Reforming SWAYAM: The Perspective of Instructors

Pooja Verma[1], Ahrar Husain[2]

[1]Research Scholar, [2]Professor,
[1,2]Department of TT & NFE (IASE), Jamia Millia Islamia, Delhi, India

ABSTRACT
Technology has made its presence felt in each walk of life and has changed the pace of modernisation. Information and communication technology accelerated the world towards knowledge economy and higher education should be focused to achieve this. MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) have placed higher education in the public domain at a global scale and not only learners but teachers also get benefited to have their continuous professional development. Realising the need of the hour, India launched an indigenous MOOC platform with name 'SWAYAM' in July 2017 and has just updated it in May 2019.This paper is part of a broad study to list the suggestions provided by SWAYAM MOOC instructors in different aspects to further improve these courses. It is a survey based self-participatory study as its link was shared with 1120 SWAYAM instructors through e-mails and 66 of them voluntarily participated. The suggestions indicated by them can be placed under three categories of technology, instruction and communication, to head towards the further refinement of quality and accessibility of this platform.

KEYWORDS: Digital India; Higher Education; ICT; India; Instructors; MOOC; SWAYAM

INTRODUCTION
Educators were always of view that technology can have a major impact on education[1].MOOC is like any open web resource but what makes it different is its structured yet flexible format [2].MOOCs have found popularity in west since 2008 when an Artificial Intelligence course was offered by a Professor at Stanford for free [3] and by 2012, it was considered as "The year of MOOC" [4] but in eastern culture solely studying through MOOCs do not work. So, it should be supplemented with regular classes and community teaching [5]. India is heading towards a knowledge economy, hence, an indigenous platform is launched in July 2017 with name SWAYAM (Study Webs of Active-learning for Young Aspiring Minds) by Government of India to surface the need of education today on three key principals of – access, equity and quality [6].SWAYAM has many merits but it falls short on - grounds of aspirations, leadership, funding, pedagogy, and the initiative is not matching global standards in several aspects [7]. SWAYAM has nine national coordinators to take care of the quality in each education sector. Smart phone are quite handy these days but it has been realised that some MOOC platforms are not mobile friendly [8].We generally say that MOOCs are beneficial for students but it has been realised that its equally important for continuous professional development [9] of the instructors as they may experiment with their pedagogical approaches frequently [10].Issues faced by learners while pursuing MOOC were technological, Instructional and Communication based [11].Some of the challenges faced by instructors while conducting a MOOC were – course information, activities, organisation, use of technology and management [12].

Objective
The main objective of this study is to list the suggestions provided by the SWAYAM MOOC instructors to further improve the platform.

Need of the Study
SWAYAM has just entered into its upgraded version in May 2019 with the view to further satisfy the need of education in the country. Instructors are one of the most important stakeholders of this platform. Their constant efforts are really important to make this initiative successful. They influence the quality of the courses directly and must have experienced the shortcomings of this platform. So, it would be highly recommended to get their feedback in the form of their suggestions to eliminate the loop holes of this platform. In this study, the instructors shared some suggestions for the refinement of these courses based on their personal experiences while teaching their respective courses.

Methodology
This study is basically a questionnaire based survey study. The questionnaire was constructed as a Google form and shared its link with 1120 SWAYAM instructors (consist of main Instructors as well as teacher assistants) through email.66 instructors voluntarily participated in the study and provided their suggestions to improve this platform based on their working experience. Mainly qualitative data was obtained. Analysis of the data was done to obtain the result given below under three categories.

Results

The suggestions provided by the instructors can be listed under the following three headings:

A. Technical

➢ **Infrastructure –** To raise the effectiveness of the platform, availability of infrastructure is pre-requisite. Especially, when teachers in remote areas are enthusiastic towards innovation like this but weak connectivity in terms of internet and electricity facilities may hinder their paths.

➢ **User friendly –** SWAYAM website as well as SWAYAM mobile app need to be made more user friendly. As many a time's problems are faced by learners to explore the content, watch lecture videos, submit their assignments etc.

➢ **Update –** Platform updating should be done to match the international standards by making it more dynamic by diversifying the setting.

B. Communication

➢ **Training-** Proper training to SWAYAM instructors and mentors should be provided through regular and elaborated workshops.

➢ **Advertisement -** Course launch must be advertised widely. As majority of the participants belong to urban colleges, awareness campaigns should focus more on rural area institutes and participants.

➢ **Announcement –** Announcements regarding assignment submission, examination dates, credit transfer etc. should be provided in an exclusive space on this platform and along with that mobile alerts should also be sent.

➢ **Interaction -** More interaction between participants and instructors is need of the hour. For this purpose live sessions should be organized to further clarify the doubts. Students should feel free to post their queries and instructors should be available in the real-time.

➢ **Language –** Communication should be done in the language that is comfortable to learners.

C. Instruction

➢ **Pedagogy-** Innovative pedagogical instruction method and materials should be utilized to serve the individual difference. Most appropriate teaching method should be realised to make the learners understand effectively. For Example, case study and field study for Forensic Science, Simulated experiments for Chemistry etc. Certain number of interactive sessions should be made mandatory for each course.

