The Dilemma of Current MOOC Development

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Abstract. Since 2013, MOOC presents quite a few problems in the rapid development: the contradiction between the innovative educational idea and the traditional practice, low acceptance and poor ability to master MOOCs of instructors, high dropout rates. The paper discusses the dilemma of current MOOC Development, in order to provide reference for its sustainable development.

Introduction

MOOC is short for Massive Open Online Course. It’s a new kind of knowledge innovation platform, which guides the learners to reorganize information resources creatively and inquire knowledge independently, and supports them in stimulating inspiration and generating new knowledge through dialogue. [1]

In 2012, more than 1 million people joined Coursera, Udacity, edX, the three MOOCs platform to learn free online courses. Therefore, The New York Times branded 2012 “The Year of the MOOC”.

Innovation and development potential, state-of-the-art technology and influence of top universities in the west, desire for high-quality educational resources lead to the rapid growth of MOOC. However, since 2013, MOOC has been repeatedly questioned. In addition, it’s development facing lots of challenges, causing many educators to reflect. [2]

Contradiction between the Innovative Idea and the Traditional Practice

Different educational philosophies produce different MOOCs. MOOCs are mainly divided into two general paradigms: cMOOCs placing heavy emphasis on networking and xMOOCs focusing on the content delivery.

cMOOCs are based on a philosophy of Connectivism. In this theory, the essence of knowledge is “networked coupling”. Besides, this theory emphasizes “De-centralization” of knowledge acquisition, and the creation and generation of knowledge. cMOOC is a kind of distributed course with loose structure, advanced topic, and in this course, students can choose the content freely, set their own pace according to learning needs, and don't care about the course assessment. cMOOCs mainly rely on Wiki, RSS subscription, Moodle online forum, network discussion, Blog and some other online tools to design and implement. Some representative courses are CCK08, PLENK2010 and eduMOOC. cMOOCs provide a platform
to explore new teaching methods, and surpass traditional classroom situations. Thus cMOOC is leading the radical revolution of higher education.

xMOOCs follow a Cognitivist-Behaviorist approach. The teaching mode of xMOOC basically is the pervasion or extension of internal teaching mode of universities, by using of lecture videos, assignments, and chunked quizzes. xMOOCs emphasize the course content obtained and grasped by the learners, focused on transmission of information and replication of knowledge. [3] Coursera, Udacity and edX are three platforms of xMOOCs, and they developed rapidly in 2012 and 2013.

Now, the vast majority of MOOCs learners only can reach xMOOCs in the world. This shows an obvious contradiction of MOOCs practice: xMOOCs which represent traditional education philosophy spread extensively while cMOOCs which represent advanced education philosophy are difficult to promote. [4] To a certain extent, the contradiction affects many educators to understand the MOOCs in great depth.

In fact, these two kinds of MOOCs supported by different educational philosophy have their own advantages. XMOOCs facilitate the replication and dissemination of knowledge; on the other hand, cMOOCs facilitate the generation and innovation of knowledge. In the future, the development of MOOCs is more likely to be mixed with different educational ideas and models. For example, MIT is exploring the MOOC combined by philosophy of Cognitivist-Behaviorist and Connectivism. Chinese scholars Yang Jinsong proposed an integrated and shared model of knowledge resources in Universities, which is based on a mixed model of xMOOCs and cMOOCs, compatible with knowledge dissemination and academic socialization. He probed how to use MOOCs to promote knowledge innovation, interaction with different disciplines, compound talents training, and the external science and technology, cultural radiation of universities. [5]

Low Acceptance of Instructors

Since the emergence of MOOCs, there are many sceptics and opponents among educators, focusing on the following aspects.

