JOURNAL OF E-LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY
Vol. 19, No. 3 (2023), pp. 59-64

Unpacking the MOOC experience: insights from Indian Postgraduate Students in Education

Shama P. Ansari[a,1], Ashutosh Biswal[a]

[a]*The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Faculty of Education and Psychology, Department of Education, Vadodara (India)*

(submitted: 6/7/2023; accepted: 18/7/2023; published: 31/10/2023)

Abstract

Anyone anywhere in the world can participate in Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) and gain knowledge and experience. As we all have a major role to play in making the world a better place, Massive Open Online Courses must be made available to as many people as possible. Students have access to a wide range of educational opportunities through the use of MOOCs, which can assist them in their pursuit of lifelong learning. MOOCs, are available to everyone interested in learning at no or minimum cost. The content presented in MOOCs is intended to be understandable by a diverse group of students. The course is typically completed at the students' speed, and there are no requirements for on-campus registration. They are viewable from any device so long as it has a constant internet connection. The researcher in the present study conducted an interview research on the M.Ed.(Master of Education) students who were enrolled in a MOOC developed by the researcher on the subject of Research Methodology. In India M.Ed. students are post graduate students in Education who enrol in this M.Ed. programme after graduation in Education i.e., B.Ed. After the MOOC got over, those enrolled in that MOOC were interviewed. The collected data was analysed using thematic analysis. The study revealed favourable attitude towards digital education among M.Ed. students. Moreover, the students' optimistic outlook on the future growth of MOOC implies its significance for developers seeking to design similar courses, as well as for educators integrating such courses into their instructional strategies. The findings of this research hold considerable value for both academics and industries, contributing to the advancement of online learning and its potential implications for the future.

KEYWORDS: MOOC, Online learning, Master of Education (M.Ed.), Interview, Thematic Analysis.

DOI
https://doi.org/10.20368/1971-8829/1135862

CITE AS
Ansari, S., & Biswal, A. (2023). Unpacking the MOOC experience: insights from Indian postgraduate students in education. *Journal of e-Learning and Knowledge Society*, *19*(3), 59-64.
https://doi.org/10.20368/1971-8829/1135862

1. Introduction

The Massive Open Online Course(MOOC) has the capacity to significantly expand access to education at all levels. Regarding education generally and higher education specifically, no one disputes its inventive potential. To develop and execute Open Educational Resources, the Indian government created MOOC guidelines in 2017. The guidelines for MOOC stress the importance of storing the online courses created under the policy on an indigenous website called Study Web of Active Learning for Young Aspiring Minds (SWAYAM), where students can access the educational materials created by the subject matter experts without cost. This innovative platform provides education to students from school to university level. It seeks to remove the digital divide and provide quality education to everyone. According to the new Education policy in India, universities now have the chance to team up with other organizations in the field, both at national and international levels and create their own MOOC. This has increased the scope of education to include both knowledge-based and skill-based courses.

MOOCs provide an excellent method for placing high-quality education in the hands of every student, be it from any field and course. It is high time for the system of teacher education to line up with current trends and also incorporate modern teaching methods in their day-

[1] corresponding author - email: shamapar25@gmail.com

to-day teaching practice. According to Goel & Goel (2013),

> *"Open Distance Learning through MOOCs has great potential to be infused in teacher education in both pre-service and in-service level which seems to be a neglected area. Teacher Education in India has a slow pace in getting access to modernization and has not yet integrated the technological innovations for transacting education."*

Adopting MOOCs into Teacher Education can bring about the necessary change and influence teaching and learning practices at all levels of teacher education. With this in mind, the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), Government of India, introduced the Annual Refresher Programme In Teaching (ARPIT) on 13 November 2018 for online professional development of in-service teachers using the MOOC platform SWAYAM. Teacher Education is a professional course where competent teachers and teacher educators are being produced who need to know a variety of information and be updated with the knowledge explosion. The goal of teacher education in India is to empower aspiring teachers with the knowledge, skills, and expertise they need to educate and support their students effectively. It is intended to prepare instructors to understand their student's needs and to employ research-based teaching practises to assist them in achieving academic achievement. The researcher in the present study conducted an interview research on M.Ed. students to find out their experiences. The developed MOOC enabled students to get acquainted with a new method of teaching-learning, compelling them to use various authentic open educational resources available on the online platform, enabling self-paced and flexible learning among them, and introducing them to an alternative mode of learning.

