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## ROLE OF MOOC IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHERS IN INDIA

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### ABSTRACT

This article attempts to examine the role of MOOC in professional development of teachers in India. Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) is a recent phenomenon in education that is revolutionizing conventional methods of teaching and learning. The capability of MOOCs reaching the masses is undoubted. The idea of MOOCs as an aid for professional development of teachers in India has to be considered and deliberated upon. An attempt has been made to reflect upon the ability of MOOCs to facilitate professional development of teachers in India. MOOC is helping the teaching professionals in the many ways and the other. This paper concludes that MOOCs can become a very low cost effective professional development resource to impart continuing education to teachers in India. The suggestions are also given to strengthen the role of MOOC in present scenario in India.

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### Introduction

An educational institution performs a significant function of providing learning experiences to lead their students from the darkness of ignorance to the light of knowledge. The key personnel in the institutions who play an important role to bring about this transformation are teachers. As stated by NCTE (1998) in Quality Concerns in Secondary Teacher Education, The teacher is the most important element in any educational program. It is the teacher who is mainly responsible for implementation of the educational process at any stage. This shows that it is imperative to invest in the preparation of teachers, so that the future of a nation is secure. The importance of competent teachers to the nation's school system can in no way be overemphasized.

It is well known that the quality and extent of learner achievement are determined primarily by teacher competence, sensitivity and teacher motivation. The National Council for Teacher Education has defined teacher education as – A program of education, research and training of persons to teach from pre-primary to higher education level. Teacher education is a program that is related to the development of teacher proficiency and competence that would enable and empower the teacher to meet the requirements of the profession and face the challenges therein. According to Goods Dictionary of Education Teacher education means all the formal and non-formal activities and experiences that help to qualify a person to assume responsibilities of a member of the educational profession or to discharge his responsibilities more effectively (Singh, 2016).

Teacher education is related with the aspects such as, who (teacher-educator), whom (student teacher), what (content) and how (teaching-learning strategy). It refers to the policies and procedures designed to equip prospective teachers with the knowledge, wisdom, attitudes, behaviors, competencies and skills they require to perform their tasks effectively in and outside the classroom, school and community (Singh, 2016).

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### MOOC: The Meaning and Origin

Before the Digital Age, distance learning appeared in the form of correspondence courses in the 1890s-1920s and later radio and television broadcast of courses and early forms of e-learning. Typically fewer than five percent of the students would complete a course (Saettler, 1968). The 2000s saw changes in online, or e-learning and distance education, with increasing online presence, open learning opportunities, and the development of MOOCs. The first MOOCs emerged from the open educational resources (OER) movement. The term MOOC was coined in 2008 by Dave Cormier of the University of Prince Edward Island in response to a course called connectivism and connective knowledge (also known as CCK08).

A massive open online course (MOOC) is an online course aimed at unlimited participation and open access via the web (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2016). In addition to traditional course materials such as filmed lectures, readings, and problem sets, many MOOCs provide interactive user forums to support community interactions among students, professors, and teaching assistants (TAs). MOOCs are a recent and widely researched development in distance education which were first introduced in 2006 and emerged as a popular mode of learning in 2012 (Pappano, 2012).

MOOCs have evolved overtime into three different variations: xMOOCs, cMOOCs, and quasi-MOOCs. Traditional learning institutions typically use an xMOOC, where the teacher is the expert and the learner is the consumer. An xMOOC has a traditional view of knowledge based on the "hub and spoke" model, where the hub is the teacher and the spokes lead to the learners. These courses primarily consist of little external materials, and

mirror traditional learning by using video lectures and quizzes (McGreal, Kinuthia, Marshall, & McNamara, 2013). A cMOOC is based on a connectivist pedagogical model, and the original courses offered by Siemens and Cormier were cMOOCs. cMOOCs are largely open and decentralized with limited structure (King & Nanfity, 2013). A quasi-MOOC is a third variation that provides web-based materials as open educational resources (OER). This MOOC type intends to support specific learning tasks and provides little or no social interaction or grading, and a representative example is Khan Academy.

#### **Need of MOOC in Current Scenario of Teacher Education**

In recent years MOOCs have captured the attention as a new way of gaining knowledge and competencies, and they have been portrayed both as a threat and an opportunity to conventional education (Beaven, 2013). MOOC is the latest remote educational system, which exerts profound impact on traditional teaching mode, leads a new trend in education, and also provides a new method for teacher professional development.

The extensive application of MOOC will surely overwhelm traditional education, just like what MP3 brought to the music industry. MOOC starts to step into teacher professional development. Previous research indicated that, in teacher professional development, MOOC enjoys advantages in cost and educational results. Teachers are still reluctant in utilizing MOOC as a new teaching method, and MOOC is also facing a lack of resources on teacher professional development. The majority previous research on MOOC concentrated on higher education and life-time education, but few touched its application on teacher professional development. Therefore, there is a need to conduct experiments to explore the application of MOOC in teacher professional development (Ji & Cao, 2016).

