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MOOCs IN SIX EMERGING APEC MEMBER ECONOMIES

Trends, Research, and Recommendations

Insung Jung, Gibran A. Garcia Mendoza, Jennifer Christine Fajardo, Roberto B. Figueroa Jr., and Siaw Eng Tan

Introduction

While online learning or open and distance learning (ODL) is not a new approach to education, massive open online courses (MOOCs) have increased the visibility of, and interest in, ODL environments to a wide range of audiences (Gasevic, Kovanovic, Joksimovic, & Siemens, 2014). When MOOCs were first introduced to the world community in 2008 and then spread more widely via global MOOC providers, such as Coursera, edX, Udacity, and FutureLearn between 2011 and 2013, they were predicted to achieve world domination and result in the complete transformation of higher education (HE). These predictions, today, seem to have been overblown; yet, we are currently observing the exponential growth of MOOCs (Shah, 2018) – certainly with respect to increasing numbers of MOOC learners across different continents, and arguably in terms of the changes it is bringing about in education more widely.

This chapter focuses on the growth of MOOCs in six emerging economies within the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC): Thailand, the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Vietnam from Southeast Asia, and Mexico from Latin America. Note that APEC is a regional economic forum with 21 members, consisting of both developed and developing countries located in the Asia-Pacific region. As such, when it comes to educational initiatives, APEC is hugely influential in this region. It is also important to mention that all these APEC countries selected for the chapter, except perhaps Vietnam, are places where ODL has long been practiced and relatively well supported by local governments and other public and private sectors. However, APEC economies that are either economically well advanced, as is the case with China, South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, and Singapore, or those that have no or little experience with ODL and MOOCs such as in Chile and Peru, are excluded from discussion in this chapter.

The chapter begins with a review of the overall trends of MOOC growth in the six selected countries. It then discusses research findings and local experts' comments on MOOC-based learning experiences and various challenges currently faced as well as apparent opportunities moving forward. It concludes with some of the key lessons we have learned for future development and research. When did MOOCs begin in APEC countries in Southeast Asia and Latin America? How did they develop? How were they supported? These questions will be answered in the next section.

Trends of MOOC Development and Implementation

MOOC initiatives are strongly supported by central or local governments, together with private sectors in the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, and Mexico, but not in Vietnam, where the awareness and policy on MOOCs are yet to be developed.

The Philippines

The first country to be discussed is the Philippines where efforts to skill and reskill its population via MOOCs and MOOC-like derivatives have been nurtured strategically (Bandalaria & Alfonso, 2015). Interest in MOOCs started in 2012 with the University of the Philippines Open University (UPOU), offering a MOOC entitled “Developing Mobile Apps Using the Android Platform.” A Moodle-based platform called Massive Open Distance eLearning (MODeL) was used to launch MOOCs in the Philippines (Bandalaria, 2018; Gervacio, 2015).

These MOOC projects are supported by the government through UPOU in collaboration with private institutions under the Public-Private Partnership Program. An example, the e-Service Management Program (eSMP) constitutes a series of MOOCs designed to train prospective workers of the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industry. Regional and international organizations like Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH and UNICEF collaborate with UPOU to offer MOOCs related to their missions, via MODeL. UPOU and UNICEF, for instance, offer eight MOOCs under the Child Rights Protection and Promotion Program.

Indonesia

Next on the list is Indonesia with a distributed population of more than 266 million spread across more than 13,000 islands. Indonesia has been quite active when it comes to MOOCs. The first Indonesian MOOC was launched on the Open edX platform by UCEO, an online program managed by the University of Ciputra in 2013 (Berliyanto & Santoso, 2018). By 2018, UCEO had grown to include 24 courses, mainly intended for entrepreneurs.