1.1 Unravelling MOOC

According to the British online dictionary, a MOOC is a term for a free online course that is taken by a significant number of students. According to McAuley et al. (2010) and Vardi (2012), "MOOCs are web-based courses taught by academics or professionals that may accommodate an unlimited number of students simultaneously." MOOCs are a continuation of the trend in innovation, experimentation, and the use of technology that was initiated by distance learning and online education to provide comprehensive learning opportunities (Siemens, 2013). According to Chakravarty (2016), " MOOCs help to pursue our area of interest while doing a job or studying, people from different geographical locations can come together, learn and connect online. Sitting at home, students will be able to learn from the best university and best educators. MOOCs can help in self-paced learning as there is no time scheduling for these courses." In India, where gender discrimination leads to lesser-educated girls, MOOCs can be very beneficial. MOOCs help people in professional development and also sharpen their skills. It helps fulfil the learning thirst, offering the chance to physician to join a dance MOOC or a musician from undertaking a human resource course.

A study conducted by Pandit, (2016) reveals that, "in a country like India, where most people are residing in remote areas and do not have adequate access to skill enhancement and quality learning, MOOC can play a pivotal role". As per a study conducted by Kaur (2019), the major advantages of MOCs in higher education are scalability, free education and removal of other constraints of boundaries. MOOCs force professors to improve their lectures, develop futuristic designs to ensure students keep up, bring people together from different parts of the world, and provide many business opportunities for making platforms and collaborating with universities like Coursera and Edx.

Hence, MOOCs are a welcome step that brings immense benefits to various stakeholders of the Indian education system. India has the second most people sign up for MOOCs after the USA (Shah, 2018). MOOCs will likely have a significant effect on India's education system by raising standards and making it easier to get a good education in all fields with the click of a button.

1.2 Significance of MOOC

MOOCs are open and accessible to all with a stable internet connection. There is no kind of biases concerning caste creed, gender and age. So learning through MOOC is considered to be inclusive. Learners can select any course of their choice irrespective of their previous background. There are no restrictions on boundaries as students from Indian universities can enrol in a course from Cambridge University, UK. The courses are also usually free and provide financial assistance in paid courses. The discussion forums in MOOCs provide an opportunity to interact with students of different backgrounds and communities. The course provides students with self-paced learning and learning at their own convenient time. People who are doing a job and lack time to study in physically mode can enrol in such courses and get the benefits of online learning. Moreover, MOOCs also provide opportunities to achieve the sustainable goal of providing inclusive and quality education to all and lifelong learning opportunities. Vezne (2020) looked into Teacher Candidate Satisfaction with Massive Open Online Courses in Turkey. Findings suggested that MOOCs help teacher candidates learn and grow as people, and that they are happy with them. King et al. (2018) found the experiences of a group of Timorese English language teachers experience in MOOC and pointed out the benefits involved, like encouraging teachers to discover new ways, improve their teaching

techniques, and enhance participants' English. Adams (2014) explored undergraduate students' experience of time using MOOCs and found that the end of lectures in MOOCs created an aura of sorrow among learners. The study found that students take different time to complete the course, some wishing days and some wishing months, but all had meaningful time spent studying the online courses. Latha (2019) included 500 Indian Learners who have completed at least one MOOC course through Coursera, Edx, or Udacity MOOC platforms and found that students in post-graduation have a higher inclination toward studying through MOOCs, where the internal rewards drive the behavior. Sukhbaatar et al. (2018) also explored undergraduates' and high school students' perceptions of MOOCs and found that students consider MOOCs a learning resource and a worthy source of knowledge. Koukis & Jimoyiannis (2018) explored 326 language teacher views on MOOCs in secondary education schools and found that MOOCs promote professional development among teachers and a high inclination towards adopting such platforms in the future. Aljaraideh (2019) took a sample of 130 faculty members from all faculties at Jerash University and found their perceptions about MOOCs. The study concluded that teachers perceive MOOCs to provide students with better learning opportunities and recommended that higher education institutes introduce MOOCs in their daily learning. Verma (2021) found the perception of participants and instructors towards the effectiveness of the SWAYAM platform through a web-based survey and concluded that although Swayam is an affordable solution to increase the enrolment ratio, it still has certain challenges like long videos and lack of audio clarity. Salas et al.(2022) studied 122 teachers from the National Autonomous University of Mexico's perception of MOOCs during the pandemic and found that MOOC is a viable solution to transform education.