Teachers' skills and their competencies in the classroom are most important components in supporting a system of quality education. Last thirty years have seen a revolutionary change in the use of information and technology and no wonder that software giants like US & India and hardware giants like China & Japan are global leaders in the present scenario. Information and technology have been given special preference in the general curriculum during the recent years but teacher education centers have not been equipped to cope up with the new realities (Singh, 2016).

In the current scenario of teacher education in India, MOOC is necessary for teachers to cope up with the technological advancements. Massive open online courses can meet the need of teacher professional development at large. MOOC connects thousands of learners and educators throughout the world by the application of online open courses. Through MOOC, teachers can get access to regular educational courses with little barriers. MOOC enables teachers to learn according to their individual needs. MOOC brings together excellent educators, technicians, and professional courses in almost all the areas. The subcategories of MOOC, such as xMOOC and cMOOC, provide online courses with different teaching and learning philosophy, which could satisfy the need of different learners. MOOC also provides powerful support to teachers' daily work in addition to its effect on fostering teachers' professional development (Ji & Cao, 2016).

#### **MOOC as an aid for Professional Development of Teachers**

MOOC is a hot topic in education area, but it is still a newcomer in teacher professional development. MOOC can enhance teachers' learning experience and meet their various needs, so MOOC has a promising future in its application to teacher professional development, and it will promote the reform on teacher education to some extent. Teacher professional development is always guided by national policies. Therefore, supportive policies are the base and presupposition for the application of MOOC to teacher professional development. Teachers' social status is rising recently, and educational degrees are becoming more and more attractive. This trend reflected the recognition of teacher's job from the society, and it also carries people's higher expectation and demands towards teachers (Ji & Cao, 2016). This calls for teacher professional development throughout the whole career period. They specify that MOOC is playing an important role in professional development of teachers:

- MOOC makes it possible for teachers to have classes at any time at any place, which breaks the limitation of synchronic education. The openness and flexibility of MOOC has changed the traditional understanding of classroom teaching.
- With MOOC, every education-related party can contribute to its quality improvement. The supportive policies from the government provides necessary grants, and the contributions from the MOOC consumers, especially teachers, will guarantee the quality of MOOC in this area.
- MOOC provides a new platform for teachers to demonstrate, maintain, and evaluate their career proficiency. However, MOOC should evolve from its extensive development mood, develop application standards for teacher professional development, and establish scientific and humane operational mechanism.

In addition to above mentioned points, Ambadkar (2014) highlights the role of MOOC in professional development of teachers in following points:

- MOOC is Easy to use and easily accessible anywhere. The only requirement is that of internet connectivity and a computer. Teachers can have flexible learning hours, and can study and gain knowledge according to their convenience.
- MOOC gives the opportunity for subject specific professional development. MOOCs enable the learner to choose from wide variety of options available. Teachers can choose the subject area in which they want to update and upgrade their knowledge and can choose from a pool of topics offered.
- MOOC is almost free. Except for a nominal charge for certification, MOOC courses are free. Teachers can update themselves by learning from renowned professionals from the best known universities through MOOCs. The educational institutions would also be relieved from the financial burden of providing professional development training programs for their teaching staff as MOOCs would provide the best low cost alternative.
- Online discussion forums, blogs and collaborations leads to knowledge sharing in the virtual world of MOOCs. Interactions with other teachers through online discussion forums help sharing expertise and solving of queries.
- MOOC helps in peer assessment, self-assessment and self-learning. It is believed that teachers can educate, update and professionally groom themselves through the professional development courses offered by MOOCs. Peer assessments or self-assessment through online quizzes and tests motivate the teacher participants to perform better.

- MOOC gives knowledge of the latest technology MOOCs adopt an interactive course structure and give a chance to the learner to observe teaching techniques of the renowned professors of some of the world's best universities. This helps the learner to acquire knowledge about the recent changes in the teaching.

#### Suggestions for Enhancing Role of MOOC in Present Scenario

MOOC has demonstrated its potential in teacher professional development. The long-term effectiveness and sustainability of MOOC are still debatable, but, as most researchers consent, MOOC do have long-term influence on the teacher professional development education (Ambadkar, 2014).

- University Grants Commission along with heads of Universities and Educational institutions in India should collaborate with other best known MOOC providers and also with top universities of world like Stanford, Harvard, Massachusetts Institute of Technology to provide a suitable Indian MOOC platform.
- The certification element will have to be worked out by universities and educational institutions to ensure that MOOC certification or accreditation for courses undertaken by teachers will add up and count as comparable professional development as they would have undertaken in routine courses.
- The business model might have to be worked out since major MOOC providers work on the principle of imparting free education.

Since already initiatives are undertaken by HRD ministry by launching 'SWAYAM', the India focused MOOC platform (Bharti, 2014) for students across India, can the same platform be extended for imparting certified, accredited professional development courses and online training programs for teachers in India, has to be considered and premeditated upon. The best known MOOC providers like Coursera, Udemy, edX are already offering several specifically designed courses for professional development of teachers. Their experiences can be shared to devise an appropriate Indian MOOCs platform as an aid especially for professional development of teachers in India (Ambadkar, 2014)

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