

# HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS (HEI) STUDENTS TAKE ON MOOC: CASE OF MALAYSIA

Jessnor Elmy Mat-jizat, Norsamsinar Samsudin and Rusliza Yahaya  
*Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris*

## ABSTRACT

The goal of this study is to explore the understanding and view of Malaysian Higher Education Institution (HEI) students on the concept of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC). Questionnaires will be used to identify respondents' knowledge (or lack of) of MOOC. Participants will then given a different set of questionnaire based of their knowledge of MOOC. Participants who have never heard of MOOC will receive a questionnaire that contains the general characteristics of a normal MOOC course, and will be asked to give feedback on a 6-point Likert Scale. By knowing the students understanding and view of MOOC, we will gain important information on the needs and concerns for MOOC courses in Malaysia. This short paper will describe an overview of the proposed study.

## KEYWORDS

Massive Open Online Courses, online learning, higher education institutes, Malaysia.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This study will explore the understanding and view of Malaysian Higher Education Institution (HEI) students on the concept of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC). It is important as MOOC was only recently been discussed in this country, even though it gained a lot of popularity in the US in two years ago (Hu 2013). By knowing the students understanding and view of MOOC, we will gain important information on the needs and concerns for MOOC courses in this country. This study can also contribute as an unofficial advert, to promote MOOC in Malaysia.

## 2. MOOC IN BRIEF

MOOC is a free online program that has sparked a lot of interest in the US two years ago (Hu 2013). Though it has been around prior to 2011, but people only start taking notice of the program when some of the world elite universities such as Harvard, MIT, Stanford University and Princeton University decided to take part. It is accessible to a global audience, and it is free. It is also flexible as it allows you to study at your own pace and time. MOOC is describe as much more impersonal and effortless than its other online learning predecessor. It is open to anybody who has access to its online location; having thousands of globally located students for a single course; students grading each other's work, and students teaching each other (Baggaley 2013). The goal is to create a community of learners who bring personal resources and perspectives to those offered by the teacher and to embark on a journey of discovery that is personal, yet include other students (Downes 2011; Mackness, Mak & Williams 2010).

However, most universities give no credits for MOOC courses (Palin 2013). For a fee, you may receive a certificate upon completion of a MOOC course, but not credits. One of the major concerns was the online identity of the student. But, now a few universities have introduced a new requirement where credits may be awarded if the students are able to demonstrate that they have met the course learning outcomes through prior learning assessments either via relevant assignment or an on-campus exam (Lee 2013; Parr 2013).

Another major concern with MOOC courses is the lack of instructional design (Baggaley 2013). It is all over the place, in blogs, discussion forums, tweets and videos. There is no one straight path that you can follow from start to finish. On top of that, as a student, you will be swamped by about 500++ postings, topics or questions to discuss daily, which came through from all the other students. Many of the course developer worries about the technical part of the course; overlooking the most critical part which is having good pedagogical approaches and proper course instructions (Mackness, Mak & Williams 2010).

### 3. ONLINE LEARNING IN MALAYSIA

Adopting new technology in teaching and learning has recently been a new “tagline” at public higher education institutions (public HEIs) in Malaysia. Online application enablers such as Padlet, Slideshare and Blendspace, were introduced to the academics, with high hopes that they will implement them in their teaching and learning activities. By blending the use of technology, it is hoped that learning in public HEIs will no longer mean sitting in the lecture room for two to three hours per subject per week. The aim is to promote self-learning and to enculturate lifelong learning among the student of HEIs.

The Malaysian Education Minister has urged HEIs to be more proactive in adopting new technology for teaching and learning. The Education Ministry is aiming for 30% of courses at public HEIs to be offered online by 2015 (The Star 2013), which is in line with the blueprint on enculturation of lifelong learning for Malaysia 2011-2020 (Malaysian Education Ministry 2014). Lifelong learning is said to be the utmost important strategy for the nation’s human capital development. Though formal higher education in universities and colleges still plays a major role, lifelong learning can provide a second chance to those who missed their opportunity to pursue higher education before. It also offers the possibility to the working population to enhance their education level. The use of technology will be a vital supporting agent which will enable the students to study at their own time, at their own place and their own pace.

Another important document is the National Higher Education Strategic Plan (PSPTN), which is a document that translates the direction of national higher education for the future that focuses on the development of quality human and intellectual capital (Mohamed Amin et al. 2011). The Education Ministry has developed 21 Critical Agenda Projects (CAPs) to ensure the implementation of PSPTN, and e-learning has been identified as one of the most important CAPs.

In trying to implement online learning in Malaysia, Norazah, Mohamed Amin and Zaidan (2011) found out that for a student, the challenges that they faced in online education programme are usually due to lack of / limited access to the Internet. Aside from that, lengthy response time from lecturers, lack of content, time consuming, lack of interesting content, uninteresting content and it is not like other social applications e.g., Facebook also contributed to student’s lack of interest to participate in online education programme. These findings show that HEIs need to upgrade and enhance their network infrastructure across all campus. The increase in broadband facilities is the utmost important factor for a functioning online learning environment.

