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Massive Open Online Course (MOOC): Our saviour during COVID-19 pandemic?

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Proposed citation:

Safri, S.N.W., Mohi, Z. & Hanafiah, M.H. (2020). Massive Open Online Course (MOOC): Our saviour during COVID-19 pandemic? *Journal of Tourism, Hospitality & Culinary Arts, 12*(3), 120-128

Abstract

When the second wave of COVID-19 hit Malaysia, public and private universities must be closed as to adhere to the government Restriction of Movement Order (RMO). This unprecedented phenomenon has forced the university management to implement a contingency plan of shifting all their academic lessons online. This paper discusses the usage of Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) by the higher institution in Malaysia during COVID-19. This paper concludes that MOOC is proven to be a stable platform and can provide independent and flexibles learning experiences to the higher education students.

Keywords:

MOOC; COVID-19; online learning; tertiary education; Malaysia

1 Introduction

World Health Organization (WHO) recently declared the new coronavirus as a world pandemic, as the number of cases has risen to more than 100,000 with 4,500 deaths, including a jump in death rate globally ("WHO labels COVID-19 a 'pandemic'," 2020; World Health Organization, 2020b). Later, WHO announces a new name for the novel coronavirus which is COVID-19 of which "Co" stands for coronavirus, "Vi" is for virus and

"D" is for disease (Schumaker, 2020). The COVID-19 virus spreads through direct contact with infected people and indirect contact with surfaces in the immediate environment through droplet transmission from coughing or sneezing (Ong et al., 2020; World Health Organization, 2020a). In order to control the spread and to prevent infection of COVID-19, numerous countries have started to impose restricted movement control order, national lockdown and quarantines (Ravelo & Jerving, 2020; Secon et al., 2020).

The first wave of COVID-19 in Malaysia started on 16th February 2020 when the numbers of cases increased rapidly to 22 new cases. The second wave of cases began on 27th February 2020, and since then the number of people affected by the COVID-19 has risen to 553 cases on 16th March 2020. To curb the number of new cases, the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Muhyiddin Mohd Yassin, imposed a two-week Restriction of Movement Order (RMO) starting from 18th March 2020 to 31st March 2020, which is enforcement under the Control and Prevention of Infectious Diseases Act 1988 and the Police Act 1967 (Pfordten & Ahmad, 2020; Yassin, 2020b). Since then, the RMO had been extended twice, and the latest is until 28th April 2020 (Kyodo News, 2020; Yassin, 2020a). The Malaysian RMO includes the following:

i.   Complete restriction of movement and gathering nationwide, including religious activities, sports, social and cultural events. To enforce this restriction, all houses of worship and business premises are to be closed, except supermarkets, public markets, sundry shops and convenience stores selling essential goods.

ii.   A complete travel restriction for all Malaysians going overseas. For Malaysians returning home, they are required to undergo health checks and voluntary self-quarantine for 14 days.

iii.   A complete restriction of foreign visitors and tourists' movement into Malaysia.

iv.   Closure of all kindergartens, public and private schools, including day schools and residential schools, international schools, *Tahfiz* centres and all other institutions of learning at primary, secondary and pre-university levels.

v.   Closure of all public and private institutions of higher learning nationwide, including training skill institutes.

vi. Closure of all government and private premises except those involved in essential services (water, electricity, energy, telecommunications, post, transportation, irrigation, oil, gas fuel, lubricants, broadcasting, finance, banking, health, pharmacy, fire prevention, prisons, ports, airports, security, defense, cleaning, food supply & retail)

The RMO has affected all sectors in Malaysia, including the closure of all public and private institutions of higher learning nationwide, including training skill institutes (Yassin, 2020b). Malaysia has more than 20 universities and more than 500,000 students enrolled in Malaysian universities with each university having between 5,000 and 30,000 students (Jabatan Pendidikan Tinggi, 2017; Ming & Mahmud, 2020; Rahman, 2020).

Consequently, after the announcement of RMO, majority of the universities allow their students to return to their hometowns, while others are located at respective residential colleges starting 18th March 2020 (Sabran, 2020; Tang, 2020).

COVID-19 has affected the student's education as they need to stay at home during the lockdown. To ensure continuous learning, teaching and learning activities were delivered through online learning. Since then, there are high demand and usage of the Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) platform; an online learning system the government invested through the Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013-2025). The MOOCs are open-access, web-based courses that can be enrolled by hundreds or thousands of students at a time. The contents of MOOC are delivered through recorded video lectures, online readings, and online assessments, as well as various degrees of student-student and student-instructor interaction (Jansen & Schuwer, 2015; Kurt, 2018; Lugton, 2012; Watters, 2014).

2 Literature Review

2.1 Malaysia University Preparedness for Online Learning

The RMO left higher education institutions without any other choice except to implement online learning. The online learning is the only viable option for higher education institutions to sustain the teaching and learning process (Tang, 2020). Accordingly, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) begins to implement online teaching and learning while Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) converts the lessons and assessments entirely online (Menon, 2020; Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, 2020). Similarly, Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) and University Malaya (UM) shift their lessons online as well as continuing their assessments and examinations, even after the RMO is lifted (Ying, 2020).