Another Open edX-utilizing MOOC provider, IndonesiaX, had offered 27 MOOCs in collaboration with a number of Indonesia’s leading universities and companies since it launched its first batch of courses in 2015 (Bandalaria, 2018; H. Handoyo, personal communication, August 11, 2018). FOCUS, another Open edX-based MOOC provider, operated by the Universitas Gadjah Mada, had 12 MOOCs in its list of offerings. A fourth MOOC option, the Universitas Terbuka (UT), a national ODL university, began offering Moodle-based MOOCs in 2015 and as of 2018 it had eight courses available.

Such opportunities signify that much is happening in Indonesia related to MOOCs, and government support for higher education has played a major role in these developments. MOOC operation in higher education institutions is supported by the government through the Ministerial Regulation Number 109, which allows students to take MOOCs and earn credits from their respective universities.

Malaysia

Next is Malaysia where the emergence of MOOCs has developed in tandem with the country’s initiatives on globalizing HE courses; such goals and initiatives being specifically outlined in the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2015–2025 (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2015). In 2013, the first MOOC, entitled “Entrepreneurship,” was offered by the private institution, Taylor University, through the OpenLearning platform. In 2014, four public universities listed MOOCs for compulsory subjects, making Malaysia the first country to implement MOOCs in public universities that allowed credit transfer (Fadzil, Latif, & Munira, 2015; Nordin, Embi, & Norman, 2015).

To date, OpenLearning has a total of 67 providers including public and private universities, 612 courses, with almost 400,000 learners in two languages (Malay and English). With the aim of offering local expertise to a global audience, some universities provide courses such as Islamic Banking, Tropical Infectious Diseases, and Ethnic Relations. Unfortunately,

these courses have not attracted learners from other parts of the world, most likely due to the use of a local platform like OpenLearning (Nordin et al., 2015). This may change as Open University Malaysia now offers MOOCs via iTunesU, and Universiti Malaya is providing MOOCs on the FutureLearn platform developed at the Open University in the UK.

In addition to the funds used by individual institutions, the Malaysian Ministry of Education has also allocated US\$138.6 million to sustain the cost of development and implementation of MOOCs between 2016–2020 (Fadzil et al., 2015). With such a steady and significant source of funding, it is likely that MOOCs will continue to have a notable impact in Malaysian education.

Thailand

The development of MOOCs in Thailand was likewise examined. Its first MOOC-style online course, titled “e-Learning Professional Development,” was launched in 2006 under the Thai Cyber University (TCU) Project through the TCU’s Open Courseware (Theeraroungchaisri, 2018). More recently, other Thai universities have successfully delivered MOOCs through a combination of learning management systems and other media platforms (Nasongkhla, Thammetar, & Chen, 2015). Since the TCU Project introduced an Open edX-based platform called Thai MOOC in 2017, it has then invited MOOC developers, via the Thai University Network. To date, this network of developers has created 195 courses using a US\$6 million government budget (Bandalaria, 2018; Theeraroungchaisri, 2018). Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, a national ODL university, is one of the leaders in offering several MOOCs on AAOU’s Asian MOOCs.

Vietnam

Although MOOC initiatives in Vietnam have not been supported by central or local governments as in the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia, there has been some recent progress. For instance, with the purpose of bringing a high level of knowledge to all, GiapSchool, an online education portal, started the first MOOCs in Vietnam in 2013. As of 2018, it offered 24 courses with more than 10,000 users enrolled. Most of the courses are developed by one person, Dr. Giap Van Duong, who is the founder of GiapSchool. In addition, Hanoi Open University, a government-funded ODL university, offers a MOOC entitled “Basic Topics in Vietnamese for Foreigners” on the Asian MOOCs site where member institutions of the Asian Association of Open Universities (AAOU) can list their MOOCs.

Collaboration for MOOCs in Southeast Asia

Given their common location in Southeast Asia, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, and Thailand have developed strong collaborative ties in education through regional organizations such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO). As such, they can exchange knowledge, best practices, and innovations in MOOCs and open education through regional summits, conferences, and other events.