Besides that, to be able to participate in a MOOC program effectively, one must be ICT literate. Punie and Cabrera (2005) describes ICT literacy as not only having basic computer literacy, but rather a higher order skill such as: knowing where to search for certain information; how to process and evaluate information; how to assess the reliability and trustworthiness of websites and other online sources; and many others. Katz and Macklin (2007) argued that the problem faced by most tertiary level students today is their inability to navigate, evaluate and use the plethora of online information available today. This is in accord with Mat-jizat (2012) findings where 148 Malaysian trainee teachers were given a task-based ICT literacy test, and the result shows that the ICT domain that the trainee teachers find the hardest were to identify and judge credible websites.

Aside from that, Malaysia’s strict rules and regulations of the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) might become a deterring factor. The inflexibility of standards and criteria developed to ensure equivalency of academic programmes in HEIs might not yet ready for MOOC. In Malaysia, a statutory body known as the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) is responsible for accrediting academic programmes provided by HEI in Malaysia (MQA 2013). MQA’s main role is to ensure the quality of education of HEIs in the country, by developing standards and criteria as national references for conferment of degrees. MQA also evaluates foreign’s qualifications and assesses them for equivalency with Malaysian HEI qualifications (MQA 2013).

Aside from MQA, there is another body that is the Public Services Department (PSD) which is a government body that manages the public service human resources in Malaysia. Recognition of academic programmes from PSD is crucial as employment in the public sector will be based on academic programmes that are recognised by PSD only (Bahagian Pembangunan Modal Insan 2013). Usually, PSD will only recognise academic programmes that were accredited by MQA.

In addition to employability in the public sector, students from an academic programme that are not accredited by MQA will face difficulties if they want to further their studies at any local public HEI; apply for credit transfers; or apply for sponsorships. Therefore, there is going to be a possibility that students who passed their MOOC courses with flying colours might have a problem in applying for jobs in the public sector or pursuing a higher degree. It somehow defeats the purpose of MOOC program where it is suppose to help student acquire knowledge at their own pace and space, and later use that knowledge to have a better chance in improving his own social, employment and economic status.

#### **4. CURRENT DEVELOPMENT FOR ONLINE LEARNING**

In May 2014, the Malaysian Ministry of Education held a MOOC Course Development Technical Committee Meeting in Putrajaya (Malaysian Education Ministry 2014). The aim of the meeting was to introduce the new OpenCourseWare2MOOC (OCW2MOOC) programme which is targeted to be implemented in September 2014. This pilot programme is more OCW than MOOC. Only four courses will be offered: 1) Islamic and Asian Civilization; 2) Ethnic Relations; 3) ICT Competency and 4) Entrepreneurship. These four courses are compulsory courses that every HEI students in Malaysia must be enrolled.

HEI students will have access to this online material and flipped teaching, or flipped classroom will be implemented in their respective lectures, based on the online material. Contents from the online material will also be included into the student's assessment.

#### **5. THE STUDY**

The objectives of this study are:

- to explore the level of understanding of MOOC programs among HEI students in Malaysia; and
- to understand the HEI students view of MOOC.

When investigating the feasibility of a MOOC program, many researchers focused on sources, communications, technologies, context and learning management systems (Cabiria 2012). However, for this study the students' view of MOOC programs (second objectives of the study) will be investigated according to five categories:

- program feasibility in Malaysia;
- ICT literacy;
- network structure;
- credit transfer; and
- Instructional design.

The students will also be given an opportunity to suggest another category that they feel important to have for MOOC program to be successful and largely accepted and acknowledged in Malaysia, not only by its prospective online students, but also by other HEIs in Malaysia.

#### **6. METHODOLOGY**

This study will use a questionnaire developed based on the five identified categories. Validity of the questionnaire will be determined by a group of seven experts with relevant background in online / distance education and knowledge in MOOC. The reliability of the questionnaire will be determined through a pilot test using 30 random Malaysian HEI students.

The main study will be conducted on three top HEI in Malaysia (based on the country National Ranking). The research population will be all final year students from the three HEI. Two sets of questionnaires will be used to gather information / views depending on their familiarity with MOOC program.

## 7. CONCLUSION

This study will explore the understanding and view of Malaysia's HEI student of MOOC programs. At the end of this study, the students' view of the MOOC program will be summarised. It is hoped that these findings could benefit relevant government ministries in making decision about MOOC or online learning in Malaysia. The findings could also improve our understanding on the requirements and demands of MOOC in South East Asia. It is hoped that the favourable view gathered can provide useful information for MOOC program developer.

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