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MOOCs and open education in the Global South

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Feng-Ru Sheu

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BOOK REVIEW

MOOCs and open education in the Global South, edited by Ke Zhang, Curtis J. Bonk, Thomas C. Reeves and Thomas H. Reynolds, London, Routledge, 2020, 358 pp., \$49.95 (paperback), (hbk), ISBN 978-0-367-02576-2; (pbk), ISBN 978-0-367-02577-9; (e-book), ISBN 978-0-429-39891-9

Since the term massive open online course (MOOC) was first introduced in 2008 (Siemens, 2013), MOOCs have attracted wide attention including the emergence of a variety of related online platforms, programmes, and research around the world. The use of MOOCs as a means of more affordable learning also gave a boost to the open education movement. However, MOOC-related documents, reports, and research were too often written from a western viewpoint and approach. Scant research publications have documented the MOOCs and open education initiatives in the Global South, where the countries are highly diverse and rapidly changing culturally, educationally, and economically. The four editors of this stellar book, Ke Zhang, Curt Bonk, Tom Reeves, and Tom Reynolds, with decades of fully online and blended learning experience among them, aimed to 'help the reader better understand the wide array of MOOC initiatives and open education projects' (preface, xxvii) in the Global South and beyond.

This publication, *MOOCs and Open Education in the Global South*, presents a collection of MOOC and open education practices and projects that have been implemented at the local, community, international, and cross-national levels in the Global South. The editors further pointed out the countries of the Global South that are less known for MOOC and OER practices. A total of 47 countries are included in the book, from six regions in the Global South: Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, the Middle East, and the Pacific/Oceania (p. 3).

According to the editors, the book attempts to take readers 'on a journey through an expansive array of MOOC-related developments and initiatives in Global South regions of the world' (Preface, xxviii). As such, it introduces the development and implementation of MOOCs and open education in the Global South from the past, the present, and on to the future with a wide range of perspectives. In addition, a series of current developments and applications of MOOCs and open education in the Global South are offered. The book also aims to respond to some of the salient issues found in the prevailing research, including:

- Why are MOOC- and OER-related phenomena so different in the Global North and the Global South?
- What are the key challenges and opportunities in the Global South?
- How do institutions and organisations in the Global South negotiate with the various challenges inherent in MOOCs and OER developed elsewhere?
- What may have contributed to much higher rates of MOOC participation and completion in the Global South?
- In what ways does the Global South benefit from MOOCs and OER?
- What can we learn from the Global South to leverage MOOCs and OER for sustainable development? (p. 2)

This publication consists of 28 chapters and is divided into seven sections to consider challenges, successes, and opportunities of MOOCs and open education in the Global South.

Each section contains a brief editorial introduction. The first section presents the development of MOOCs and open education in Korea and China through the view of history by local scholars. First, we hear the potential open and distance learning reunification possibilities of North and South Korea from the perspectives of Yong Kim, Oct Tae Kim, and Jin Gon Shon at the Korea National Open University. Next, the reader gets a sense of the history of MOOCs and MOOC research in China from a prominent educational technology expert, Professor Jianli Jiao of South China Normal University, and his research team member, Yibo Fan.

Section 2 comprises of eight chapters, highlighting prevailing MOOCs and open education practices and designs within various cultural and educational environments, as well as the resulting impacts. For example, Maha Bali and Nadine Aboulmagd discuss the idea, implementation, and possibility of open education underneath a unique cultural environment, Egypt. Additionally, four chapters in this section describe the practices and development of the MOOCs and OERs in Asia such as Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and in Latin America. Of particular importance, we get the unique insights and historical perspectives of Tian Belawati, the former rector of Universitas Terbuka (also known as the Indonesia Open University) as well the former President of the Asian Association of Open University and the International Council for Open and Distance Education. While one only needs to flip to the next two chapters to learn about important shifts in perspectives in the design and development of MOOCs in chapters from Som Naidu of the University of the South Pacific (USP) and his colleagues Shironica Karunanayaka of the Open University of Sri Lanka and Deepak Bhartu at the Centre for Flexible Learning in USP.

Section 3 includes five chapters focusing on professional development. This section presents salient approaches and projects that apply MOOCs and open education to facilitate professional development. For example, three chapters discuss the professional development of MOOCs in Turkey, Thailand, and South Africa. In addition, Sanjaya Mishra, Martha Cleveland-Innes, and Nathaniel Ostashewski describe the use of MOOCs among international organisations (Commonwealth of Learning and Athabasca University) to promote teacher professional development around the world.

