

Analyzing the Current Online Open Courses in China: A Brief Overview and Discussion

Bo Bai^{1*}

¹ School of Arts, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, Guangzhou, China

Email Address

baibo_2004@126.com (Bo Bai)

*Correspondence: baibo_2004@126.com

Received: 8 June 2023; **Accepted:** 21 July 2023; **Published:** 5 September 2023

Abstract:

Through the status analysis, this paper indicates that the following problems exist in China's online open courses: online course participants lack scientific understanding of online courses, and students' motivation to learn is unclear; teacher-student interaction is poor, and the involvement of students is insufficient in the classroom; the capital investment in online open courses is relatively large, but the return on investment ratio is low; the overall quantity of courses set up is substantial, but the quality is unsatisfactory. In response to these problems, some suggestions are put forward for improvement.

Keywords:

Mooc, Status Analysis, Response Strategies

1. Introduction

Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) is known as “mu ke” in China. The MOOC was developed in an environment of rapid development of both computer and internet technology. 2012 is generally considered to be the first year of the MOOC, in which Stanford University launched a series of online education courses, thus starting the widespread emergence of MOOC. China is following the world trend of development, in 2013 Tsinghua University, Peking University, Fudan University, Shanghai Jiao Tong University and other universities also launched a series of open online courses, especially after the outbreak of epidemic MOOC is an alternative for many schools to choose as an online distance learning. During the epidemic, the number of courses offered nationwide reached 942,000 and the number of online learners reached 1.18 billion [1]. Many institutions have used online courses as an important supplement to offline teaching during this period, with some regions using online courses for the majority of their courses due to the epidemic, and many teachers choosing online courses as the main content of their lessons. However, although China's online courses have come a long way, there are still many problems with online courses in China.

2. Online Course Participants Lack a Scientific Understanding of Online Courses and Students' Motivation to Learn is Unclear

Participants in online courses mainly include the teachers who teach the lessons and the students who take them. Currently, the main participants in online courses in China are university students, and some high school students. According to research conducted by scholars, 66.67% of university students have participated in online courses, and 71.3% of the remaining 33.33% have heard of or understand online courses [2]. University teachers are also overwhelmingly involved in the construction of online courses. However, both teachers and students are mostly limited to one aspect of the policy framework for online courses. Students lack a clear understanding of how courses are evaluated and accredited for credit, and teachers lack a systematic understanding of the training and assessment incentive system.

In addition, the majority of students who participate in online courses attend to complete the tasks set by the lecturer or the school programme, with only a small number taking the course voluntarily to improve their academic performance. This makes online courses somewhat of a forced participation for students, as many students participate in online courses only to pass the course assessment and are not motivated to learn on their own. At the same time, some of the teachers who participate in online courses are involuntarily involved in the delivery of online courses in order to complete their teaching assignments and course recognition, especially during the severe epidemic when online courses have become the only option for teachers.

3. There is Little Teacher-Student Interaction and the Level of Student Participation in the Classroom is Limited

As online courses are recorded by teachers and participated by students online, the level of student participation in online courses is very different from offline courses and online live streaming. As they are recorded in advance, teachers are unable to anticipate students' questions and therefore generally deliver the class from their own perspective during the teaching process, while students are not able to participate in the delivery of the course when they participate in the online course, and therefore cannot participate in the interaction with the teacher. And without teacher-student interaction, the teacher's motivational and inspirational role for students may be weakened or even disappear.

In the general classroom there are more opportunities for students to work in teams through various activities that develop a sense of teamwork and interpersonal communication skills, which is more difficult to achieve in the online open classroom. In the traditional classroom, students' critical thinking can be developed and stimulated through teacher-inspired questions and student-teacher discussions, which are the precursors to major discoveries in science and technology.

4. The Capital Investment In Online Open Courses Is Relatively High, With a Low Return on Investment Ratio

At present, the main body of investment in online courses is still higher education institutions, that is, the state financial input is still the main. Online open courses have a large capital investment and high course fees, with some courses costing millions of yuan, which is a heavy burden for higher education institutions. As there are generally

more than a few dozen open online courses offered by higher education institutions, this is a considerable amount of money.

Online open courses are mainly free to the public, the number of paid courses is relatively small, mainly concentrated in a few famous universities or famous professors in the field, while most of the courses are free to the public, which leads to online open courses with almost no return on invested funds and a low overall return on investment ratio. The low return on investment ratio not only limits the further investment of higher education funds, but also affects the investment of social funds. As we all know, social capital needs returns and profits, and a low return on investment, or even completely free investment, makes it almost impossible to attract social capital to invest in online open courses, which further affects the development of online open courses.

5. The Overall Number of Courses Is Large, But The Quality Is Poor

In 2003, the Ministry of Education launched the “National High-Quality Courses” project to promote the application of modern information technology in teaching and learning, casting the first batch of first-class exemplary courses. 2012 saw the launch of the “High-Quality Video Open Classes” project, which focused on popularising cultural quality and shaping a number of famous teaching speakers, fully demonstrating the elegance of lectures in universities. In 2013, the Ministry of Education launched the construction of “National Excellent Resources Sharing Course”, which focused on promoting the transformation and upgrading of the previous National Excellent Courses, improving their functions and providing a better teaching experience. The complete online teaching model supports the construction of online open courses in higher education institutions and enables personalised learning for students and social learners. Moreover, various higher education institutions have also carried out the construction of internet online courses one after another, and the number of internet online courses in China has now reached a considerable scale.