Recently, SEAMEO Regional Open Learning Centre (SEAMOLEC), one of the 24 centers under SEAMEO focusing on ODL in the region, established the SEA MOOCs Network, which is aimed at promoting capacity-building of the MOOC providers in the region via a community of practice (SEAMEO, 2018). Such initiatives are vital to the promotion and growth of MOOCs as well as other emerging forms of educational delivery in this region. Moreover, sharing of these

practices and knowledge can provide more contextualized scenarios to meet the educational needs of its citizens.

The majority of MOOC providers from those Southeast Asian countries are members of AAOU. The AAOU's Asian MOOCs site lists MOOCs offered by its member universities. The Asian Learning Portal serves as AAOU's official MOOC platform and can be utilized by member universities that have no technical capacity for hosting their own MOOCs (Bandalaria, 2018). Such services can serve to nurture the development and delivery of MOOCs and open education to people living in educationally underserved areas.

Mexico

Besides these five Southeast Asian countries, MOOCs have also impacted countries on the other side of the Pacific Rim. For instance, platforms such as MiríadaX, MéxicoX, and Académica in Mexico emerged to provide MOOCs to different countries across Latin America (Muñoz Muñoz & Ramió Aguirre, 2013; Zubieta García, 2015). These platforms were born after Spain's Universidad Politécnica de Madrid had developed the first MOOC in the Spanish language, "El algoritmo RSA," which was released on the platform Crypt4you in 2012.

The National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) introduced its first MOOCs with Coursera in early 2013, which led to the development of MiríadaX. MiríadaX, the first non-American MOOC provider, tapped into the large Spanish-speaking market worldwide and attracted over a million users for its first four MOOCs (Shah, 2014).

Later in 2013, the Monterrey Institute of Technology and Higher Education (ITESM) joined Coursera and became the first private university in Latin America to offer MOOCs in both Spanish and English. According to the Observatory of Educational Innovation Tecnológico de Monterrey report (2014), the partnership produced seven courses and reached 137,000 users from 142 countries in 2013.

Furthermore, Televisión Educativa signed an agreement with edX in 2013 to develop and offer online interactive classes and MOOCs from well-known universities worldwide. In 2015, MéxicoX, an Open edX-based platform, began to be operated by Televisión Educativa, focusing on areas such as fundamental academic abilities and specialized professional training. The latest figures reveal that it has 57 partners, including public and private universities and institutions, 235 courses, and over 1.5 million users.

In 2015, another platform called Académica was released. Developed by TELMEX and the Carlos Slim Foundation, it had the initial aim of promoting TELMEX's internet services in major universities. Currently offering 150 courses in Spanish, Académica focuses not only on providing quality content but also on promoting user interaction and improving learning experiences (A. Vázquez, M. Serrano, R. López, S. Velázquez Castillo, personal communication, April 11, 2018).

Findings From MOOC Research and Local Experts

For this chapter, research articles published in a number of local, regional, and international journals were analyzed, together with related books and reports, as well as interviews of a number of local experts. The following section discusses major findings from these analyses.

Learners and Learning Experiences

Some of the MOOC studies included in the analyses detail general MOOC learner characteristics and their learning experiences as follows.

Demographics

In the Philippines, MODeL's user registrations reached 10,000 as of 2018. However, the only demographic data available was for eSMP, one of its programs. eSMP had 2,000 learners (51% female, 49% male) as of 2016. The majority were 20- to 31-year-olds, with 20% having a high school diploma and others an associate or bachelor's degree. The majority of the enrollees were Filipino.

Thai MOOC currently has about 121,000 enrollments across all courses. According to the deputy director of TCU (Theeraroungchaisri, 2018), around 70,000 new registrations were added in the period from March 1, 2017, to July 18, 2018, alone, confirming the observation that interest in Thai MOOC has been increasing (B. Siritarungsri, personal communication, August 11, 2018). The median age of learners is 31, and 57.7% have a college degree. Based on the data from two of the most popular courses, 1–2% of the learners came from countries like Canada, the USA, and Laos, while the vast majority were Thai.

