ATTITUDE OF POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS TOWARDS SWAYAM: INDIAN VERSION OF MOOCS

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Abstract

The Ministry of Human Resource Development has taken an initiative towards developing an indigenous platform of learning named as SWAYAM which stands for **S**tudy **W**eb of **A**ctive Learning by **Y**oung and **A**spiring **M**inds. The main objective of this study was to find out the responses of the Postgraduate students towards SWAYAM. The two research questions were focused on perceptions regarding SWAYAM and attitudes towards this initiative taken by MHRD. Data was collected using a self-designed questionnaire and an information schedule. In depth analysis on the survey was carried out; the inputs gathered are consolidated and projected in a table for easier understanding along with the explanation and findings. The findings suggest SWAYAM-MOOCs are still in the experimental phase, whatever the popularity MOOCs get outside India; still when compare to the traditional academic approach is considered to be the best way of education to most of the students. Several factors which pose as challenges required to be taken as consideration for successful implementation of this initiative.

Keywords: SWAYAM, MOOCs, Higher Education

Introduction

Ministry of Human Resource Development envisages setting up a holistic MOOCs Platform to enable course takers to enroll for a course online and for free of cost, giving increased focus on self-learning initiative as a key activity for the aspiring youths to pursue the right career choice or the learning capabilities so that they join the workforce with better skills for enhancing growth and development. Also the convenience of studying online will provide more opportunities for remote students due to the reach and accessibility of the online platform. SWAYAM is expected to have in excess of 2000 courses from various streams of educational disciplines (MHRD, 2015) [6]. Learning through Massive, open and online courses (MOOCs) shall enable the stakeholders of Education who want to learn, earn, teach or innovate, the capability to realize their own true potential and transform our country. The unique feature of MOOC is providing education to public, at minimum level of cost at world scale and to deliver an attestation of completion to those who fulfill their study. MOOCs provides education whereas there is a need to create synergies between the salient features of anytime-anywhere format of e- Learning and the

traditional classroom-based chalk and talk method to develop a unique content delivery mechanism, which is responsive to learners' needs and ensures seamless transfer of knowledge across geographical boundaries. Generally MOOCs are aimed at unlimited participation through internet devices that use traditional e-learning resources like video lectures, in-lecture quizzes, readings and weekly quizzes and assignments along with interactive user forums to clarify concepts and enhance learning by providing a social learning experience to the students.[2]

Background of MOOCs

Digitalization of Education in the last decade has been undergoing imperative changes on both the fronts of dissemination and reception first through e-learning and more recently through MOOCs. The Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) phenomenon started in 2008. The first MOOC was conducted by George Siemens, Stephen Downes and David Cormier. These MOOCs were based on the principles of the learning theory of Connectivism, coined by George Siemens, and the notion of Connective Knowledge, as proposed by Stephen Downes. Foremost among these principles are *learning is the process of making connections* and *knowledge is the network.* David Cormier was responsible for coining the term MOOC. Subsequently, many MOOCs were run across the world. Soon the MOOCs, with interest from both private and non-profit institutions, evolved that relied more on Video Lectures, Learning Management System and Discussion Forums. There was an emergence of many well-financed platforms like Coursera, edX, Udacity, Udemy, Khan Academy, Futurelearn, NovoEd, OpenLearning, Canvas, Class2Go, OpenStudy and others. Some of them even joint attempts by Universities in US that prompted The New York Times to name 2012 as 'The Year of the MOOC' (Malik, 2015)[5].

