

Instructor Awareness of MOOCs in a Private Japanese University

Anthony Sellick

Shumei University

Contact: sellick@mailg.shumei-u.ac.jp

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) have exploded in popularity worldwide since they were first offered in 2008. This report describes preliminary research investigating the extent to which instructors in Japan are aware of them. The survey found that the majority of instructors were completely unaware of MOOCs, but that those who were aware of them recognised their potential benefits for both themselves and their students. Further research is required to determine if these data are representative of instructors in Japan, and also to determine how practical it is to introduce MOOCs to students at Japanese institutions.

Introduction

Massive Online Open Courses (hereafter MOOCs) are essentially a form of e-learning, in that they are courses offered online. Where they differ from the online distance learning courses traditionally offered by educational institutions is that they are fully online and do not usually have entry requirements. As a result, most MOOC courses are available to anyone who has Internet access. Furthermore, many MOOCs are free, although providers may charge a fee to formally certify a student as having successfully completed a course (Martin, 2012).

Since the first MOOC was launched in 2008, the number of MOOC providers and students has grown enormously, as have the range and number of courses available. For example, JMOOC, which began operating in 2013, offers 130 courses, while Coursera, established in 2012, offers more than 1,500 to its 33 million users (Coursera, 2019a). Individual courses can attract vast numbers of students, with the British MOOC provider FutureLearn having enrolled more than 440,000 students on its British Council Understanding IELTS: Techniques for English Language Tests course (FutureLearn, 2018). However, set against this, it must also be noted that the completion rate of MOOCs has been reported to be as low as 10 percent (Koller et al, 2013).

For institutions, the creation of a MOOC provides opportunities to increase awareness of their brand, to potentially increase future student intake, and to monetise teaching materials. This is of particular importance at a time when competition among colleges and universities has intensified (Byrne, 2000). Furthermore, MOOCs can increase public awareness of important issues (Grainger, 2013). One example is Understanding Violence, a course provided by Emory University, U.S.A., on the Coursera platform, which “introduces [students] to experts who study different forms of violence and we will discuss the various causes of violence. [Students] will also learn about efforts to reduce violence and engage in a day of compassion” (Coursera, 2019b) Another example relevant to foreign language teachers is the Lancaster University, U.K., course Dyslexia and Foreign Language Teaching, available on the FutureLearn platform.

For teachers, creating a MOOC can aid in their career development, increase exposure of their research findings, create opportunities to conduct further research and establish partnerships, and even help to sell their books. In an era where there is increasing pressure on instructors in tertiary education to publish, developing a MOOC provides educators with an extra way to differentiate and promote themselves. Furthermore, for teachers, taking MOOCs can help with their continuing professional development and serve to increase the breadth of their knowledge beyond their field of specialisation.

For students, taking a MOOC can provide various benefits beyond the obvious enhancement of their résumés. Firstly, it allows a student to sample a university's style of teaching and course content, potentially earn credit towards future university study, support and enhance their own formal learning, and show self-efficacy and motivation to learn (Bentley et al., 2014). Secondly, there are opportunities for students to participate in MOOCs beyond a student role. Some MOOC platforms, such as Coursera, have an active community of volunteers helping to translate teaching materials, review course materials, and mentor other MOOC students (e.g. Coursera, 2019c, 2019d, 2019e). Thus, taking MOOCs can offer students a variety of ways to differentiate themselves in a way that is attractive to future employers. Thirdly, the structure of MOOCs encourages communication among students in order to develop understanding and enhance learning. Students are often required to create work that will be peer reviewed, and to peer review the work of others. Finally, many MOOCs have learner forums allowing students to share ideas, explore concepts, and to communicate with a diverse range of other learners as equals (DeWaard et al, 2011). The forums also enable students to co-construct knowledge and understanding by 'scaffolding' each other (Silcock, 2003). This exchange can in turn positively affect motivation and social skills (Brown & Duguid, 2001).

However, unless teachers are aware of MOOCs, and their potential benefits, they will be unable to inform their students of them, encourage their participation, or support them in their MOOC studies. In this study, I report on a pilot survey regarding MOOC awareness among the teaching staff of a private university in Japan.

Methodology

An anonymous 11-item Japanese/English bilingual survey containing four demographic items and seven items regarding MOOCs was distributed to all full-time and part-time teaching staff of a private university in central Japan. The surveys were distributed at the beginning of the academic year, prior to the commencement of teaching.

Results

Of the 219 surveys distributed, 44 were returned, representing a response rate of 20.1 percent. A demographic summary of the respondents is provided in Table 1.

