MOOC, OER and Mass Higher Education

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Commonwealth of Learning

Based on a report by Professor T V Prabhakar, IIT Kanpur

Notes

A master slide deck developed by Venkataraman Balaji and used with variations in three different presentations: at MKCL (www.mkcl.org), Pune, India (15 May 2013) while launching the Param meta university initiative, at NAARM (www.naarm.ernet.in), Hyderabad, India (17 May 2013) in the NAARM-COL Workshop on OER in Agricultural Higher Education and Training, and in the Institutional Seminar at Wawasan Open University (www.wou.edu.my) (22 May 2013).

Overview of the presentations:

A key challenge facing the policy makers in many developing countries is the need to increase affordable access to quality education and training at post-secondary level. The ODL paradigm has been able to address this challenge quite effectively in the past. Two key developments, both involving contemporary ICT, can be of further help.

First is the advancement of the OER paradigm, especially in the developing countries of the Commonwealth. COL maintains an online service called the Directory of OER (http://doer.col.org) that is linked to Commonwealth Connects. Slides 4-12 show that developing countries of the Commonwealth (such as Nigeria, India, Pakistan and South Africa) have published quantitatively more OER than the developed countries. Learners in some of the developing countries are "socializing" OER from many countries through online spaces such as Facebook or YouTube. Not only is more and more quality, peer-reviewed content is becoming more accessible to large number of learners; these are also getting commented upon and discussed more extensively. This is one way by which quality in higher education and training is partly getting addressed.

The other development that has the potential to extend quality to more learners is the practice of Massive, Open, Online Courses (MOOC). There is a strong business model associated with MOOC today in the USA. It can be disjoined from the technology dimension. In Slides 14-36, various components of technology in MOOC are presented and analysed and some readily available platforms are identified. We

propose the view that MOOC should be managed more as an event, more like a conference (and less like a traditional instructor-led course). Some online technologies are readily available to meet part of the requirements. For evaluation and certification, wholly online procedures and practices are not yet available. In Slides 37-42, we consider the importance of Learning Analytics which help track the online "behavior" of the learner that is useful in anticipating drop-out stages and in applying remedial measures. Learning Analytics are of importance to employers as an auxiliary measure of learner's persistence and knowledge development pathways.

Once we disjoin the business model from technology dimension, we find that many ODL organizations can make use of MOOC to advance their core mission of improving access without reduction in quality. This is explained with reference to particular institutions who can change the scale at will- use the same set of tech platforms to reach a few or a few thousands of learners per offering. This is covered in Slides 43-53.

Our view is that the technology components of MOOC can be adapted in developing countries to enhance the reach of higher education and training with quality in a way that can help potential and current employers generate value from learning.