In India, where in the year 2000, only 5 millions of citizens had internet access,, the number has now increased to 755.8 million (Internet World Stats, 2021). This huge increase in internet access, especially in the developing world, has also made online content and interaction available to people worldwide (Ahuja, 2018). In 2006, NCERT wrote a position paper saying that non-traditional ways of learning, like distance and open learning, on-demand education, and other flexible ways of learning, should be tried out. Today's young people need flexible systems, curricula that look to the future, and a focus on careers in the twenty-first century. There is an urgent need to persuade the educational system, which should make teaching and learning more meaningful for teachers and their students. MOOC is the solution to most of these problems, and it can give many people access to education. MOOCs can give students better and more varied lessons than one teacher might be able to develop on their own (Daniel 2012).

Efforts need to be taken to maximize the engagement among learners, monitor their learning, and make learning interesting so that the dropout rate can be minimized. This study provided Master of Education (M.Ed.) students not only a new platform for learning but also promoted them to adopt such practices in the future. It provided a path for future teacher educators to get acquainted with an innovative teaching-learning platform, promote professional development, create awareness for MOOCs, and equip them with 21st-century technical skills. This study aim to analyse the experiences of M.Ed. students who had enrolled in the MOOC developed by the researcher.

2. Materials and Methods

The following section will discuss the research design, participants, tools used, and data analysis techniques.

2.1. Research Design

The present study is qualitative in nature, and the interview method was adopted. The M.Ed. students were enrolled in a MOOC developed using WordPress. The course was divided into three specialization courses on research methodology. Each course lasted three weeks and was self-paced but with a fixed start and end date. Students were also provided a manual to guide them in enrolling and surfing the course. At the end of the course, an interview was conducted to know their experience towards the MOOC.

2.2. Participants

The participants in the present study were students enrolled in the two-year M.Ed. (Master of Education) programme. These are postgraduate students in Education who enrol in this programme after graduation in Education (i.e., B.Ed.) to become teacher educators. In 2021-2023, fifty-one students were enrolled in the M.Ed. programme in the Department of Education, Faculty of Education and Psychology, The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Gujarat, India. All those fifty-one M.Ed. students were enrolled in the MOOC prepared by the researcher. Out of these fifty-one students, twelve were randomly selected to participate in the interview.

2.3. Instruments

Data was collected through an interview schedule which was semi-structured. The interview schedule had twenty five mixed questions, including both open-ended and close-ended questions. The main aim of conducting the interview was to know experience of the students in learning through MOOCs, the challenges faced by the students during the implementation of the MOOC, and also their suggestions for future developers of a MOOC and prospective learners in MOOCs. The interview was conducted via phone, and

each interview, lasting for approximatively 30 minutes. Every M.Ed. student has explained the purpose of conducting the interview, and permission was taken to record their voice for analysis purposes. The M.Ed. students were asked to be honest during the interview. The interview began with some general questions about their educational qualification and experience, and later open-ended questions related to challenges and experience. Suggestions and feedback were taken into account. Probing was done wherever the researcher felt that the M.Ed. students is stuck. The recordings were saved for analysis at a later stage.

2.4 Data analysis

The interviews taken by the researcher were recorded with the prior intimation and later transcribed manually for qualitative analysis using thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke's (2013) framework for thematic data analysis was used to do thematic analysis. This analysis was done in six steps: getting to know the data, making initial codes, looking for themes, going over themes, naming and defining themes, and making a report.

3. Results

When the thematic analysis of interview data was done, it gave rise to seven main themes. This included learner background, advantages, challenges faced, benefits, replacement over the traditional classroom mode, recommendations and suggestions for the future.

	Themes
Massive Open Online Course (MOOC)	• Learner background
	• Advantages
	• Challenges faced
	• Benefits
	• Interesting features
	• Replacement over traditional classroom mode
	• Recommendations & suggestions

Table 1 - Themes that emerged from the Interview.

Theme 1: Learner background

Of the twelve M.Ed. students interviewed, eleven were female M.Ed. students and one was male. Most of the M.Ed. students had teaching experience, and only four M.Ed. students had no experience in teaching. Out of twelve M.Ed. students, only four had bachelor's degrees, while eight M.Ed. students had a master's degree. Most M.Ed. students never had experienced MOOC in the past, although two M.Ed. students did try their hands on MOOC and two were familiar with online courses on Diksha, but not MOOC. Seven out of twelve M.Ed. students did have a modest knowledge of research methodology, and five M.Ed. students had never studied research methodology in the past.

