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UNSTOPPABLE STUDY WITH MOOCs DURING COVID 19 PANDEMIC: A STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Online Learning technology, which is now a fundamental need of modern civilization, is also becoming an affordable, handy information provider and even a provider of professional courses and educational degrees instead of attending physical classes in the traditional institute of learning. Recently this opportunity is offered through MOOCs (Massive Open Online Course), especially in India. MOOCs are gaining popularity worldwide for their benefits and easy access, provided by the best universities worldwide, individually or collaboratively. Some popular MOOC platforms are namely FutureLearn, edX, Coursera, Udacity, etc., have already set their distinctive mark in the field of higher education and competency enhancing courses with a variety of subject disciplines. Our country also has recently launched a MOOCs platform named SWAYAM, which is gaining progress successfully. The study tried to find out the awareness on MOOCs among students in North Eastern region with special reference to Assam University, Silchar. MOOCs contains a variety of online reading materials and resources; in this context, it is now vital to rating the awareness level of MOOCs among the students worldwide during this COVID 19 pandemic, visualizing the growth of the MOOCs in India.

Keywords: *Massive Open Online Course, MOOCs, Online Learning, Higher Education, COVID 19, Swayam, Assam University-Silchar.*

1. Introduction

Nowadays, MOOCs have been making significant changes in the way of providing education. MOOC is a massive course designed to support unlimited participation offered through a platform. MOOCs are genuinely massive and open; anyone can sign up, and there are no admission requirements, costs, or any other prerequisites. Origin of Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) concept was not suddenly appeared but it had encompassed through various phases of different kinds of Online Courses, Open course Ware, Open Education Resources, Distance Learning Courses, Online Taxonomy and Online Pedagogies which contain a wide range of reading materials in different formats.

1.1 Background of the Study

The genesis of Massive Open Online Course was traced back to 2008, but enough popularity was gained by Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) in 2012. In 2012 MOOCs had gain lots of popularity among millions of learns worldwide, including professionals of various disciplines. Dave Cornier and Bryan Alexander coin MOOC in 2008 for their course “Connectivism and Connective Knowledge,” which tries to cover some paid students and online students. After that, several universities in the US created MOOCs like Stanford University professors started offering their courses online; India also did not lack behind in providing online education.

1.2 Statement of the problem

MOOCs are providing an excellent opportunity for all learns to get knowledge, to enhance their ability, upgrading their skill in a different field with a minimum cost. Therefore, it becomes

crucial to discuss its usefulness and effectiveness in the modern era of education and people's perception and awareness regarding MOOCs.

1.3 The objective of the study

- 1) To know the awareness level of MOOCs among the postgraduate students of Assam University;
- 2) To assess or to measure the perception of MOOCs among the postgraduate students;

1.4 Scope and limitation of the study

This study is focused on finding the awareness level of MOOCs among the postgraduate students, and this study is limited to the geographical boundary of Assam University, Silchar.

1.5 Significance of the study

This study will provide a clear picturesque of student's understanding and motivation in using MOOCs. It may provide needed information to MOOC developers regarding the implementation of MOOCs in universities.

2. Review of Literature

To know the latest development and profound understanding in research on massive open online courses, the researcher has consulted both primary and secondary sources of information. Some journal articles and internet websites have also been consulted.

2.1 International studies

Before COVID-19, students were more inclined with the traditional way of learning, but with the outbreak of CORONA VIRUS, students have been using the online platform of learning more rigorously mentioned by (Akuratiya & Meddage, 2020). They have found out that students are very much in like with the online study which has created a very comfortable platform for study to which they have actively participated. The researcher has concluded that the students are willing to accept their online course via online mode which has gained a very positive impact. After the outbreak, market demand for online education and the number of online platform users raised rapidly (Chen, Peng, Yin, Rong, Yang, & Cong, 2020). (Zheng, Rosson, Shih, & Carroll, 2015) dealt with knowing students' needs from MOOCs and how well MOOC addresses these needs. The study identified learning motivations and summarized innovative approaches that students take while learning from MOOCs.