Table 1
Demographic breakdown of survey respondents

<u>Gender</u>		<u>Age</u>		<u>Country of origin</u>		<u>Employment type</u>	
Male	30	<30	0	Japan	36	Full-time	32
Female	14	31-40	15	China	1	Part-time	12
Other	0	41-50	12	Korea	1		
		51-60	10	Australia	1		
		>60	7	U.K.	4		
				Canada	1		

When asked if they had heard of MOOCs (Item 5), 14 respondents replied that they had, while 30 replied that they had not. Items 6 through 12 were then asked to the respondents who were aware of MOOCs. The responses to Item 6 (Which MOOC platforms are you aware of?) are shown in Table 2.

Table 2
MOOC platforms known by survey respondents

<u>MOOC Platform</u>	<u>Respondents</u>
JMOOC	6
Coursera	8
EdX	6
ALISON	2
FutureLearn	4
DuoLingo	6
Udacity	5
Udemy	4
OPEN2STUDY	2
OpenupEd	1
University of the People	1
Gacco	1
Fisdome	1
Khan Academy	1
iTunesU	1

The subsequent item (Item 7) asked the respondents if they had ever taken a MOOC, to which ten replied that they had.

Table 3
Number of MOOCs taken

<u>MOOCs taken</u>	<u>Respondents</u>
1-5	7
6-10	1
11-15	0
16-20	0
20>	2

The number of MOOC courses they had taken (Item 8) and reasons why (Item 9) are summarised in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 4
Reasons for taking a MOOC

<u>Reason</u>	<u>Respondents</u>
To upgrade my skills	4
To update my knowledge	2
To broaden my knowledge	1
General interest	7
As part of my professional development	5
Other	0

Item 10 asked the respondents if they would recommend a MOOC to their students, to which nine replied that they would. Additional information given by the respondents is presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Reasons why respondents would recommend a MOOC to students

<u>Response Code</u>	<u>Exemplars</u>
Enhancing Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I believe breadth of knowledge as well as depth of knowledge is important. (Respondent 1) • I want [my students] to learn more things. (Respondent 2) • To expand their view. (Respondent 3) • Students can increase their knowledge and develop their interests. (Respondent 16) • There are some very practical skills available for little or no cost at all. (Respondent 36)
Cost	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free and different from courses offered here. (Respondent 24) • There are some very practical skills available for little or no cost at all. (Respondent 36)
Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I would recommend MOOCs but only if it were beneficial to those students and not too time-consuming. (Respondent 28)

Item 11 asked respondents if they had recommended a MOOC to their students. Four respondents replied that they had done so. Additional information given by the respondents is presented in Table 6.

Table 6

Reasons why respondents recommended a MOOC to students

<u>Response Code</u>	<u>Exemplars</u>
Enhancing Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In order to develop an interest in learning about topics unrelated to their majors. (Respondent 1) • I want them to have experience of different kinds of education. (Respondent 2)
Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To progress at their own pace. (Respondent 16)
Utility for Employment / CPD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To assist students seeking employment in a particular field. Some of the practical units available from notable universities are set to look impressive on a Japanese résumé. (Respondent 36)

Comments provided by the 10 respondents that had not recommended a MOOC to their students are presented in Table 7.

Table 7

Reasons why respondents had not recommended a MOOC to students

<u>Response Code</u>	<u>Exemplars</u>
Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There was no opportunity. (Respondent 3) • Time, forgetfulness, don't think they'd do it. (Respondent 24) • Many students already have constraints on their free time. To add another would seem unhealthy. (Respondent 28).
Utility for Employment / CPD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The effectiveness is unclear. (Respondent 20)

Item 12 asked those respondents with awareness of MOOCs if they were interested in taking a MOOC or more MOOCs, to which ten of the respondents replied in the affirmative, and four in the negative. Their reasons are presented in Table 8.

Table 8

Reasons given by respondents for interest, or lack of, in taking a MOOC

<u>Response Code</u>	<u>Exemplars</u>
Enhancing Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Education never ends. (Respondents 1 and 20) ● There are many topics I am interested in. (Respondent 2) ● I have an interest to do so. (Respondent 3) ● There is always something new to learn. (Respondent 28) ● To upgrade skills I might need. (Respondent 31) ● Can learn a variety of things. (Respondent 44)
Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● If I had time to do so. (Respondent 36) ● Lack of time. (Respondents 13 and 21)
Utility for Employment / CPD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● If there is something good for me. (Respondent 16) ● Often not certified/recognized. Want to focus on writing and researching. (Respondent 24).

