, which can be accessed freely through the website http://nptel.ac.in.

SWAYAM

SWAYAM, Study Webs of Active – Learning for Young Aspiring Minds is a Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) platform. It has been launched by the HRD ministry of India on August 15, 2016. It hosted 2,000 courses for students across the country , SWAYAM is an instrument for self-actualisation providing opportunities for a life-long learning. Here learner can choose from hundreds of courses , virtually every course that is taught at the university / college / school level and these shall be offered by best of the teachers in India and elsewhere. If a student is studying in any college, he/she can transfer the credits earned by taking these courses into their academic record. If you are, working or not working, in school or out of school, SWAYAM presents a unique educational opportunity to expand the horizons of knowledge. In the first phase, IIT Bombay, IIT Madras, IIT Kanpur, IIT Guwahati, University of Delhi, Jawahar Lal Nehru University, IGNOU, IIM Bangalore, IIM Calcutta, Banaras Hindu University, alone as well as with the help of faculty from foreign universities will be offering courses in areas of engineering education, social science, energy, management, basic sciences.

SWAYAM, is said to present students with an opportunity to study anything from a list of 2000 courses out of which 200 are currently available for registration. Audio-visual medium, illustrations, research and case studies with self-assessment are few of the mediums chosen to approach the study of these courses. All these courses are offered free of cost under this programme however fees would be levied in case learner requires certificate.

Utility of NPTEL and SWAYAM

NPTEL and SWAYAM course contents

will be useful for teacher training and through them improve the quality of students. In addition, the course materials (both web and video) are freely accessible by everyone independent of their geographic location. These courses can be used by professionals for updating their academic background. Open and distance education using NPTEL contents are long term prospects for IITs. The contents will hopefully help evolve criteria for focused learning and a common set of standards for professional education in India through participation by everyone concerned under this platform. To provide further information on SWAYAM and MOOCs in general, Professor A.K.Bakshi, Chairman of the Centre for E-Learning, said, *"These online courses have been developed by a team of senior academicians and are expected to enhance the gross enrolment ratio in higher education without compromising with the quality. These courses will also help in bridging the digital divide in the country."*

Future and Scope of MOOC

MOOC cannot replace the traditional approach of classroom learning but it can be used as an alternative method to bridge the gap between various schools of learning. It has been said however that MOOC has certain limitations which are listed below:

- Although digitalization is a must now, there are many nations that are unable to provide the basic necessities to enrol for MOOCs hence the spread of MOOCs are limited.
- It is not always certain that all MOOCs provide degrees, certificates and/or diplomas which limits the number of candidates that enrol for these courses as many companies ask for records of the education levels achieved and candidates are unable to provide them with the same.
- A student's life is confined to one room that

has internet access and a laptop or a computer which allows little or no interaction with the outside world.
- Since MOOCs are web-based, there is no monitoring of the candidates/students, which carries a risk of plagiarism or cheating.

Employment Opportunities post Online Education

The new world of online education provides inexpensive education of college-level courses in many fields of study. However, it is said that employers are not completely convinced with the level of education and coursework provided by the MOOCs unless the candidate is looking for jobs in the Technology or Computer Science sector.

Generally, it is said that MOOCs are focused on providing education that will improve skills in specific fields of study, mostly focused on technology, science and mathematics. Although some of the online courses provide records of completion of the courses, the online education concept is relatively new. It is found that students are ready for this new concept however many employers are still hesitant and sceptical about it.

To summarize, MOOCs are a great platform for higher education not just in India but all over the world but it comes with its pros and cons when it comes down to the future prospects of students that have passed out of MOOCs. Since the concept is new and has garnered praise recently, it can turn out to be one of the best concepts off late.

Benefits of MOOC

Improving access to Higher Education

MOOCs are regarded by many as an important tool to widen access to Higher Education (HE) for millions of people, including those in the developing world, and ultimately

enhance their quality of life. MOOCs may be regarded as contributing to the democratisation of HE, not only locally or regionally but globally as well. MOOCs can help democratise content and make knowledge reachable for everyone. Students are able to access complete courses offered by universities all over the world, something previously unattainable. With the availability of affordable technologies, MOOCs increase access to an extraordinary number of courses offered by world-renowned institutions and teachers.

Providing an affordable alternative to formal education

The costs of tertiary education continue to increase because institutions tend to bundle too many services. With MOOCs, some of these services can be transferred to other suitable players in the public or private sector. MOOCs are for large numbers of participants, can be accessed by anyone anywhere as long as they have an Internet connection, are open to everyone without entry qualifications and offer a full/ complete course experience online for free.

Sustainable Development Goals

MOOCs can be seen as a form of open education offered for free through online platforms. The (initial) philosophy of MOOCs is to open up quality Higher Education to a wider audience. As such, MOOCs are an important tool to achieve Goal 4 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Offers a Flexible Learning Schedule

Certain lectures, videos, and tests through MOOCs can be accessed at any time compared to scheduled class times. By allowing learners to complete their coursework in their own time, this provides flexibility to learners based on their own personal schedules.

Online Collaboration

The learning environments of MOOCs

make it easier for learners across the globe to work together on common goals. Instead of having to physically meet one another, online collaboration creates partnerships among learners. While time zones may have an effect on the hours that learners communicate, projects, assignments, and more can be completed to incorporate the skills and resources that different learners offer no matter where they are located

Challenges for MOOC

The challenges for MOOCs are as follows:

1. Relying on user-generated content can create a chaotic learning environment

2. Digital literacy is necessary to make use of the online materials

3. The time and effort required from participants may exceed what students are willing to commit to a free online course

4. Once the course is released, content will be reshaped and reinterpreted by the massive student body, making the course trajectory difficult for instructors to control

5. Participants must self-regulate and set their own goals

6. Language and translation barriers

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