Theme 2: Advantages

It was essential to know the experiences of M.Ed. students on learning through the MOOCs developed by the researcher. Most M.Ed. students felt that it was an interesting medium to learn research methodology. Some described MOOC as an important course for anywhere and anytime learning. Others felt that this course made them aware of a new platform to learn research methodology. The feature that makes this platform important for M.Ed. students is that there are shorter videos, an option to revise videos, and no burden of carrying books. One M.Ed. student said that her pre-existent fear of online learning was removed by this course. One interviewee commented:

> *"When you introduced us on the first day of the course, I was very afraid of it Because this is a new technology. I thought I would not be able to do it. Never did I do an online course. But eventually, I got interested in the course. The language was very easy. Now I have learned in college about MOOC, I have become aware of such a course, so I will make such a course in science and social science for school students"*

Theme 3: Challenges faced

It was important to know the challenges faced by the M.Ed. students on the platform where they enrolled to learn through MOOCs. Some felt that there were no major challenges faced while others listed some challenges like forgetting passwords while enrolling and confusion between registering for the course and logging in. In all the cases, respondents reported that the manual helped them to avoid confusion. One interviewee opined that fonts in a few videos needed to be bigger than it was.

Theme 4: Benefits

When M.Ed. students were inquired about the benefits of MOOC the interviewees, on the whole, demonstrated that MOOCs are flexible and self-paced. On top of that it also gives a scope to revise all the concepts, while learning as all materials are available in one place. One interviewee quoted that:

> *"I think we can learn at our own pace and revise whenever we want. When we learn through videos so we visualize. It's a good way to learn. The test is there, activities, games are so interesting. It's not boring and it's fun to learn through MOOCs".*

Theme 5: Interesting features

The next section of the interview pertained to the most and least interesting features of the MOOC. Majority of the M.Ed. students responded that the video-embedded pop-ups in between the videos excited them the most

while learning in MOOC. For a small number of M.Ed. students, the activities in each module made them enjoy the course content. On the other hand, when they were inquired about the least interesting feature, some interviewees argued that fixed duration of the courses and additional resources after every video were too much to grab and felt unnecessary sometimes.

Theme 6: Replacement over Traditional classroom mode

Later when the M.Ed. students were asked whether MOOCs would ever replace the traditional classroom, there was a mixed reaction. While some opined that it might happen in the future and the future is digital, others felt that instructors' absence makes it a weak medium to learn. Some respondents expressed that both the mode hold equal significance, and emphasized that the instructors presence and support is paramount for any course, regardless of the mode. One interviewee also responded that blended mode would be preferred where MOOC can be used as a learning resource. When asked about the future of MOOC for M.Ed. students and whether it will decline or bloom, the majority of the learners opined that it will bloom in the future as it is flexible and suitable for independent learners.

Theme 7: Recommendation and Suggestions

When the M.Ed. students were asked what their recommendations are for future learners of MOOC, a small number of those interviewed suggested that learners should make a plan and set their deadlines in advance. Some felt that learning through MOOC initially gives a culture shock as it is a unique medium to learn a course without any instructor, but later they will enjoy it. There were some suggestions that M.Ed. students should make notes while studying and read all the additional resources provided. One interviewee reported that:

> *"I will tell them that focus and watch all videos and also make notes because after all its technology, and if in future the platform is lost or deleted, what will students do, so make notes, that stay forever".*

On the same line, when M.Ed. students were asked what they recommend for course developers, some suggested that more real-life examples in videos be added, and technical terms explanation should be more. A few of them suggested the instructors have their presence in the videos for M.Ed. students to know who the instructors are. One of the interviewees suggested including such a course at the school level with more game features.

In the final part of the interview, when M.Ed. students were asked about what should be added to the MOOC in the future to make it more engrossing, few M.Ed. students reported that there should be doubt-solving sessions after every MOOC. Whilst a minority mentioned that more discussion forums be added after every module. One M.Ed. student shared a few features, like Nearpod, the option to download videos, and a course map.