The final item of the survey (Item 13) was addressed to all respondents in order to ascertain if they were interested in finding out more about MOOCs. Of the 44 respondents, 27 responded in the affirmative and 17 responded in the negative. Their reasons are presented in Table 9.

Discussion

Unfortunately, the low response rate means that it is unlikely that the data collected in this survey is fully representative of the teaching body at the university. While it is always difficult to determine reasons for non-participation, it may be that the timing of the questionnaire distribution (during an especially busy time of the semester) resulted in a decrease in potential participants. It may also, perhaps ironically, be the case that many potential participants declined to take part due to a lack of knowledge of MOOCs. Nonetheless, it is clear that awareness of MOOCs has yet to penetrate fully, with many instructors seemingly entirely unaware of this mode of education. It is interesting to note that those who had taken one or more MOOCs were keen to take others in the future, and that most felt that they and their students could benefit from taking them, emphasising the chance to enhance learning, and to improve employability and career development. However, legitimate reasons for not recommending MOOCs to students were also raised, in particular the additional time needed for a MOOC on top of the time required for their primary studies. Notably, no respondent raised cost as a potential barrier for students with regards to MOOCs.

This survey was conducted at a university at which no staff member had been involved in the creation of a MOOC. Consequently, reported awareness of MOOCs could be quite different if a university involved in their production was surveyed. Furthermore, since some MOOC providers offer courses aimed at students preparing for university study, intending to study abroad, or preparing to take common tests (such as TOEIC), it may also be instructive to determine how well awareness of MOOCs has spread among secondary education instructors. Subsequent research should, then, be conducted at a greater range of educational institutions.

In addition, while awareness of MOOCs is necessary for instructors to be able to introduce them to their students, it is also important to determine to what degree students are aware of MOOCs and how they acquired that knowledge. Finally,

the practicalities of introducing and encouraging students to participate in MOOCs will need to be investigated. This is of particular importance given that the completion rate of MOOCs can be as low as 10 percent (Koller et al, 2013).

Table 9

Reasons given by respondents for interest, or lack of, in finding out more about MOOCs

<u>Response Code</u>	<u>Exemplars</u>
Enhancing Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I want to gain experience of different kinds of education. (Respondent 10) • Looks like it is good to improve my skills. (Respondent 19) • I'm interested in doing it. (Respondents 4, 5, 7, 20, 22, 23, 38, 44)
Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I don't have time. (Respondents 13, 21, 37)
Utility for Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's useful for work. (Respondent 22) • I don't know if it would be useful. (Respondent 33)
Knowledge of MOOCs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I already know a lot about them. (Respondent 1) • I want to find out more from now. (Respondent 2) • There are many MOOCs I did not know about. I want to find out more from now. (Respondents 3, 17, 24) • I have no idea what a MOOC is. (Respondents 8, 14, 15, 18, 25) • I had never heard of them, so I think I want to find out. (Respondents 29, 30, 31, 32, 34, 35, 36) • I knew about the University of the Air, but not about MOOCs, so I decided to find out more. I was surprised because many universities had made courses, and researchers who I know appeared in the lectures. Now I am interested in doing them. (Respondent 40) • I knew about them, but I didn't know much about the MOOC system. I think I should find out more. (Respondent 42)

Conclusion

Based on the results of this preliminary research, awareness of MOOCs in Japanese tertiary educational institutions is potentially still very low. However, those instructors who were aware of MOOCs generally felt that their students could benefit from them, too. Further research is needed to obtain a better picture of MOOC awareness among instructors in Japan and to determine the practicalities of introducing MOOCs to students. Fruitful avenues of research could include determining awareness of MOOCs among teaching staff at a national or prefectural university in order to compare it with awareness among private university staff, and ascertaining student awareness of MOOCs, as well as their attitudes towards them once aware that MOOCs exist. Ultimately, however, instructors will only be confident in recommending MOOCs to their students if they are both aware of them and have tried one themselves.

References

- Bentley, P., Crump, H., Cuffe, P., Gniadek, B. J., MacNeill, S., & Mor, Y. (2014). Signals of Success and Self-Directed Learning. EMOOC 2014: European MOOC Stakeholder Summit. Proceedings, 5-10.
- Brown, J. S. & Duguid, P. (2001). Knowledge and Organization: A Social-Practice Perspective. *Organizational Science*, 12(2), 198-213.