2.2 Studies conducted in India

Online Learning has emerged as an excellent solution to the problem of imparting education during the COVID 19 Pandemic. Online learning has provided the student with an opportunity to

create their own learning environment. (Gaur, Mudgal, Kaur, & Sharma, 2020). Massive open online courses offer e-campus and virtual classrooms where learners can attain their classes anytime they like. MOOCs are also transforming the libraries into classrooms and the center of education (Gupta, Yadav, & Dixit, 2017). In India, many institutions and various companies are associated with institutions worldwide, offering MOOCs (Nisha & Senthil, 2015). Coursera and edx are mostly known MOOC platforms among LIS educators, and MOOC is highly appreciated and supported by LIS educators in India (Sawant, 2016). MOOCs awareness is higher in postgraduate students than graduate students. One common motivation carried by the student to enroll in MOOC is to complement the regular courses they are currently taking (Nagasampige, Subbaiah, & Nagasampige, 2017).

3. Research Design

This study falls under the category of survey method of research, and data collection has been done using a purposive sampling technique. In some cases, the research has also use observation and interview methods of research.

4. Data Analysis and Interpretation

After collecting raw data, the researcher has thoroughly studied and systematically organized the data; and presented it in a graphical form using MsExcel for better understanding. From the 185 distributed questionnaire to the selected population of Assam University, Silchar, 161 i.e., 92% questionnaire were received back.

4.1 Demographic Details of the respondents

Table 1 shows that out of the total respondents, the maximum number of respondents are **Female, 82 (50.9%)**, whereas **79 (49.1%)** respondents are **Male**. The age of the respondents covered in the study has been grouped into four categories where the majority of the respondents **114 (70.8%)**, are in the age group of **Below 23**, followed by **44 (27.3%)** in the age group of **24-27**, **2 (1.2%)** respondents are in the age group of **28-30** and **1 (0.6%)** respondents are categorized in age group **Above 30**.

Respondent's yearly income might be a factor for considering MOOCs. Table 1 shows that out of total respondent highest respondent **57 (35.4%)** have a family of **1 Lakhs to 3 Lakhs** followed by **3 Lakhs to 5 Lakhs** have **39 (24.2%)**, **Below 1 Lakhs** have **35 (21.7%)** and lastly **Above 5 Lakhs** have **30 (18.6%)** respondents.

Table: 1 Demographic Profile (N=161)

| Status | Number (%) |
|---------------|------------|
| Gender | |
| Male | 79 (49.1%) |

| | |
|-----------------------------|-------------|
| Female | 82 (50.9%) |
| Age Distribution | |
| Below 23 | 114 (70.8%) |
| 24-27 | 44 (27.3%) |
| 28-30 | 2 (1.2%) |
| Above 30 | 1 (0.6%) |
| Yearly Family Income | |
| Below 1 Lakhs | 35 (21.7%) |
| 1 Lakhs to 3 Lakhs | 57 (35.4%) |
| 3 Lakhs to 5 Lakhs | 39 (24.2%) |
| Above 5 Lakhs | 30 (18.6%) |

4.2 Respondent Technology Support for Online Learning

Respondents are asked to rate their response in the rating scale from **1 to 5** where **1= Strongly Agree, 2= Disagree, 3= Neutral, 4= Agree, 5= Strongly Agree**

Table: 2 Respondent technology support for online learning (N=161)

| Statements | SD | D | N | A | SA | Total Attributes |
|---|----|----|----|----|-----|------------------|
| I have computer with internet connectivity | 8 | 12 | 14 | 60 | 67 | 649 |
| I have adequate software's like MS office, Video Player, adobe acrobat on my computer | 7 | 10 | 13 | 72 | 59 | 649 |
| I have the necessary skills to operate the computer | 7 | 4 | 17 | 72 | 61 | 659 |
| I have an email account | 6 | 1 | 3 | 48 | 103 | 724 |
| I can communicate effectively on internet | 5 | 5 | 18 | 71 | 62 | 663 |
| I find myself very comfortable in using computer | 4 | 2 | 26 | 71 | 58 | 660 |
| I have adequate knowledge to find information using the internet | 6 | 3 | 25 | 63 | 64 | 659 |
| Grand Total | | | | | | 4663 |

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Likert Score} &= \text{Total Score} / (\text{No. of respondents} \times \text{No. of attributes} - \text{missing values}) \\ &= 4663 / (161 \times 7 - 0) \\ &= 4663 / 1127 \\ &= 4.14 \end{aligned}$$

A Likert Score of 4.14 (**approx 4 = Agree**) in the 5 point rating scale indicates that respondents **Agreed** to have sufficient knowledge and equipment to support technology for online learning.