In Malaysia, most MOOC learners are university students due to the fact that several MOOCs are compulsory in public universities. MOOCs offered by private universities, such as Taylor's University, are undertaken mostly by their full-time students (Fadzil et al., 2015).

MéxicoX website reports that in 2017 it had 1,575,010 users; 55.38% female, 44.62% male, of which 38% held a bachelor's degree, and 35% a high school diploma. Ages ranged from 16 to 35 years old (21–25 being the largest group). MiríadaX's 4,071,483 users are not solely from Mexico, Central and South America but come also from the US, Spain, France, Italy, and India. Zubieta García (2015) reports that in 2013, most of MiríadaX's learners were students, followed by professionals, enthusiasts, and academics.

The data show that the general characteristics of the MOOC learner in emerging APEC countries (e.g., age, gender, and education) are not so different from those of the global MOOC learners reported in Chuang and Ho (2016). However, in the APEC countries, more university students are taking MOOCs as part of their coursework, compared with other parts of the world.

Learner Perception and Acceptance

Experiences with MOOCs by Southeast Asian learners are generally seen to be positive. Manalo (2014) reported positive responses from learners towards the first MOOC in the Philippines. Similarly, Gervacio (2015) reported positive evaluation of another MOOC on MODeL. Over 90% of respondents expressed satisfaction with course content, working and learning approach, participants, achievement of objectives, and course organization. In Malaysia, a survey of 1,055 students of an ethnic relations course by Nordin, Norman, and Embi (2015) found positive learner acceptance towards MOOCs; however, caution should be taken when generalizing these findings due to the relatively small number of survey participants.

Cultural Influence

Not all studies conducted report positive experiences with MOOCs. MOOC learners, and even instructors in Ho Chi Minh City Open University of Vietnam, who were so accustomed to traditional instructor-led teaching and learning, spent more time on passive reading and video watching than they did on interaction while taking a MOOC (Dang, Watts, & Nguyen, 2017). In Thailand, Thaipisitukul and Tuarob (2017) reported resistance from conservative instructors in sharing teaching techniques on public platforms. As Connolly (2016) and Dang et al. (2017) indicated, a teacher-centered culture in Asia could be a huge barrier for online learning which requires learners' active interactions with the instructor as well as other learners together with their self-directed learning.

Challenges

The analyses have revealed major challenges such as the following.

Lack of Technological Infrastructure

One of the most common challenges faced by the Southeast Asian MOOC providers is the uneven Internet coverage and relatively slow connection speeds which inhibit the opportunities for equitable education via MOOCs. A good example of this is Vietnam. Although in Vietnam, approximately 52% of its population are Internet users, Vietnam has a network capacity insufficient for multimedia-based MOOC learning (Dang et al., 2017). The problem is similarly reported in the Philippines, Indonesia, and Thailand. Bandwidth limitations remain a formidable barrier to more widespread uptake of MOOCs in many developing countries (Patru & Balaji, 2016).

Lack of Digital Literacy

Another common challenge faced is the lack of digital literacy, technological competence, or e-learning efficacy of both instructors and learners. For instance, a study from Hanoi Open University found low levels of learners' e-learning readiness which was a key barrier to successful MOOC learning in Vietnam (Le & Nguyen, 2015). Similarly, Berliyanto and Santoso (2018) report that the Indonesian MOOCs are open but not massive due to the relatively low English and technical skills of learners, and poor technological infrastructure in homes.

In a survey from 33 higher education institutions in Malaysia, Kumar and Al-Samarraie (2018) found that instructors felt ill-equipped to design MOOCs. They also reported that these instructors are further burdened with handling two modes of instruction, via face-to-face and online, as MOOCs are credit-compulsory. Culquichicón et al. (2017) point to instructors' lack of content expertise as one of the major problems with MOOCs from Latin America, including Mexico. Measures aimed at improving training support and facilities were among the suggestions put forward by researchers in an effort to alleviate such problems. Another key suggestion was to invite contributions from top content experts.