Byrne, J. V. (2000). Engagement: A Defining Characteristic of the University of Tomorrow. *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*, 6(1), 13-21.

Coursera: About (2019a). Retrieved from <https://about.coursera.org/>

Coursera: Understanding Violence (2019b). Retrieved from <https://www.coursera.org/learn/violence>

Coursera: Global Translator Community (2019c). Retrieved from <https://coursera.community/gtc-news-announcements-17/join-the-coursera-global-translator-community-45>

Coursera: Beta Tester Community (2019d). Retrieved from <https://coursera.community/beta-tester-news-announcements-20/join-the-coursera-beta-tester-community-47>

Coursera: Mentor Community (2019e). Retrieved from <https://www.coursera.org/learn/mentor-community/home/info>

DeWaard, I; Abaljian, S; Gallagher, M.S.; Hogue, R; Keskin, N; Apostolos, K.& Rodriquez, O.C. (2011). Using mLearning and MOOCs to understand chaos, emergence and complexity in education. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*, 12(7), 95-112.

FutureLearn delivers the largest MOOC ever as more than 440,000 learners convene for English language learning. (2018) Retrieved from <https://about.futurelearn.com/press-releases/futurelearn-delivers-the-largest-mooc-ever-as-nearly-400000-learners-convene-for-english-language-learning>

Grainger, B. (2013). *Massive open online course (MOOC) report 2013*. University of London, London, U.K.

Koller, D., Ng, A., Do, C., & Chen, Z. (2013). Retention and intention in massive open online courses. *EDUCAUSE Review*, May/June, 62–63.

Martin, F. G. (2012). Education: will massive open online courses change how we teach? *Communications of the ACM*, 55(8), 26-28.

Silcock, P. (2003). Accelerated learning: a revolution in teaching method? *Education 3–13*, 31(1), 48-52.

Appendix: Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) Awareness Survey

Please help us with our research by answering the questions below.

下記の質問に答えることで、アンケートを答えて私たちの研究にご協力ください。

Thank you.

1. Gender: Male Female Other
性別: 男性 女性 その他

2. Age: <30 31-40 41-50 51-60 60>
年齢: <30歳 31-40歳 41-50歳 51-60歳 60歳>

3. Country of Origin: Japan Other:
国籍: 日本 その他:

4. Employment Type: Full time Part time
雇用形態: 社員 パートタイム

5. Have you heard of MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses)?
あなたはMOOCについて存知ですか?

Yes (Go to question 6) No (Go to question 13)
はい (質問6へ) いいえ (質問13へ)

6. Which MOOC platforms are you aware of?

あなたが知っているMOOCサービス?

JMOOC	Coursera	EdX	ALISON
FutureLearn	DuoLingo	Udacity	Udemy
OPEN2STUDY	OpenupEd	University of the People	Other:

7. Have you ever taken a MOOC?

MOOCを利用したことがありますか?

Yes (Go to question 8)

No (Go to question 12)

はい (質問8へ)

いいえ (質問12へ)

8. How many MOOCs have you taken?

あなたが利用したMOOCの数はいくつですか?

1-5

6-10

11-15

16-20

20>

9. What motivated you to take a MOOC?

あなたがMOOCを利用した動機は何ですか?

To upgrade my skills

スキルアップのため

To update my knowledge

知識の向上のため

To broaden my knowledge

見聞を広げるため

General interest

興味から

As part of my professional development

私の専門分野の発展の一環として

Other:

その他:

10. Would you recommend a MOOC to your students?

あなたの学生にMOOCを勧めますか?

Yes ・ はい

No ・ いいえ

If yes, why? はいの場合、理由は?

If no, why not? いいえの場合、理由は?

11. Have you recommended a MOOC to your students?

Yes ・ はい

No ・ いいえ

If yes, why? はいの場合、理由は?

If no, why not? いいえの場合、理由は?

12. Are you interested in taking a MOOC or taking more MOOCs?

Yes ・ はい

No ・ いいえ

If yes, why? はいの場合、理由は?

If no, why not? いいえの場合、理由は?

13. Now that you have heard of MOOCs, do you think you will investigate a little more about them?

Yes ・ はい

No ・ いいえ

If yes, why? はいの場合、理由は?

If no, why not? いいえの場合、理由は?

Bio:

Anthony Sellick is an author and teacher based in the Faculty of Education and Teacher Training at Shumei University, Japan. He holds masters degrees in both Education and Psychology, and he has taught in primary, secondary and tertiary educational institutions in the U.K. and Japan. His research interests include the psychology of the language classroom.