4.3 Respondents interest in online learning

Table 3 depicts the respondents rating on a Likert rating scale from 1 to 5 on their interest in online learning and the use of online documents and videos for study.

Table:3 Respondents interest in online learning (N=16)

| Statements | SD | D | N | A | SA | Total Attributes |
|--|-----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|-------------------------|
| I am interested in online learning | 7 | 6 | 17 | 94 | 45 | 671 |
| I search for online course materials related to my study | 11 | 16 | 22 | 71 | 49 | 638 |
| Online videos and contents help me to make my study notes | 10 | 10 | 22 | 71 | 56 | 660 |
| If course-related information is presented in video format, it will be very useful in learning/understanding | 9 | 2 | 39 | 62 | 57 | 663 |
| I like to watch educational videos | 6 | 3 | 17 | 80 | 62 | 693 |
| Grand Total | | | | | | 3325 |

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{Likert Score} &= \text{Total Score} / (\text{No. of respondents} \times \text{No. of attributes} - \text{missing values}) \\
 &= 3325 / (161 \times 5 - 0) \\
 &= 3325 / 805 \\
 &= 4.13
 \end{aligned}$$

A Likert Score of 4.13 (approx 4 = Agree) in the 5 point rating scale indicates that respondents **Agreed** are interested in online learning and using available online documents and videos to support their study.

4.4 Respondents awareness of MOOCs (N=161)

It has been known from the figure: 1 that the majority of the respondents, **119 (73.9%)** are not aware of MOOCs and only **42 (26.1%)** of the respondent are aware of MOOCs.

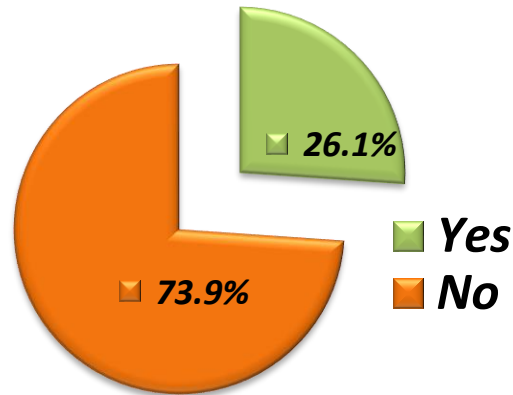


Figure: 1 Respondents' awareness of MOOCs

4.5 Respondents awareness about following MOOCs platforms

Table 4 depicts that majority of the respondents 24 (57.1%) are aware of **Swayam** followed by 17(40.5%) **NPTEL**; 14(33.3%) **Udemy**; 11(26.2%) **The Open University**; 11 (26.2%) **Coursera**; 10 (23.8%) **edX**; 7 (16.7%) **Udacity**; 6 (14.3%) **FutureLearn**; 5 (11.9%) **EduKart** and lastly 4 (9.5%) respondents aware of **ApnaCourse**.

Table:4 Respondents awareness about following MOOCs platforms (N=42)

| List of MOOCs | Respondents(%) |
|---------------------|-------------------|
| The Open University | 11(26.2%) |
| Udacity | 7 (16.7%) |
| Coursera | 11 (26.2%) |
| edX | 10 (23.8%) |
| EduKart | 5 (11.9%) |
| NPTEL | 17 (40.5%) |
| Swayam | 24 (57.1%) |
| FutureLearn | 6 (14.3%) |
| Udemy | 14 (33.3%) |
| ApnaCourse | 4(9.5%) |

(Multiple Responses Permitted)

4.6 Sources from where the respondents come across MOOCs (Multiple Responses Permitted) (N=42)

Figure 2 shows that the maximum respondents **23 (54.8%)** came across MOOCs from **the Internet** whereas **8 (19.0%)** of respondents came to know about MOOCs **From a Friend** followed by **7 (16.7%)** respondents who knew while **Attending Lecture/Seminar**; **3 (7.1%)** respondents knew from **Library** and **1 (2.4%)** respondent came across MOOCs while reading **Newspaper**.