Poor Course Design

Another challenge is related to the design of courses and their subsequent development. For example, Taib, Chuah, and Aziz (2017) report issues with teacher-centered design and the lack of collaborative elements in some Malaysian MOOCs. In a study from Latin America, conducted with MOOCs on health science, Culquichicón et al. (2017) revealed serious problems with poor course content and design as well as a lack of expertise on the part of MOOC developers.

Moreover, a face-to-face learning culture in the region has not been fully considered in the MOOC design and delivery process, which may have affected low retention and completion rates. One suggestion was to promote voluntary meet-ups or clubs of MOOC learners where learners can meet others face-to-face in physical spaces or build virtual communities (Firmansyah & Timmis, 2016). This may lead to an increase in motivation, online interactions, and, most importantly, a sense of belonging to a MOOC community.

Unbalanced Content Areas and Languages

In the APEC region, substantial use of MOOCs is observed in conventional HE contexts. Mexico UNAM's courses, hosted on the Coursera platform, primarily focus on business and social science,

while ITESM MOOCs on edX mostly focus on engineering and science. As Pérez Sanagustín, Maldonado, and Morales (2016) conclude, natural sciences are seemingly left unattended.

In Thailand and Indonesia, most MOOCs are offered in their native language to attract local enrollees. However, the opposite is true for the Philippines and Malaysia, where most of the MOOCs are offered in English for global participants. While this difference could be explained by each nation's purpose in offering MOOCs, there is a need to closely review changes in MOOC learner demographics and choose the language(s) in which they are offered accordingly.

Lack of Sustainable Business Models

Yet another challenge is the lack of a mature business model for MOOCs, as is indicated in case studies of an Asian MOOC project (Kim, 2015). One promising example can, however, be found in the Philippines where grants from governmental and international organizations, such as UNICEF and the Asian Development Bank, are used for UPOU's development of MOOC materials while giving MOOC instructors teaching load credits (M. Bandalaria, personal communication, August 5, 2018). Unfortunately, the partnerships between HE institutions and businesses are still not visible in most MOOC projects in the APEC region, which is most likely due to weak legal, policy, and regulatory frameworks that are necessary to involve both the public and private sectors effectively.

Opportunities

Despite the limited evidence to date of positive impacts made by MOOCs in the six countries examined in this chapter, several studies as highlighted in the succeeding paragraphs have revealed promising opportunities for MOOCs that could effectively address persistent educational issues, and thereby improve the social and economic development of individuals living this region and beyond.

Strong Governmental Support

The Malaysian and Filipino MOOC projects are viewed as a key national initiative to improve the accessibility and quality of higher education, and, as such, are strongly supported by their respective governments (Bandalaria, 2018; Bandalaria & Alfonso, 2015; Fadzil et al., 2015). At the same time, the Indonesian MOOC initiative is also supported by its government to serve as a link between formal and non-formal education systems (Berliyanto & Santoso, 2018). Additionally, the Thai MOOC initiative has moved into mainstream education since the government allowed credit transfer among participating universities and continuously increased MOOC development funds (Theeraroungchaisri, 2018). In Mexico, MOOC initiatives are supported by local governments or developed collaboratively with other Latin American countries, often with support from the EU, to provide quality higher education to Spanish-speaking peoples.

Growing Number of Potential MOOC Learners

The rapidly growing demand for higher education in Southeast Asia, the large Spanish-speaking population in Latin America, and the fast development of connectivity in the emerging economies definitely offer a good opportunity for MOOCs in the six countries studied. Significant inroads are being made despite the scale of current MOOCs in this region typically not as "massive" as reported in the literature (e.g., Jordan, 2014). With regard to the issue of connectivity, the Philippine

government launched its project “Free Wi-Fi Internet in Public Places,” which provides that all public places such as parks, hospitals, schools, universities, and others will have free Internet access (Gervacio, 2015).