SWAYAM: INDIAN version of MOOCs

Many initiatives has been taken by Government of India for open course education: Sikshat, National Digital Repository of IGNOU, EDUSAT, and Consortium for educational Communication (CEC), ERNET, Shikshya (xi-xii standards CBSE Board) & Vista Vahini (school teachers and students). Indian government launched an Indian MOOC platform called **'*SWAYAM*'- Study Webs of Active-learning for Young Aspiring Minds** on 25th September-the birth anniversary of Pt Deen Dayal Upadhyaya (Vishnoi, 2014) [8]. SWAYAM is an open source platform based on Edex. It offers courses in multiple languages including regional languages. SWAYAM has an ambitious target of 10 million learners. It runs blended courses. Credit recognition and transfer of credits to traditional universities is permitted. No university shall refuse any student for credit mobility for the courses earned through MOOCs.

SWAYAM COURSES

National Mission on Education through ICT (NMEICT) and National Programme on Technology Enabled Learning (NPTEL) already developed e-content in 23 disciplines and 933 Courses [7]. The following shall be national coordinators for each of the Sectors for the purpose of development of the e-content for SWAYAM-

University Grants Commission (UGC), Consortium for Educational Communication (CEC), Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), National Programme on Technology Enhancement Learning (NPTEL), National Institute of Open Schooling(NIOS), National Council of Educational Research and Training(NCERT)

- Under SWAYAM, professors of centrally-funded institutions in India will offer online courses
- The institutions offering courses (Host institutions) will be considered as national coordinators
- There will be a subject expert called Principal Investigator in all host institutions
- MOOC courses are supported through spoken Tutorials, virtual labs
- Created an online digital library called 'National E-Library' accessible to all learners to support student learning

TEACHING AND LEARNING UNDER SWAYAM

Teaching and learning follows a four Quadrant approach which enrich the instructional material by including content based lecture videos, animations or interactive simulations, supplementary resources like case studies, wiki development of the course, open content available on the internet, etc. and problems, quizzes and assignments. Information and communication Technology is used to its fullest capabilities to enrich the courseware and delivery.The course lessons are then released on a weekly basis along with live forums which may be used for weekly assignments, concept and doubt discussions and enhancing student's/learner's network. These forums are constantly moderated and reviewed by the Academic team. The course ends with a final examination that is proctored or in the form of assignment.

Objective

The specific objectives for this study are-

1. To find out the perception of Postgraduate students regarding MOOCs.

2. To understand the attitude and beliefs of the students towards the initiative taken by MHRD i.e. SWAYAM: Indian Version of MOOCs.

3. To study the factors that pose challenges in implementing SWAYAM.

Methodology

In this study investigator used survey research design of descriptive research method. Students pursuing Post graduation from different Colleges and campuses under University of Calcutta were treated as population of the study. For sample, Random Sampling technique was adopted for the study. Total 100 students were selected as sample. Data was collected using a self-designed questionnaire and an information schedule. The questionnaire used a five-point Likert-scale. 15 close-ended and 5 open-ended items has been selected to understand the perception, attitude and beliefs of the students towards the initiative taken by MHRD i.e. SWAYAM: Indian Version of MOOCs. The reliability and validity of the items could not be measured due to time constraints.

Limitation of the Study:

1. Only students pursuing post-graduation from the colleges and campuses under Calcutta University were taken as sample for the study.

Analysis of the Data and Findings: In depth analysis on the survey was carried out; the inputs gathered are consolidated and projected in a table for easier understanding along with the explanation and findings. Summary of the Survey Shows-

Research Question	Survey result
Owning digital devices	26% (Cellphone) 67% (Smartphone with Internet connectivity 92% (Desktop/Laptop PC)
Have regular Internet access (in College/Home/Internet Cafe)	78%
Aware of MOOCs	74%
Aware of SWAYAM	64%
Interested in Digital modes of education like MOOCs	86%
Taken any of the MOOCs	3%
Prefer MOOCs over traditional university learning process	35%

Though the students were found digitally literate and quite friendly in the cyber space, a few of them had access to MOOCs (3%). About 36% of the respondents were not aware of SWAYAM, though they were aware of online courses. Students' responses show that the place and visibility of the teacher is still important in today's Higher Education. Personal teaching experience, Laboratory experience & field work cannot be replaced by MOOCs, practical sessions in laboratory are always performed under due observation of Faculties.

