MOOCs as access to information in developing countries: new ways to utilize ICTs to help meet challenges in the education sector

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Abstract:

This paper includes a general overview of MOOCs in countries in the process of development or transition. Examples of webinars, which have become the online alternative to MOOCs developed by and for library professionals, are shared. Benefits such as participating of MOOCs anywhere at any time, and challenges such as connectivity are discussed. As well as research which is an important part of the process to identify topics for the classes. How to develop MOOCs and best practices are considered with the purpose of providing resources to establish successful projects involving multi-ethnic populations.

Hello everyone. I hope everyone is having a great Congress and that you are enjoying Lyon. I am glad to be on this panel with such esteemed colleagues. I would like to start providing an overview of the current MOOC situation in countries in the process of development or transition in various regions.

Before I continue, I would like to note that MOOCs stands for Massive Open Online Course. This is a global overview of MOOCs in different regions of the world. I've looked at the regions of Latin America & the Caribbean, Africa and areas of Asia.

As we have heard from the panelists today, Coursera is one of the organizations providing free online courses. They have partnered with the National University of Taiwan to provide courses for the Chinese-speaking population. The courses are open for everyone.

In Africa, and with support from the World Bank, a new pilot initiative in Tanzania, started this year. It is seeking to incorporate Coursera classes as part of a broader initiative to help equip students with market-relevant IT skills. The classes will be part of The New Economy Skills for Africa Program – ICT (NESAP-ICT) which was launched in 2008 to support countries in Sub-Saharan Africa in building skills for the knowledge economy. That is very encouraging and positive for development.

In Mexico, the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) has developed a comprehensive program to provide online education including MOOCs. So far, the classes are divided in two tracks: one for the continuing professional development of academics, and the other for students and public in general about innovative topics. Current classes are mostly about how to provide online education. They include classes such as
Information and Communication Technologies for Education, How to create classes using Moodle, and others.

As we can see, MOOCs are still very new in developing countries.
Besides universities and institutions, professionals are taking matters into their hands and have started to develop their own online **alternatives** for other colleagues. I just mentioned examples of MOOCs and now will mention alternatives used by professionals in different regions.
The most popular ones are provided via webinars which are recorded and accessed anywhere at anytime. I would like to share examples of the two groups providing these webinars in Latin America and Spain.

Socialbiblio is based in Spain. It is a group created by and for librarians. They provide monthly or weekly webinars about one topic by one speaker. To access the webinar platform, people need to join their online community. They can always go back to listen to the recording of the webinar. The courses are created using WizIQ which allows the organizers to provide them for free.

Aprender3c is a very new group recently started in Argentina. They are also by and for librarians. The courses are very alike to Socialbiblio as some of the organizers volunteered with Socialbiblio in prior years. and they have experience with the format and topics. The webinars are created using YouTube Live Events and Google Hangout. These are recorded and people can go back to listen to them at any time.

What works?

- Globally-relevant job skills as well as locally-relevant job skills are very popular. This said, there is an interesting conversation about whether or not it is better to focus on either of these, global or local. It depends on each person's reality.

- To implement MOOCs in the developing world, we also need 'industry collaboration' where a number of institutions and organizations from our field join forces to make this happen. For instance, *through 'knowledge hubs' to develop curricula, learning content, and testing and certification standards.* This way, local instructors should acquire the ability to create their own content and conduct classes in the local language.

- Consider the use of mobile devices: *students might not have access to high-speed Internet, but mobile devices will enable them to participate in class on a continuous basis.* Additionally, they are free from the potential constrains of a particular location--- they can participate in class from anywhere. This is particularly helpful for those in rural areas.

Challenges

Access to technology and good infrastructure for Internet connectivity. *Digital literacy, English language proficiency, structure of learning, the delivery environment, the perceived value of learning* – are all challenges.

- Local teachers need to acquire digital instruction and technology skills.

-Challenges also include being a self-starter or a person who is motivated enough to work alone. This is a challenge for many of us who are more gregarious types.

-Another big challenge: generally, there is not much content available in different languages. Content is mainly produced in English. Therefore, students need to understand English to participate on most the courses.
This said, I should mention that Coursera has a **Global Translator Community Program**, but not all the courses are translated into many languages.

But, there are **benefits**!

A huge benefit is that anyone can participate in MOOCs, anywhere at any time. In the mountains, in the fields, anywhere.

Another one is that through carefully designed MOOCs, we could increase the literacy of people in developing countries including women, children and vulnerable populations.

We can cultivate lifelong learning as well. The library is the best place in our communities and societies to help people achieve this.

Let's think about all this.

Research

Now, I would like to share information about research conducted by Information New Wave, the non-for-proft organization I lead, we bring access to information to developing countries in Latin America. We work with libraries, library schools and those providing access to information in the community to identify information needs to design free educational alternatives.

We carried out focus groups and interviews with academic, public and school librarians, and LIS professors and students. We found out that the courses they need are related to emerging technologies, digital libraries and library instruction.

The fact that these results coincided with needs identified by colleagues developing MOOCs in developed countries is very revealing and helpful.

How to make this happen?
First, we need to look back at what works, and the challenges and benefits mentioned before. Next, we need to assess the needs of our target population which I explained briefly by sharing my organization's research. Based on this we can identify topics, locally-relevant topics, and globally-relevant topics.

Then we want to identify the best format. We need to consider if we are ready for MOOCs on computers, do we need to consider accessing courses on mobile devices or do we need to start with webinars.
Last, but not least, we really need to include the community from the very beginning of the process.

Before I end my presentation, I need to go over important points pivotal to the success of any project including multi-ethnic groups which are very present in developing countries:

As per Schnuer and Ujala (2007), we need:

> Awareness of cultural norms and socio-political understanding.

> Awareness of local educational system, history of the country, and regional differences including the transnational social and political environment.

> Awareness of local culture including food, music, and architecture. Yes, we should be aware of all the components of the cultures we work with.

> It is important to patiently work with participants to effectively discuss ideas, explain concepts, and teach.

And finally, we should be careful not to judge, avoided bias and stereotypes, and practiced empathy in local situations.

References

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Links

Aprender3c http://aprender3c.org/
Socialbiblio http://www.socialbiblio.com/
UNAM http://www.cuaed.unam.mx/portal/index.php