

## Chapter 10

# MOOCS Applications in Open Distance Learning (ODL): Issues and Challenges

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The term MOOC has been around since 2008, but the concept began to generate significant media attention and debate in 2012 with the launch of MOOCs offered by or in association with prestigious US institutions through providers such as EdX, Coursera, and Udacity. In response to widespread media attention and debate, uptake of MOOCs has since spread globally. Coursera and EdX have partnered with elite institutions in Europe, Asia, and Australasia, and new MOOC platforms have been developed including Future Learn in the UK, OpenupEd, and iVersity in Europe and Open2Study in Australia.*

### **BACKGROUND**

Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs) and trends towards greater openness in higher education and to think about the implications for their institutions. The phenomena of MOOCs are described, placing them in the wider context of open education, online learning and the changes that are currently taking place in higher education at a time of globalization of education and constrained budgets. A literature review was undertaken focusing on the extensive reporting of MOOCs through scholarly blogs, press releases as well as openly available reports and research papers. This

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-5146-1.ch010

identified current debates about new course provision, the impact of changes in funding and the implications for greater openness in higher education.

Universities Philosophical benefits, why do colleges and universities want to get involved in MOOCs? On a philosophical and altruistic level, MOOCs turn higher education into a public good on a global scale. The desire to share one's knowledge is innate in many educators. What's more exciting than teaching tens of thousands of students all around the world? What's more gratifying than being able to transform the lives of individuals that may not have been able to get education otherwise? What's more illuminating than learning about diverse perspectives from these same students? MOOCs provide the invaluable opportunity to connect with global learners without conventional constraints such as time, money, and geography. Web-based courses are a practical way to engage in meaningful discussions with learners from a diverse set of communities. By gathering online to learn about a topic, learners can form communities that transcend geographic and political boundaries. This paper aims to investigate a partnership between the University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW-Madison) and Wisconsin Library Services, which brought open access online learning to thousands of lifelong learners around the state of Wisconsin. "Changing Weather and Climate in the Great Lakes Region", a massive open online course the UW-Madison launched in 2015, paired a regional focus with face-to-face discussions at 21 public libraries to deepen learners' personal connections to the subject matter. Through strategic partnership, targeted course development and marketing of events, intimate local discussion sessions and state wide events provided fora in which Wisconsin residents would explore changing weather and climate with university faculty, staff and students (Steven Ackerman, 2016).

## **PRACTICAL BENEFITS OF MOOCS**

The practical benefits, however, are probably the main drivers for the rush. MOOCs create the perfect stage to "experiment with pedagogical methods on a vast scale" (Colingo, 2013). There are rich data to be mined and interesting studies to be done on a broad array of human behaviors such as motivation, online interaction, team collaboration, and learning habits. Brand recognition is important in this hyper competitive age. For now, MOOCs are like movie trailers for universities and professors are the stars. In the near future, MOOCs could become featured films. Paradoxically, instead of replacing colleges and universities, MOOCs may actually increase the enrollment at institutions that offer them. A MOOC experience can influence a potential student's decision on the university or program they will pick for a traditional degree. Great instructors will get high enrollment, high student engagement, and even a large celebrity-like following. Many MOOC instructors listed

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