Lot of discussion is ongoing with respect to MOOCs and its future when compare with the traditional academic way of teaching. From the feedback it is clear that 65% of the total respondents have favored the traditional education system. Whatever the hype and popularity MOOCs get in to; still when compare to the traditional academic approach is considered to be the best way of education to most of the students. An overall perception prevail that formal education and regular courses much superior to that of the open universities or other distance education methods in terms of academic status. When this shifts to the digital paradigm of MOOCs, the perception is even biased that 65% of the respondents don't prefer MOOCs over traditional University process.

Few respondents feel whether the certificate is valid or not and whether they can use this for getting any exemption in the traditional university for their further studies. 73% of the respondents were strongly agree with the possibilities that come with this initiative that it is a good option for a retired professor, who can share his experience with the upcoming generation irrespective of place, time, and cost. On the other hand, the emerging trends benefit the digital era and the tech-savvy students also.

86% of the respondents were interested in digital mode of education like MOOCs. The student centric nature of MOOC gives the learner an upper hand. But it is to be noted that self-learning cannot be done without self-motivation and dedication of the students. Coursera witnesses a major fall in the number of students those who enroll and those who complete the course (Chatterjee, 2014)[1].

Since the study was delimited to the metropolitan city Kolkata, considerable digital divide exists between the rural and urban students. Since a majority of the learning mass seeking higher studies is not friendly with the recent technology, it is a major constraint hindering them to access MOOCs seamlessly.

68% of the participants were strongly agreeing with the fact that language and cultural diversity stands as a major challenge for the extensive implementation of MOOCs. As considerable amount of learner, who does not possess the knowledge or adequate fluency in English cannot participate in these courses.

Discussion

Though the IT infrastructure has improved a lot in the city, but the basic infrastructure needed to implement MOOCs is still absent in many colleges and campuses. Fast Internet services being costly, learners are bound to compromise with speed. To implement SWAYAM-MOOCs effectively, a fast internet connection is required throughout. Students enrolling to MOOC Awareness of MOOC's needs to be spread appropriately using the social media sites, blogs along with traditional methods. To make SWAYAM-MOOCs popular to an extensive manner, basic digital education and familiarity of the students with the digital environment is an obvious pre-requisite. Making the students digitally literate and friendly is not an overnight task. Initially providing digital literacy in the grass-root level at the schools and colleges would be the first step towards promoting digital literacy. Teachers being the chief part for conducting MOOCs should be tech-friendly and familiar in the online digital environment. On the other hand, introducing MOOCs in some regional languages will be subtle initiative to preserve the regional culture and linguistic heritage of the nation. Thus the online courses can incorporate Quality, Affordability,

Scalability, Inclusion, and Employability in Indian Educational Society. Indian MOOCs may also have subject topics that have not been explored yet, such as Classical Indian Music, Indian History, Yoga, etc. They can also be used to provide high quality education to remote parts with subjects that require intensive graphics and visual illustrations.

Conclusion

In India majority of students can't enroll for their desired regular course because of limited seats at college & universities or non-availability of ideal institution with proper infra-structure. MOOCs offer to open up higher education by informal supplementary & affordable completion of university education for free or at a low cost for learners who are interested in learning. It really fosters a unique opportunities to expand horizons of knowledge life-long. Universities can start SOOCs (selective open online course) with the help of MOOCs. IITs are already offering their open certificate course on selective subjects. Now-a-days MOOCs are playing supportive role of traditional education system, students should take benefit of free MOOCs. It is duty of librarians to create more awareness amongst society, working people & house wives who cannot join regular education. MOOCs provide learning opportunities to them to educate from desired universities. Besides, India is suffering from digital divide. After 69 years of Independence electricity it is still a dream to the remote advancing hamlets, Government of India should seriously think over this burning issue to mitigate on war foot basis.

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