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E-Learning and MOOC: The Cross Currents in Education and the Benefits for Learners

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Abstract – With the increased use of internet, there is a growing awareness of the need to become more digitally literate. With Web 2.0, software has become more open source, providing users with a greater ability to influence the web. Internet based learning practices affect the way learners acquire knowledge. The learning practices in various disciplines have changed in a large measure. The arts and humanities, science disciplines, and engineering and technology, have gone through innovating teaching and learning methodologies. MOOC is bringing a grass root level change in educational practices. Individuals and institutions offer courses using platforms like Udemy, Udacity, Coursera, EdX etc. Moreover handheld devices like tablet computers and smartphones make learning more effective and personal. In Mobile learning using mobile applications and the Internet of Things rely the future of modern educational practices.

Keywords: E-Learning, MOOC, M-Learning, Mobile Apps, Internet of Things

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In this age of globalisation, the free market economy is changing the life and lifestyle of people around the world. English as a global language has modified the global political, economic and social scenarios and unified human race as seen never before. These global exchanges of resources not only limited to trade and commerce, but also in the exchange of human resource. The world has become more open and a better place with social and cultural exchanges. This revamping in life and lifestyle also gets reflected in the field of education. We live in an age where learning is becoming more open and flexible and technology has altered the approaches towards the process of learning.

With the increased use of internet, there is a growing awareness of the need to become more digitally literate. This has paved way to increase creativity and innovation, as well as new roles for learners and teachers. Today teachers can move away from the role as a transmitter of knowledge, and he can be a facilitator and students can now become more self-directed and active in their own learning processes.

When internet was introduced, the first generation of World Wide Web – commonly called Web 1.0 – was connected by hyperlinks and was the "read-only web." It was a static web that was not yet providing interactive content. Since 2004, the second generation of web, called Web 2.0 evolved, and internet has become more social and interactive. The broadband internet, better browsers as different from Netscape based browsers, and the user's ability to develop content etc. made internet more accessible and user friendly. With Web 2.0, software has become more open source, providing users with a greater ability to influence the web.

The term Web 2.0 was invented by Darcy DiNucci in 1999 and later popularized by Tim O'Reilly and Dale Dougherty at the O'Reilly Media Web 2.0 Conference in late 2004. The Web 2.0 features include social networking sites, blogs, wikis, video sharing, web applications etc. Web 2.0 enables an average web user to have social-networking profiles, or personal blogs, and readers can comment directly on a page, that was not common previously. This exchange of information has a deep rooted impact on the models of learning. The traditional classroom education system is an area that is highly affected by the changes in the form and content of the World Wide Web.

In the European Commission Joint Research Centre Scientific and Technical Reports 'Learning 2.0: The Impact of Web 2.0 Innovations on Education and Training in Europe' (2009), it is mentioned that Web 2.0 can be a practical option for teachers to grow professionally at a personal level (Redecker 2009). The social web allows for more collaborative education. For example, blogs give students a public space to interact with one another and the content of the class (Richardson 2010).

With the introduction of e-learning, there is a paradigm shift in the teaching and learning processes. Massive Open Online Courses has made learning more flexible and open. The current major

happening in education is the movement from physical classrooms to virtual classrooms. It is about how internet is connecting and widening the scope for teachers and learners.

How does E-learning Affect Disciplines?

Internet based learning practices affect the way learners acquire knowledge. The learning practices in various disciplines have changed in a large measure. The arts and humanities, science disciplines, and engineering and technology, have gone through innovating teaching and learning practices. Let's check the impact on language education.

How can this shift affect English language teaching? Precisely, English is the most affected language and the leaners of English have got a wide variety of choices to learn it. A competent instructor can teach language effectively by running a MOOC and attract students all around the world. Moreover, it has given rise to more specific learning practices – English for special purposes.

The MOOC programmes in science and technology with the introduction of virtual labs, and other updation and upgradation courses renovated the learning methodology in science. The interdisciplinary studies in social sciences have brought about new fields; online courses in the social sciences including sociology, political science, human geography, demography are offered by various universities via MOOC platforms.

MOOC AS A LEANER CENTRED APPROACH

The term MOOC was coined to refer to a course developed by Stephen Downes and George Siemens entitled *Connectivism and Connectivity Knowledge* in 2008. Their intention was to exploit the possibility for interactions between wide varieties of participants made possible by online tools so as to provide a richer learning environment than traditional tools would allow.

In 2007, Eren Bali, a Turkish engineer and entrepreneur, designed software for a live virtual classroom and he and his associates launched it as a MOOC platform in May 2010: Udemy – "The Academy of You" –with Oktay Caglar and Gagan Biyani. Udemy offers paid and free courses, depending on the instructor. Sebastien Thrun founded a company called Udacity in February 2012 to cater to the development of technical skills among engineers to propel career forward.

MOOC has reached a new dimension when in April 2012, Andrew Ng, a Chinese-American computer scientist and statistician, and Daphne Koller and two other Stanford CS professors, started the company called Coursera which partnered with universities in preparing and offering MOOCs. It reached new heights when Massachusetts Institute of Technology developed the MITx platform for offering MOOCs. Later it was renamed edX in association with Harvard University. Now edX consortium has over 30 university partners.