Association With Global MOOC Providers

Alliance with top MOOC providers, like Coursera and edX, as seen in Mexico, together with the adoption of Open edX as the basis of local MOOC platforms in Southeast Asian countries, brings promising opportunities for emerging countries to offer their MOOCs to a wider and more global audience.

Conclusion: Lessons for Future MOOC Development and Research

The chapter shows that the six emerging APEC countries studied have utilized MOOCs as a means to achieve the UN’s global goals of ensuring inclusive and quality education for all. These six nations also promote lifelong learning and bringing about innovation in higher education based on their long experience with open and distance learning. What follows are the key lessons that have emerged from their MOOC experiences previously analyzed.

- *Policy support and funding from the government are critical, especially in the early stages of MOOC development, as shown in the successful cases of Indonesia and Malaysia which allowed credit transfer of MOOCs and funding for course materials. In some APEC countries and HE institutions where ODL is still considered as a second-rate mode of education, gradual integration and recognition of MOOCs in HE institutions with a strong quality assurance system may not only boost MOOCs adoption among students but may also contribute to promoting a culture in which MOOCs can be perceived as part of and not just an alternative to the standard academic program requirements.*
- *Development of sustainable business models, in collaboration with HE institutions, the private sector, and other organizations, is important for the future of MOOC development, as seen in the Philippines working together with governmental institutions and international/regional organizations. To overcome a lack of sustainable partnerships between public and private sectors in APEC MOOC projects, all parties involved in the MOOC business need to take ownership of their roles. MOOC providers should find effective ways to validate their certifications in the job market. It is critical for MOOC learners, especially for those who are not enrolled in HE institutions, to be able to receive feasible and real benefits from their MOOC certifications such as enabling them to apply for a job or get a promotion in their companies. Governments need to create an enabling environment for other public and private parties and establish an appropriate mechanism to assure the quality and accountability of MOOC development and delivery. Finally, companies should see MOOCs as an additional way to provide professional development or career development to their employees.*
- *Encouraging and rewarding instructors and researchers for MOOC development, facilitation, and research are important to sustain quality MOOC projects, as shown in the Philippines which assigned teaching or workload credits for MOOC-related courses and research activities. With the rapid changes and developments in HE, especially in the emerging economies in the APEC region, much more is expected and demanded of instructors. However, there is still a lack of clarification concerning their transforming roles without any real plans for systemic change. To bring about desirable results with MOOCs including more support for instructors in their shifting roles while enhancing their status and capacity, there is a need for a systemic plan of action for change.*

- *An alliance with global MOOC providers will promote lifelong learning and the globalization of local MOOCs*, as seen in Mexico which collaborated with such providers as edX and Coursera and reached out to both English- and Spanish-speaking populations across different countries. In several APEC countries, it is observed that MOOCs have opened up opportunities for free online study mostly for university students and young generations within each local context. Unfortunately, there is little evidence that MOOCs have reached out to a wider range of learners of all ages beyond the border of each country. There is a need to examine various ways to expand access to HE and lifelong learning via MOOCs.
- *More and better-designed empirical studies on MOOCs are needed to explore the future potential of MOOCs*. Rigorous research on MOOCs in the emerging APEC countries is quite limited. Additional studies are needed in a variety of areas; including, but not limited to, learner characteristics, non-completion issues, cost-effectiveness, instructional design, pedagogical dimensions, assessment strategies, and short- and long-term impact evidence using learning analytics and accumulated MOOC data.

As is clear, these are exciting yet challenging times for educational delivery in the Asian Pacific region and Mexico. MOOCs are providing a unique and evolving mechanism for addressing the diverse educational needs of learners of a wide range of ages and cultural backgrounds. Each of the countries reviewed in this chapter may continue to refine its existing MOOC solutions as well as create new ones which can provide countless individuals not only with access to higher education but also to primary education. Continuous collaboration among public and private educational institutions along with the support of local governments and the private sectors accompanied by consistent and improved quality are therefore needed and significant in utilizing MOOCs.



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