Discussion and Conclusion

The M.Ed. students are postgraduate students who are mature learners. Such students do not require the transmission of knowledge from the teacher, they only necessitate proper guidance and direction to get access to relevant knowledge related to the subject. This is in line with the study of Latha (2019) wherein post graduates students have a higher inclination towards MOOC. Confirming the finding from previuos studies (Koukis & Jimoyiannis, 2018; Salas et al., 2022), M.Ed. students are positive towards future growth of MOOC. It can be an effective learning medium for M.Ed. students, especially those who fear online learning. The MOOCs can be designed with shorter videos, an option to revise videos, and additional student resources. It can also encourage students to create MOOCs, which can be useful for future teachers. According to National Education Policy (2020), Teacher Education is an indispensable sector for making future teachers that will shape the future of the next generation. They should not only be well-versed in Indian values but also a master of the latest advances in education and pedagogy. The teacher and teacher educators in the future will be dealing with digital natives. These students will be well versed with the latest technology and will prefer learning through the latest technology. Hence teacher education institutes should promote the development of more such MOOCs and their implementation that can allow students to learn anywhere and anytime. The developed MOOC can be used as a resource for online learning, can complement traditional learning, and can also be used in higher education institutes where there is a lack of teacher educators to teach the subject of research methodology.

References

Adams, C., & Yin, Y. (2014). Undergraduate Students' Experiences of Time in a MOOC: A Term of Dino 101. International Association for the Development of the Information Society.

Ahuja, R. (2018). MOOCs are A welcome step towards development. University News, Vol 56(6),18- 21

Aljaraideh, Y. (2019). Massive Open Online Learning (MOOC) Benefits and Challenges: A Case Study in Jordanian Context. International Journal of Instruction, 12(4), 65-78.

Braun,V., & Clarke,V. (2006).Using Thematic analysis in Psychology.Qualitative research in Psychology, 3(2), 77101.

Chakravarty, Rupak. (2016). MOOCs in India: Yet to Shine. International Journal of Information Studies and Libraries. 14.

Daniel, J. (2012). Making sense of MOOCs: Musings in a maze of myth, paradox, and possibility. Journal of Interactive Media in education, 2012(3).

Goel, D. R., &Goel, C. (2013). The teacher education scenario in India: Current problems & concerns. MIER Journal of Educational Studies, Trends, and Practices, 2(2).

Internet usage statistic (2021).https://www.in ternetworldstat s.com/top20.h

Koukis, N., & Jimoyiannis, A. (2018). MOOCs and Teacher Professional Development: A Case Study on Teachers' Views and Perceptions. International Association for Development of the Information Society.

Latha, A.(2019)Challenges and implications of learning through Massive Open Online Course mooc a consumer perspective in India.

McAuley A, Stewart B, Siemens G, Cormier D (2010) The MOOC model for digital practice. http://www.elearnspace.org/Articles/ MOOC_Final.pdf.

MHRD (2020).National Educational Policy 2020.Ministry of human resources development. Government of India.

Pandit, A. (2016). Can 2016 Be the Inflection Year for MOOCs in India?" The Financial Express. www.financialexpress.com/jobs/can-2016-be-the-inflection-year- for-MOOCs-in-India/232269/.

Salas-Rueda, R. A., Castañeda-Martínez, R., Eslava-Cervantes, A. L., & Alvarado-Zamorano, C. (2022). Teachers' Perception About MOOCs and ICT During the COVID-19 Pandemic. Contemporary Educational Technology, 14(1), ep343.

Shah D (2018, 11 Dec,) By The Numbers: MOOCs in 2018. https://www.classcentral.com/report/mooc-stats-2018/

Siemens, G., 2013. Massive Open Online Course s: Innovation in education. Open Educational Resources: Innovation, Research and Practice, 5.

Sukhbaatar, O., Choimaa, L., & Usagawa, T. (2018). Students' perception and experience of Massive Open Online Course s in Mongolia. Creative Education, 9(12), 1818-1828.

Swayam Central. (2016). Swayam.gov.in. https://swayam.gov.in/about

Vardi MY (2012) Will MOOCs destroy academia? Communications of the ACM 55(11):5

Verma, P. (2021). Role of SWAYAM MOOCs in Democratisation of Higher Education.http://hdl.handle.net/10603/359676

Vezne, R. (2020). Teacher Candidates' Satisfaction with Massive Open Online Course s in Turkey. Cypriot Journal of Educational Sciences, 15(3), 479-491.