Disapproval of the Educational Philosophy

The educational philosophy of MOOCs lays emphasis on learning, weakening the leading role of instructors, who changed from imparter of knowledge to organizers and coordinators of teaching activities. Due to the profound influence of the traditional teaching concept, the transformation of instructors' idea will be especially difficult. For example, in Amherst College (Ivy League), the famous liberal arts college, professors refused to cooperate with the edX online course platform and to get involved in “MOOCs Rush”, because of MOOCs against the educational philosophy of learning through intimate conversations. [6]

Despite affirmation of MOOCs’ positive effect, many instructors still considered that it’s a better way to combine online and offline courses.

Doubt on the Quality of MOOCs

A great many educators still hold the view that real learning relies on individual teaching, and classroom teaching has the advantage over learning based on technology. In their opinion, MOOC is short of the critical factor—Interpersonal Interaction. Its standardization makes it unable to teach students in accordance with their aptitude and adapt to people's creativity and
the diversity of thought. It will simplify the teaching into a mechanical process of information transmission, which could hardly reflect the core value of education.

Professors in the department of philosophy at the Harvard University published an open letter to oppose all kinds of MOOCs, because MOOCs “will replace professors, dismantle departments, and provide a diminished education for students in public universities”. [7]

**Concern about Academic Status and Livings of Their Own**

University elites and researchers are concerned that openness may threaten academic freedom and institutional autonomy, thereby preferring to slow the development process, according to Richard Velen, an associate professor of education at York University. [8] Besides, lots of instructors worried that not only do they play only teaching assistants of star professors, but also teaching workload is reduced. The threats of low pay, low benefits and increased job insecurity make it hard to promote MOOCs actively.

**Poor Ability to Master MOOCs of Instructors**

Considering MOOC as a new curriculum model in the world educational field, the transformation of instructors who practice educational reform and development is imperative. Research shows that being motivated by a sense of intrigue, meaningful self-actualization and a sense of altruism are three main reasons why instructors are willing to teach MOOCs. [9]

Taking MOOCs means challenges for instructors, including master of modern educational technology, changes in instructional design and implementation, difficulties in evaluating students’ work, the absence of student immediate feedback, and encountering a lack of student participation in online forums. Instructors must improve the core capabilities of instructional design and implementation, and master various information technologies meanwhile.

However, a large number of instructors merely take MOOC as a tool to improve and assist teaching without a deep understanding of its innovation. Compared to the western instructional design of MOOC, there is still quite a big gap for domestic universities. [10]

**Common Phenomenon of High Dropout Rates**

It’s a kind of self-organization behavior to take MOOCs over the internet, which greatly satisfies the human’s desire for knowledge. But in reality, efficiency is limited if students just rely on their self-organization to study and research. Dropout rate and completion rate also needed to be paid attention. The report by Meyer (2012) says that students taken MOOCs of Stanford University, MIT and UC Berkeley up to 80%-95% drop out. For example, only 7% of 50 thousand students in the course of Software Engineering provided by UC Berkeley completed the course. A similar situation exists with Coursera. In the course of Social Network Analysis, only 2% learners eventually obtained the completion certificates and just 0.17% got the advanced certificates. [11]

Research by Hew & Cheung (2014) suggests four reasons why students sign up for MOOCs: the desire to learn about a new topic or to extend current knowledge, the curiosity about MOOCs, personal challenge, and the desire to earn as many completion certificates as possible. [12]

There are two reasons of high dropout rates. First of all, for students, this course is entirely dependent on self-organization and management, even if the students with strong desire and higher consciousness are difficult to ensure the completion of learning tasks, so organization
and management rely on others is indispensable. Secondly, since the cost of joining the MOOCs studying is very low or even none, people are easily to choose to drop when they encounter difficulties and setbacks in the study. As a conclusion, high autonomy and nearly free cost are bound to have a high drop rate of MOOCs.

Although current MOOC development is in the dilemmas mentioned above, as a new model of educational reform, MOOC is worth trying in practice by the government, universities, instructors and students, in order to explore a more effective educational way to satisfy the individual learning and knowledge sharing needs.

References


