COVID-19 Pandemic impels surge in MOOC learning and the New Normal: A Literature Review

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Abstract - **Virtual learning is often debated over brick-and-mortar method of learning. In most cases online learning is over-shadowed by face-to-face classroom environment. But the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic changed the entire education system. Colleges and universities were closed, and students were made to attend the online classes and online courses like Massive Open Online Course - MOOC. Hence the question of comparison or debating between the online and physical learning is out of question. In this review of literature, the researcher focuses on the role of MOOC during COVID-19 pandemic in Higher Education (HE) and future of new normal.**

Index Terms - **MOOC, Online courses, higher education, COVID-19 pandemic, new normal.**

I.INTRODUCTION

India was under lockdown from March 25, 2020, to control spread of COVID-19. Later it was unlocked in phases and stringent rules were relaxed except in the containment zones. However, most of the colleges and universities are still closed and continue to hold classes through online mode.

On March 11, 2020, COVID-19 was declared a pandemic by World Health Organization (WHO). COVID-19 or Coronavirus is a contagious disease and spread through droplets when an infected person coughs or sneezes.

Since April 2020, regular learning practices of over 1.5 billion higher education students in 185 countries have been disrupted due to university closures as a result of COVID-19. Two-thirds of higher education institutions among those countries report that they must shift from classroom to distance teaching and learning stated International Association of Universities and UNESCO (2020) (Pham & Ho September 2020).

In India, Higher education consists of 53,620 institutions and 37 million students. The University Grants Commission (UGC) made all these institutions to go online through different ICT tools (Dr Ankuran Dutta, May 2020).

Massive Open Online Course (MOOC): Massive - unlimited enrollments; Open – open to anyone, no admission process; Online - delivered through internet; Course - goal is to teach a specific subject. The name MOOC was first used, to refer to a course Connectivism and Connectivity Knowledge developed by Stephen Downes and George Siemens in 2008.

The motivation of the MOOC's learners falls under three categories –to fulfill current needs, to train for the future and to satisfy the curiosity. Complicated concepts taught in conventional classes are understood. Majority of the learners feel that the course is understood easily, and they are satisfied over MOOC learning and would like do more courses (Nagasampige, Manojkumar. et al. 2017)

A notification was issued by UGC in 2017 to offer MOOC courses in Study Webs of Active –Learning for Young Aspiring Minds (SWAYAM) platform. All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) and Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD developed this platform through the support of Microsoft. Government has appointed 9 National Coordinators to maintain the best quality content. In India MOOC is still at primary stage. So far, under SWAYAM, 203 institutes are partnered, 3,322 courses are completed and 1,51,82,325 students are enrolled in different courses. (SWAYAM Sept. 29, 2020)

II.RESEARCH DESIGN

In this review of literature, the researcher will review the published paper and research on online courses with a special reference to MOOC in India at the time of COVID-19 pandemic. The researcher analysis and review the published article on the area from March to November 2020 as it is the time of nationwide lockdown was imposed due to COVID-19 pandemic.

III.SELECTION CRITERIA AND SOURCES OF DATA

The primary sources of this literature review are research papers from different national and international journals. Some papers between 2016 and 2019 are also reviewed as these are the years where online courses became more popular. The researcher has chosen 16 researched papers from March 2020 to November 2020, which were published in different national and international journal through Google scholar database. The study focuses into the area like why people opt for online courses, awareness of online courses and the response of MOOC during COVID-19.

IV.REVIEW OF LITERATURE

MOOCs were created to run parallel to the university education system so that it did not affect the university activities. However due to COVID-19 every university globally is experimenting with online teaching (Ca Vinod Kr Sharma June 3, 2020).

According to Yuefang Sun, (2020), MOOC as an innovative form of online education, is a huge advantage over traditional classroom and narrowed the gap of educational levels. MOOC sets the learners free from time and space.

Dr Ankuran Dutta (May 2020) concluded in his paper that as a whole, online learning was not systematically implemented in India, even in the open and distance learning. The digital social media opportunities and benefits for academic purposes were visible only after the pandemic struck the world. In the study it was found that students of higher institution widely used social media.

Around the world COVID-19 has forced the people to shift to online learning at universities. Duke University was one of the first to use MOOC as a result of COVID-19. They realized that MOOC is more viable option than improvising online lectures. During the COVID- 19 pandemic, MOOC providers such as Udacity, Edx and Coursera have offered free courses to help the learners to enhance new skills. Ultimately the website witnessed a sudden spike in traffic due to people discovery about the importance of MOOC (Sood, 2020). From mid-March to mid-May 2020, Coursera platform has witnessed an increase by 10 million new users which in fact represents seven times the sign-up users at the same period in 2019. EdX and Udacity platforms also witnessed the similar multiples of enrolments around that time (AlQaidoom and Dr. Shah, October 2020). In India, SWAYAM- the free MOOC provider has severed its purpose. In regard to the most indicated MOOC platforms used as an example in selected papers, SWAYAM (MOOC platform of India) has been mentioned in three papers, whereas the other platforms were mentioned only once (AlQaidoom and Dr. Shah October 2020). This signifies that SWAYAM is gaining popularity and momentum in India.

V.FINDING

MOOC was the ultimate resort for students to cover the syllabus during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Young (2020) MOOCs boomed during COVID-19 after a near-death.
In spite of high number of MOOC enrolment some grey areas which cannot be ignored like:
1. Problem in network connection
2. Distractions
3. Less engagement (Xie et al. Nov 2020)
Despite those drawbacks online education will be an integral part of education after the pandemic. No doubt traditional method of learning and online system of learning can go hand in hand. In 2019, the investment on education technology was around 18.66 billion USD across the world. By 2025, the market is estimated to reach 350 billion USD towards online education (Li & Lalani, 2020). In the context of India, according to KPMG in India and Google in 2017, India's online education market is set to grow to USD 1.96 billion and around 9.6 million by 2021 from USD 247 million and 1.6 million users in 2016 (Varyani and M S).
According to AlQaidoom & Dr. Shah (October 2020), the best practice of using MOOC in HE at the time of lockdown is through using MOOC to support teaching

resources, accessing prestigious universities courses, and enhancing social presence.

Few researchers stated that to replace physical classroom learning and teaching MOOC needs more improvements. Most of the other researchers feel that MOOC format should be followed and used in their educational institutions stating as a role model to online learning (AlQaidoom and Dr. Shah October 2020).

VI.SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Online education is the rising trend in the era of new normal. Government and educational institutes should take some extra interest to buy or upgrade the online educational equipment. Like a humble initiative was taken by Vice-Chancellor Prof. Surajan Das of Jadavpur University, to bridge the digital divide. He appealed the teachers and employees to donate a day's salary and also requested guardians, alumni and others to contribute to the fund for providing smartphones and internet high-speed data packs to around 800 needy students, so that they can attend online class. (Subhankar Chowdhury August 2020).

Teachers too need to undergo certain training on online education in order to get equipped and to gain confident. Teachers and institute need to come together to discuss and guide students to minimize the drop out enrolment rate.

VII.CONCLUSION

COVID-19 will be there for a while and the only way to remain uninfected is to protect oneself through face mask, hand sanitizer and social distancing. Therefore, in the context of new normal, blended mode of education- combination of traditional and online will prevail. Ngo (2019) stated that for the people who look for professional learning, MOOC is the solution. Though MOOC certificate is not valued as college degree, still MOOC have the edge because world-class educations are taught by the experienced teachers.

VIII.ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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