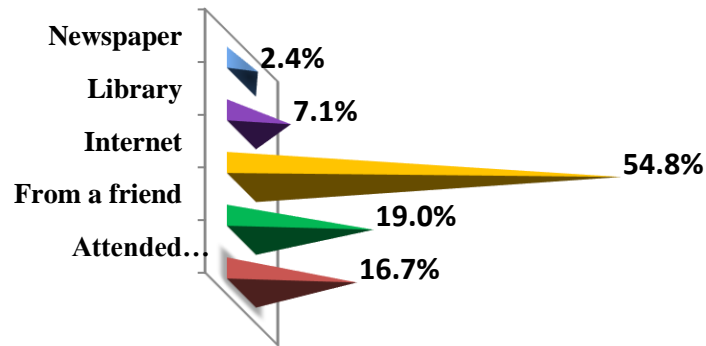


Figure:2 Sources from where the respondents come across MOOCs

4.7 Respondents interest in pursuing MOOCs

Table 5 shows that out of the total respondents, **35 (83.3%)** respondents are interested in pursuing MOOCs, whereas **7 (8.3%)** are not interested in pursuing MOOCs.

Table: 5 Respondents interest in pursuing MOOCs (N=42)

| Respondents interest | No. of Respondents(%) |
|----------------------|-----------------------|
| Yes | 35 (83.3%) |
| No | 7 (8.3%) |

4.8 Respondents completed/doing MOOCs (N=42)

From Figure 3, it is clear that the highest no. of respondents, **31 (73.8%)** did not complete MOOCs, whereas **11 (26.2%)** of respondents met their MOOCs.

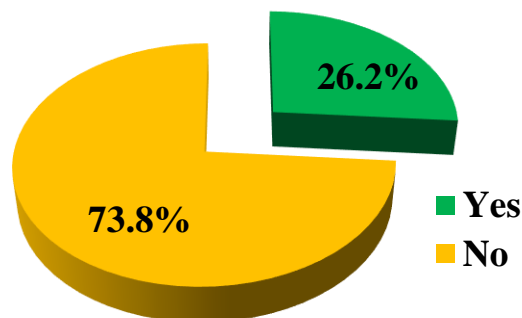


Figure: 3 Respondents completed / doing MOOCs

4.9 Respondents awareness on MOOCs as given weightage as an open course

Table 7 depicts that a maximum of **30 (71.4%)** respondents are aware of MOOC as given weightage as Open Course, whereas **12 (28.6%)** respondents are not aware of it.

Table: 6 Respondents awareness on MOOCs as given weightage as an open course (N=42)

| MOOCs given weightage as Open course | No. of Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Yes | 12 | 28.6% |
| No | 30 | 71.4% |
| Total= | 42 | 100.0% |

4.10 Respondents interest in taking the open course from SWAYAM /NPTEL

From figure 5, we realized that a very good no. of respondents **29 (69%)** are interested in taking an open course from **SWAYAM/NPTEL**, whereas **13 (31%)** of respondents are not interested.

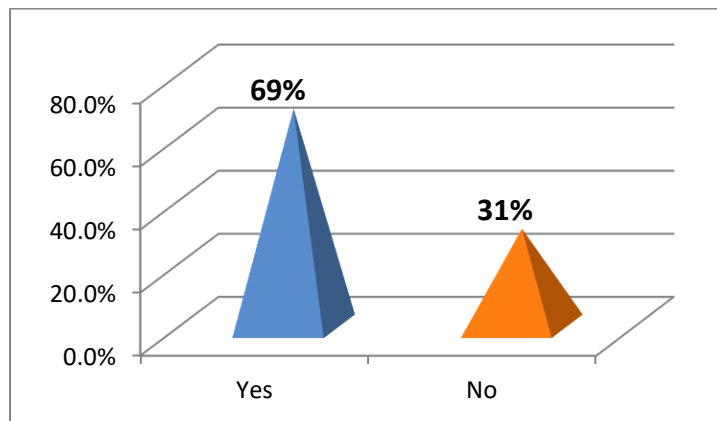


Figure: 4 Respondents interest in taking an open course from SWAYAM /NPTEL

4.11 Respondents preference regarding face to face vs. online study

It is clear from Table 6 that the maximum no. of respondents **8 (19%)** are agreed with **60% F2F and 40% online**, followed by **11 (26.2%) 50 F2F and 50% online** as well as **11 (100%) online** and lastly, **8 (19%)** of respondents agreed on **40 % F2F and 60% Online**.