In developing countries like India, MOOCs are still a new and premium option for the common masses. Even though the government runs educational programmes through radio and television, internet based education is not popular. National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning (NPTEL) is a platform through which IITs and IISc offer online courses. The upcoming SWAYAM (Study Webs of Active Learning for Young Aspiring Minds) platform is an ambitious project from the part of the Indian government where students across all universities in India will be able to earn credits. It is the centralized platform that would bind Indian higher education, both online and offline.

LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES IN THE INTERNET

Let's have a look into the kinds of courses offered under the different MOOC platforms. Udacity topics include programming and development, artificial intelligence, cloud computing, data science, business etc. Udacity would connect paid learners with prospective employers. When Udacity is by experts and Udemy is by random person looking for making money for themselves. Udemy is a very low-cost place to learn. But learning new things on Udemy cannot help you advance your career. It is because Udemy certificates are not recognizable by employers. It is not an accredited institution like universities and the courses will not count toward college credit or even continuing education units (CEUs). The topics in Udemy include software development, finance and management, IT certifications, personal development, designing, marketing, teaching and academics etc.

Whereas Udemy has courses developed by individuals, Coursera has mainly academic courses from top-notch universities. Generally, Coursera courses are free to audit. But, to access graded assignments and earn a course completion certificate, learners need to pay. And it is worth it since you would get a certificate from a partnered university. Coursera mainly works with universities and colleges, but also with governments. Coursera courses have duration of four to ten weeks, with one to two hours of video lectures a week. There are quizzes, weekly exercises, peer-graded assignments, and sometimes a final project or exam before you get a university certification. It offers online courses, specializations, and degrees in a variety of subjects, such as engineering, humanities, medicine, biology, social sciences, mathematics, business, computer science, digital

marketing, data science, and others. Over a hundred of universities and institutions offer courses in partnership with Coursera.

Like Coursera, EdX also hosts online university-level courses in a wide range of disciplines. The platform is created by Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard University. It offers MOOCs and interactive online classes in subjects including law, history, science, engineering, business, social sciences, computer science, public health, and artificial intelligence. EdX has more than hundred partners, including universities, for-profit organizations and NGOs. Like Coursera, the learner can either audit the course for free for a limited period of time, but to submit graded assignments and projects, one needs to purchase courses. The courses here is expensive than Coursera.

Moreover, there are some other non-profit organisations that aim to provide education for free especially at the school level. Khan Academy is such an initiative that aims to provide a free, world-class education to anyone, anywhere. It offers math by grade, science and engineering, computing, arts and humanities, economics and finance, Kendriya Vidyalaya Courses as well as test preparations.

Moreover there are several other web sites that host leaning materials accessible for any internet user. LinkedIn SlideShare is a hosting service for professional content including PowerPoint presentations and documents which is now owned by Microsoft Corporation. For teachers, it is a platform to share knowledge; they can contribute resources to the learners and could support each other. SlidePlayer is also a similar platform for presentation sharing. Today, YouTube is growing as the most popular and widely used medium to learn. It is an informal medium and almost any information is available in a search. Several academicians and contributors share videos and by subscribing to their channel, a learner could watch and follow them.

Podcasting is another medium that learners can use to listen to talks on academic and non-academic subjects. ESL learners and improve their listening skill using podcasting. There are many fee and subscription based services like SoundCloud, Spotify, PodBean etc.

Mobile learning (m-learning) is an emerging area in education. It is education using personal mobile devices, such as tablet computers and smartphones to obtain learning materials through online education mobile apps, and social interactions. It is flexible and allows learners to access learning materials anywhere, anytime. With the growth of Android open source smartphone operating system, a number of education apps are introduced in Google Play Store. There are apps that provide content on all major subjects such as Byjus App, and Khan Academy. Duolingo is an app for second language learners to learn over more than thirty languages. PhotoMath is an app that uses the smartphone camera and OCR technology to read math equations that you write down, and gives you the answer.

Wolfram Alpha is another app for serious scholars. It has a wealth of information about a ton of topics including mathematics, statistics, data analysis, physics, chemistry, engineering, astronomy, units of measurement, weather, geography, and plenty more, almost similar to Wikipedia. For the learners of English there are a number of apps available to improve language skills. There are some apps that offer to talk with real people around the world and improve your speaking skill. Cambly is a service that costs higher but it allows you to speak with native speakers of English. The e-commerce giant amazon's Kindle is an e-book reading platform where learners can download and read books.

The introduction of technology in education is changing the very way we approach learning. The Web 2.0, MOOCs, and the gadgets and mobile apps are redefining the concept of learning. The future of educational practices is internet based and the Internet of Things is going to have a far reaching impact in the education sector. We are in an age where information is open and accessible to everyone. Learning is becoming more and more personal and the learners can exploit the opportunities offered by adopting newer technologies.

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