Although the number of online courses in China has made great progress, but the overall quality is poor. The content of some online courses is outdated, or the courses are rarely or hardly updated due to the change of instructors, financial problems and so on. Due to the current era of knowledge explosion and rapid change of information, many new concepts and terms have emerged in large numbers, and new technologies have also prompted significant changes in the way human society thinks, which requires online open courses to keep up with the times and the pace of technological development, then they must make timely adjustments according to the development of society and technological changes, while many online open courses have failed to do this, and the overall quality still needs to improvement.

The development of online open courses has been instrumental in promoting course development, with more flexible course development subjects, while helping to improve instructors' professional knowledge and skills, and enhancing students' independent learning abilities. So for the problems of online open courses in China, the following response strategies are proposed.

Firstly, policies should be implemented to the ground. The Ministry of Education and higher education institutions have formulated corresponding policies and regulations to promote the development of online courses. In addition to the documents of the Ministry of Education, there are also the documents and regulations of various provinces, cities and higher education institutions, such as the “Implementation Plan for Online Open Course Construction in Jiangsu Province in the 13th Five-Year Plan”, “Some Opinions of Tsinghua University on Strengthening

Online Education” and “Implementation Measures for Online Open Course Construction in Nanjing University of Finance and Economics”. Although there are numerous policies and regulations in the documents, many of them cannot be implemented in the process of implementation. The most important one is the management of online open courses, and an effective solution is to set up a special online open course management department in the academic affairs office and encourage schools with conditions to set up an online education office to regulate the construction work of online open courses as well as to establish various management regulations. This is also in line with the 2015 document “treating online open courses as an important supplement to classroom teaching, and establishing management, incentive and evaluation mechanisms for teaching and learning in online open courses according to the reality of our university”. Among the practices already in place, Tsinghua University has set up a special office for online education. This office, headed by the president and vice-president in charge of the university, is responsible for the selection and quality assurance of online education courses, and the university's teaching committee has achieved good results. Up to 2017, in accordance with the principle of “university support, faculty responsibility, teacher input and student participation”, a total of 121 pilot courses of blended teaching based on MOOC have been conducted, and 26,000 students have been awarded credits. [3]

Secondly, the curriculum and management model should be optimised. Online courses require a more logical and scientific approach, as well as more flexibility, because they do not allow teachers to track students' learning in time. In order to establish a link between different courses, a teaching chain of "teaching-learning-testing-feedback-improvement" should be formed, i.e. teachers should set the hours and content of each course according to a certain teaching logic and training objectives. After the teaching of a course, students' learning should be tested with exercises and the next lesson should be revised in time to ensure the effectiveness of teaching. This model can be modelled on the UK Open University's course programme, where the basic outline of each course, the reference study time, the level of the study start requirement course, and the reference resources are displayed on the school's webpage; and the corresponding learning activities, exercises and discussions are designed in the learning resources. [4] Students can choose their own way of testing to meet the requirements of the rationality of the curriculum. The management of the courses is based on the online open platform, and the academic affairs office undertakes the corresponding management of the operation of the platform. The university should improve the course management model, review the validity of courses; publish online courses available for students on the course selection platform; supervise teachers to regularly improve course information, update teaching resources and organise student discussions and feedback; assess students' learning performance and organise online student assessment; and make all aspects of the online open courses operate in an orderly manner. [5]

Finally, the funding sources of online open courses should be reformed, and changes should be made to the sources of funds invested in online open courses to raise funds in various aspects. The existing funds invested in online open courses mainly come from the state and higher education institutions, while social funds are rarely invested in online open courses due to the low return rate, which affects the development of online open courses. It is suggested that on the basis of adhering to the public interest nature of online open courses, fee-based courses should be increased appropriately, but the number should not be too many and the price should

not be too high. In addition, cooperation with network operating agencies can be strengthened. By cooperating with network operating institutions to set up internet online open course platform websites, make use of the abundant market and operating experience of network operating institutions, and adopt various ways to raise funds, such as placing advertisements on the online open course website platform. This will attract social funds to access the development of online open courses and promote the further growth of online open courses.

6. Conclusions

Although online open courses have been developed in China for a relatively short period of time, they have adapted to the fast-paced and fragmented characteristics of today's society and provided a practical learning path for cultivating lifelong and independent learning practices. Although there are many problems in the development of online open courses in China, the overall development trend of online open courses will continue unchanged, which requires the adoption of targeted measures for the current problems to provide a strong support for the progress of online open courses in China.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

Funding

This paper is a stage output of the “Development and Application of Online Open Course Resource Library Platform for Design in the Context of Informatization”, Project No. 220500700185105, an industry-university cooperation collaborative education project of the Ministry of Education in 2022.

References

- [1] Jun, Q.; Yun, X. Research on the Status of Online Open Courses on Translation in China and Countermeasures - Reflections on Online Teaching During the Epidemic. *Translation Teaching*, 2020, 4(4), 67.
- [2] Yu, X. Investigation and Research on the Policy Effectiveness of Online Open Course Construction in Universities. Master's thesis, Southwest University, 2018.
- [3] Thunews. Available online: http://news.tsinghua.edu.cn/publish/thunews/9650/2017/20170228144404258458015/20170228144404258458015_.html (accessed on 1 August 2023).
- [4] Luo, L.X.; Xin, D. A Review of the Open Learning Project of the Open University in the United Kingdom. *Open Education Research*, 2007, 4, 109-112.
- [5] Yu, X. Research on the policy effectiveness of online open course construction in universities. Master's thesis, Southwest University, 2018.



© 2023 by the author(s); licensee International Technology and Science Publications (ITS), this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)