Online learning is not new in Malaysia. With fast and a stable internet connection, and the availability of different types of mobile devices such as laptops, smartphones, and tablets, online learning has become a significant part of teaching and learning experience between instructors and students (Luaran et al., 2014; Ming & Mahmud, 2020). A survey done by the Malaysian government shows that 67.6 percent of internet users in Malaysia are using the internet for study purposes (Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission, 2017). However, the usage of online learning is still low as the conventional teaching, and learning method is still being practiced in most Malaysian higher education institutions. Moreover, most of the online learning platform and contents can only be accessed by the particular university students and are unavailable to the public (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2015).

In October 2011, the Ministry of Education launched Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 to elevate the standard of Malaysian education system to international level and to equip the students with 21st-century skills (Education Performance and Delivery

Unit, 2020). The blueprint plans to change the Malaysian education system that would be beneficial in developing, improving and strengthening the young Malaysians' identity (Kin, 2015). The core idea of the blueprint includes online learning under the 9th shift Globalised Online Learning and the 10th shifts Transformed Higher Education Delivery. The Globalised Online Learning shift aims at moving from a large-scale production delivery model to technology innovations that link to equal access of education and offer more custom-built learning experiences to all students through several innovative, interactive, and creative mediums by using the Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) (Chonghui, 2016). MOOC is an asynchronous type of online learning that offers open-access and web-based courses and delivers contents through recorded video lectures, online readings, and online assessments, as well as various degrees of student-student and student-instructor interaction (Dhiman, 2015; Ghirardini & Landriscina, 2011; Jansen & Schuwer, 2015; Kurt, 2018; Lugton, 2012; Shah & Pickard, 2019; Watters, 2014). In addition, MOOC is an advantage that has been created solely to attract students' interest (Ghazali, 2020).

With reference to the shifts in Malaysia Education Blueprint (2015–2025), the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) perceives MOOC as an essential component in teaching and learning in higher education. The Malaysian universities are required to refine their educational programs and curriculums with some recommended guidelines that the programs offered must be flexible and that learning can be carried out without face-to-face involvement. Moreover, the course assessments would not be based solely on exams, but instead would focus on practical and competency-based learning through a new system of accreditation/ certification (Haseeb, 2018; Ranai, 2018). The Star (2018) reported over 880 courses have been created by Malaysian educators from 20 public universities, ten private universities and 34 polytechnics with more ongoing in 2018. In addition, reports have shown that over the projected period, 2016-2023, the growth of the online education market is estimated to be 16.4 percent annually (Digital Journal, 2020; EdTechReview, 2017). With the expected development, the implementation of online learning during the pandemic should be convenient.

3 Methodology

3.1 MOOC As Saviour During COVID-19

The decision to utilise online learning via MOOC platform during RMO is revolutionary as the world is going through the 4.0 Industrial Revolution. Despite initial hesitation, almost all universities in Malaysia have shifted to online learning during the RMO period, and several public universities plan to continue conducting their lessons online even after the RMO is lifted (Menon, 2020; Ming & Mahmud, 2020). Proven to be a stable platform, MOOC should be utilised as the preferred online learning platform by universities as it helps to keep the students occupied with their lessons and learning experience (Dennis, 2020; Mahmud, 2020). MOOC could be the impromptu response of

teaching methodology during the COVID-19 outbreak. Being a platform that provides an independent learning experience, MOOC offers advantages to the course instructors as it allows students with the opportunity to learn with minimum supervision. Besides that, MOOC can be operated using a smartphone; thus, there is no excuse that students cannot get access to education during COVID-19. Although MOOC cannot be used for courses that require practical and lab components, lecturers can be flexible by creating online activities and providing educational resources that would allow students to achieve the course learning outcomes. Besides getting students occupied and keeping them updated with their lessons, the MOOC discussion forum also encourages students and lecturers to interact. In other words, with MOOC, students and lecturers can stay connected with each other. It is a waste if the lecturer does not take advantage of this chance. Although lecturers need to develop their learning material, the MOOC materials can be used for several semesters, and new content can be introduced when their curriculum is changed. There are others options of e-learning, but MOOC will continue to evolve into the latest paradigm in the online teaching and learning process as long as there is interest, by continuously developing existing systems according to current needs (Ghazali, 2020).

4   Conclusion

The Malaysian government has invested a lot in MOOC training. However, there still some problems can arise while learning through MOOC, such as how the lecturer can ensure that the soft skills of the student are integrated into all programs, such as communication skills, problem-solving, and critical thinking so that learners can manage and take responsibility for their learning with rapid changes in the industry. Therefore, the COVID-19 pandemic allows the Malaysian government to re-evaluate whether their investment in online learning is worthwhile. The universities may also assess the strength and weakness of MOOC as an online learning platform and to decide whether it is viable to replace the current conventional teaching method.

5   About the author

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