➢ **Open resources –** If proper supply of electricity and internet could be made available, it may open ways towards unlimited web resources which may ultimately leads to the better transaction of lessons by instructors for better learning.

➢ **Diversify –** There should be diverse courses available in different languages under each discipline.

➢ **Flexible –** Undertaking the different needs of the learners, most of the courses should be made self-paced and their registration must be kept open.

➢ **Evaluation-** There should be a uniform system of assessment and evaluation based on international standards.

➢ **Language-** Courses should be available in different Indian languages and one instructor should be there for each language.

➢ **Exam Centres -** There are many international participants interested to join these courses but due to availability of exam centres in India only, they miss the opportunity. This platform needs to be globally expanded.

➢ **Accessible -** MOOC could be made more accessible for persons with disabilities

➢ **Fees-** SWAYAM should allow nominal fee collection to sustain.

➢ **Real-time Feedback –** Instructors should be more involved in the course and provide real-time feedback to the learners.

➢ **Enhance skills-** MOOCs should be made mandatory along with regular courses especially with skill based courses.

➢ **Reduce syllabus-** Some courses are loaded with heavy syllabus. The burden of huge syllabus should be reduced for better teaching-learning.

➢ **Video length -** 30 minutes videos are very long and therefore, capsule videos of 2-3 minute each should also be provided for each topic. Small videos may also supplement the mainstream courses.

➢ **Database –** Whole content knowledge produced during the course preparation should be treated as repository but should be updated with time to validate itself. Question bank should also be formed for assessment.

➢ **Re-Exam -** There should be a provision to conducting exams for unsuccessful learners again.

➢ **Choice based Credit system-** All universities must be persuaded to adopt the SWAYAM courses for credit transfer with some incentives, mere advisories won't do much.

➢ **Content Development –** Training for content development of MOOCs should be provided. More screening of the content should be done by experts to enhance the course quality.

Conclusion

As per the experience of instructors from different disciplines of SWAYAM courses, they have provided certain suggestions to raise the quality of this platform. When their suggestions were seen collectively, they could be placed under three headings - Technical, Communication and Instruction. Under technical category, they have pointed towards low user friendly SWAYAM app., infrastructural and updation needs. Under communication category, they made realise the need of training, advertisement, interaction, proper announcements and to overcome the language barriers. Under instruction category, their suggestions surrounded better pedagogical approaches, open resources, flexibility, evaluation, real-time feedback, huge syllabus, video length, knowledge repository, content development, accessibility, choice based credit system and

fees. Government should take the feedback provided by each stakeholder carefully. Instructors have place of their own in assessing these courses as they are pedagogy and subject experts of their academic area. Periodic feedback and need of modification are must to achieve international standards.

References

[1] K. F. Hew and T. Brush, ―Integrating technology into K-12 teaching: Current knowledge gaps and recommendations for future research, Educational Technology Research and Development, vol. 55, no. 3, pp. 223-252, 2007.

[2] A. J. Jacobs. (April 2013). Two cheers for web U! New York Times.[Online]. 162(56113), pp. 1–7. Available: http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/21/opinion/sunday/grading-the-mooc-university.html?smid=pl-share&_r=1&.

[3] H. Hu, ―MOOC migration,‖ Diverse: Issues in Higher Education, vol. 30, no. 4, pp. 10-11, 2013.

[4] L. Pappano. (November 2012). The year of the MOOC.[Online]. Available: http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/04/education/edlife/massive-openonline-courses-are-multiplying-at-a-rapidpace.html

[5] Zhong, Shenghua& Zhang, Qun-Bo & Li, Zheng-Ping & Liu, Yan. (2016). Motivations and Challenges in MOOCs with Eastern Insights. International Journal of Information and Education Technology. 6. 954-960. 10.7763/IJIET.2016.V6.824.

[6] SWAYAM Portal www.swayam.gov.in.

[7] https://www.nalanda2.org/single-post/2017/03/14/India-needs-to-make-MOOCs-a-national-priority.

[8] deFreitas, S. (2013). MOOCs: The final frontier for Higher Education? Coventry University. Retrieved October 27, 2014 from http://benhur.teluq.uquebec.ca/ted/Ressources/mooc.pdf.)

[9] Verma, P. and Husain, A. (2018). MOOCs for Teachers' Continuing Professional Development in India: A Review Paper. MALTESAS Multi-Disciplinary Research Journal (MIRJO), ISSN/ISBN-0127-6271, Vol. 3, Issue 3, pg. 69-75.Retrieved from: http://maltesas.my/msys/explore/docs/2018/50_1546234815.pdf.

[10] K. F. Hew and W. S. Cheung, ―Students' and instructors' use of massive open online courses (MOOCs): Motivations and challenges,‖ Educational Research Review, vol. 12, pp. 45-58, 2014.

[11] Verma, P. & Husain, A.(2019).Challenges faced by SWAYAM participants. Distance and Open learning: Challenges and opportunities in present scenario (pp.198-203). National conference by Center for Distance and open learning, JamiaMilliaIslamia, Delhi, India.

[12] M. Ramirez, N. Rivera, A. Garcia (2014) MOOC Learning: Challenges and Opportunities of Using Team Teaching, ICERI2014 Proceedings, pp. 5751-5756).