Table:7 Respondents preference regarding Face to Face vs. Online Study (N=42)

| Face To Face Vs. Online Study | No. of Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| 40 % F2F and 60 % Online | 8 | 19.0% |
| 50% F2F and 50% Online | 11 | 26.2% |
| 60% F2F and 40 % Online | 12 | 28.6% |
| 100% online | 11 | 26.2% |
| Total | 42 | 100.0% |

5. Importance of MOOCs in COVID 19 Pandemic

COVID-19 is the infectious disease caused by the coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2, which is a respiratory pathogen. To stay safe from the virus, people are instructed to maintain physical distancing, wearing a mask, keeping rooms well ventilated, avoiding crowds, cleaning their hands, and coughing into a bent elbow or tissue. (WHO). As per COVID 19 guidelines, all educational institutions must stay closed; hence, our education has shifted from face to face to online study to avoid large gatherings and crowds for blocking the transmission of the virus. Due to this many teachers have been forced to switch to online instruction in a hurry. Most have scrambled to revamp their syllabus, their assessments, and change to a patchwork of options through virtual meeting and learning platforms such as Google Meet, Zoom, Google Assistant. Asynchronous lectures, emails etc. In this context MOOCs (Massive Open Online Course) comes in full force to impart quality education to the learners of the different subject area. MOOC learners have the benefit of expanding their knowledge and skill to a great extent. As we see in formal educational institutes, our scope of choosing the subject is limited by the institute building but it differs in MOOCs. MOOCs has an Ocean of Knowledge; you can pick from it whatever is suited you. During this pandemic situation, MOOC is likely a sever of education. Students can opt for diploma, degree and Postgraduate Degree from MOOCs by following all guidelines of COVID 19. Those Job holder who wants to opt higher promotion they can also choose MOOCs and get a degree. During the pandemic, many MOOCs provider like Coursera, edX, and some other providers have rolled back some of their restrictions on access, so instructors could jump at the chance to introduce their students to quality online learning through MOOCs.

6. Major Findings

The findings based on the study are as follows:

- Out of 185 distributed questionnaires, 161 (92%) questionnaire was received back which is a good response;
- It is also found that out of 161 respondents, only 42 (26.1%) of respondents are aware of MOOCs, which is very poor;
- It is found from the survey that out of 42 respondents majority of the respondents, 24(57.1%), were aware of Swayam;
- It is observed that the majority of the respondent, 23(54.8%), came to know about MOOCs while surfing the internet. In this case, the library must take some initiative to spread awareness;
- It is also observed that a good number of respondents 35 (83.3%) were interested in pursuing MOOCs, which shows students interest in MOOCs;
- It is found from the study that the majority of the respondent, 31 (73.8%), have not completed /doing MOOCs, which is a very poor result;

- It is observed from the survey that the maximum number of respondents, 30 (71.4%), were not aware of MOOCs as given weightage as Open Course. The library must arrange some awareness program on this;
- It is observed in the survey that an excellent number of respondents, i.e., 29 (69.0%), were interested in taking Open Course from SWAYAM/NPTEL;
- Out of total respondents on F2F Vs. Online Learning it is found that the highest number of respondents 11 (26.2%) preferred 50% face to face and 50% online learning;

7. Suggestions

- Arrangement of more workshop, seminar and training program on MOOCs for teachers and students as well;
- The orientation of MOOCs by the library referring Swayam/NPTEL;
- Spreading awareness on CBCS (Choice Base Credit System) among students;
- Spreading the importance and benefits of MOOCs;
- Involvement of the Library in implementation of MOOCs;
- Use of state of the art Lab for creating educational videos;

8. Conclusion

MOOCs is basically a deep sea of knowledge that students can dive into but it is useless, unless they have proper knowledge about it. For the student who enrolls in MOOCs courses, it is essential to commit time and seriousness to complete the task given by the instructor at the right time. MOOCs can offer the right information to the right user at the right time. From the study, we came to know that awareness of MOOCs among the students of Assam University is not up to the mark; there is more work that needs to be done by the government as well as the university to spread the awareness. MOOC has overcome all the challenges of the COVID 19 pandemic and instrumental in providing courses to the learner as it does not include physical boundaries. The scope of MOOCs available in every sector of education makes it very strong in the field of education.

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