Section 4 consists of three chapters describing the MOOC and open education collaborative research and initiatives across multiple countries. For example, two chapters present a collection of MOOC experiences across different countries, including Bahamas, China, Colombia, Iran, Mexico, Zimbabwe, and South Africa, and one chapter led by Professor Insung Jung and her colleagues at International Christian University in Tokyo presents the development of MOOCs and OER in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Mexico, Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam. Also, one chapter describes the economic and social impacts of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) on Latin America and the Caribbean.

Section 5 consists of four chapters addressing the development of MOOCs and open education at a larger scale from governmental policies and strategies.

For example, two of the chapters highlight MOOC and OER related government policies in Brazil and Malaysia. Some chapters highlight the challenges and opportunities of MOOC and OER development in different social contexts, such as in Turkey, Thailand, the Philippines, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and UAE.

In addition to government agencies, the efforts of non-governmental organisations for MOOCs and open education development and implementation are presented in Section 6. This section is subdivided into four chapters to describe four quite inventive projects conducted by particular organisations or institutions. For example, two chapters introduce multiple-national collaborative projects through individual organisations such as those led by Sheila Jagannathan of the World Bank and Atieno Adala describing unique online degrees created through open

education possibilities at the African Virtual University. After that, one will find two other equally interesting chapters that introduce unique MOOC and OER projects in India and Kenya.

The final section includes two chapters to present the prospects of MOOCs and open education resources through current results and achievements. For example, Paul Kim and Jieun Lee describe an innovative application of data analytics and artificial intelligence that sprung out of the Stanford Mobile Inquiry-based Learning Environment (SMILE) that could have wide ranging implications for MOOCs and OERs for K-16 education.

Overall, this publication introduces the successes and challenges of localised MOOCs and OERs within different practices and research, making this edited volume a valuable resource book. MOOCs and OERs have received widespread attention over the last decade. Localisation or domestication is considered as an indispensable factor in sustaining MOOC and OER implementations (Keramida, 2015; Weiland, 2015). Most of the prevailing documents and information regarding MOOCs and OERs come from the Global North (i.e., North American and European countries).

Compared with this region, the Global South is regarded as a somewhat mystical and unknown area. As a result, this unique collection of local MOOC and OER examples from dozens of emerging economies, with educational systems in the midst of transformation due to open and distance educational experimentation in the Global South, is a vital and valuable element of this particular publication. Another key feature of this momentous volume is the inclusion of over 60 authors from Global South countries. These countries also comprise distinctive cultural, social, and geographic backgrounds. With the perspectives of the myriad local scholars, world renowned researchers, and international advocates found in this book, readers can develop profound insight into the implementation of MOOCs and OERs in this region.

In addition, several other crucial features also contribute to the uniqueness of this book. For instance, the arrangement of book themes took my attention. As Confucius presumably once stated (n.d.) 'Study the past if you would define the future.' The organisation of the book corresponds entirely with this thinking. The editors first describe past developments, then current practices and case studies in each region. With the understanding of the past and present, the final chapters then depict future MOOC and OER developments globally. This well-organised publication helps the reader to develop a better understanding of MOOC and OER development and practices in the Global South regions. Another key aspect of the book is the description of the designs, applications, and impacts of MOOCs and OER with a focus on various themes, such as professional development and innovation, organisational development, multi-party collaboration, and government policies and strategies.

In effect, Zhang, Bonk, Reeves, and Reynolds offer readers an enticing overview of MOOCs and OERs in the Global South regions from a diverse range of perspectives. Overall, this publication introduces a series of successes and challenges of localised MOOCs and OERs that make this book both a highly valuable resource and a stepping stone for intense discussion, debate, and strategic planning.

Notes on contributor

Feng-Ru Sheu is an Assistant Professor and Instructional Design Librarian in University Libraries at Kent State University. She holds four degrees from Indiana University: two master's degrees in Library Science and Early Childhood Education, a specialist degree in Information Science, and PhD degree (double major) in Instructional Systems Technology and Curriculum Studies. Her research interests include the application of learning theories and innovative technology to enhance learning, usability, and human performance. Sheu also advocates for open education. Her research in this area focuses on the effectiveness of open pedagogy and the impact of Open Educational Resources (OER).

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Feng-Ru Sheu

University Libraries, Kent State University, Kent, OH, USA

 fsheu@kent.edu  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5061-9771>

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