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Book Review: MOOCs and Open Education in the Global South: Challenges, Successes, and Opportunities

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Abstract: MOOCs and Open Education in the Global South: Challenges, Successes, and Opportunities is edited by Ke Zhang, Curt Bonk, Tom Reeves, and Tom Reynolds. The book is 392 pages, published by Routledge in 2019 with ISBN-10: 0367025760 and ISBN-13: 978-0367025762.

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Introduction

This is a very timely book from Ke Zhang, Curt Bonk, Tom Reeves, and Tom Reynolds with a much-needed focus on MOOCs and open education in the Global South. This is a follow-up book to MOOCs and Open Education Around the World published by Routledge in 2015. Comprised of 28 chapters, a foreword written by, Mimi Lee, one of the editors of the 2015 volume, and an extended preface, with contributions from 68 authors across 47 countries primarily in the global south. The book is divided into six distinct sections: Historical Perspectives, Current Practices and Designs, MOOCs and Open Education for Professional Development, Multi-Country Collaborations and Collections, Government Policies and Strategies, Organisational Innovations, and the Future of MOOCs and Open Education.

Across the book there is an impressive focus on the challenges (and opportunities) facing the global south in terms of MOOCs and open education. The book covers an impressive range of countries and initiatives. There are a variety of approaches from individual institutional initiatives through to institutional or Government led directives.

The chapters demonstrate the importance of the need to take account of local societal norms and cultural structures, for example, the chapter comparing MOOC developments in North and South Korea. In contrast, it is suggested from China is very teacher-centred and passive. Importantly, one chapter focuses on how Egypt is overcoming access barriers. In addition, a number of chapters suggest that online education is a means of overcoming the prohibitive cost of textbooks.

One of the benefits of education and in particular online education is to enable future economic growth. Many chapters argue that there is a need to shift away from a content focus to focusing on the context of learning. A useful list is provided of what makes effective, efficient and engaging learning and teaching. A number of chapters suggest there are challenges in terms of many countries having little access to the Internet and associated prohibitive costs; a number of solutions to this are described.

In terms of young learners, most use the Internet for socialising or entertainment, rather than education. There is also a discussion focusing on the perspectives of instructors, as well as the importance of learner-instructor and learner-learner interaction to increase online learners' persistence. A number of roles of instructors are outlined, including: course designer, administrator/teacher, co-ordinator to develop a specialised series of courses, and course liaison.

The initiatives described focus either on MOOCs for learners or MOOCs for professional development. The latter being important because of the recognition of the need to develop instructors' digital literacies. Furthermore, a number of chapters highlight the importance of training and awareness raising in terms of the potential of MOOCs and open education.



Many of the current MOOCs are primarily teacher-centred and passive, whereas it is argued that there is a need to shift to emphasising more student-centred and activity-based approaches, which promote higher order thinking skills, criticality and problem solving, i.e. the skills students will need to participate in a constantly changing work context.

A range of research approaches is described, including: Design Based Research and the use of a Delphi study approach. In addition, a number of frameworks are used across the chapters, including the Community of Inquiry framework, Senge's learning organisation framework and application of the concept of affordances.

Across the chapters, some of the key challenges faced in the Global South include: lack of technical infrastructure, lack of digital literacies (both for instructors and learners), poor course design, taking account of local contexts and languages, and a lack of sustainable business models.

In the book, readers will find an interesting discussion about the potential impact of emergent technologies, such as: Virtual Reality, Augmented Reality and Artificial Intelligence. There is also frequent reference to the alignment of MOOC initiatives to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and, in particular, SDG 4, which focuses on quality education.

The editors conclude the book by arguing that there is hope and optimism for the future of MOOCs and Open Educational Resources in the Global South. Given my reading of this highly relevant and thoughtfully designed new book as well as the initial 2015 volume, I became somewhat optimistic too.

References

Zhang, K., Bonk, C. J., Reeves, T. C., & Reynolds, T. H. (2019). *MOOCs and Open Education in the Global South: Challenges, Successes, and Opportunities*. Routledge.

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