A Study on the Current Development Status and Problems of MOOCs in China

Yin, Yaoqian

Betreuer: Herr Dr. Holger Rohland
Hochschullehrer: Prof. Dr. rer. nat. habil.
Gerhard Weber
AG Didaktik der Informatik/Lehrerbildung
Institut für Software- und Multimediatechnik
Fakultät Informatik

DIL

Technische Universität Dresden

Fakultät Informatik

Task for the master thesis

Name, Vorname des Studenten: Yin, Yaoqian

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Objective:

The aim of this thesis is a systematic study of the current development status and problems of MOOCs in China. In this paper, it is intended to analyze the present status of the development of MOOCs and its problems at the moment. After analyzing the current state, strategies will be proposed for dealing with the given problems of implementing MOOCs in China.

The first part of this paper will analyze the factors that affect the rapid development of MOOCs worldwide. The following four factors will be investigated about the Chinese MOOCs:

-       The scale of development of these MOOCs

-       The Participants of these MOOCs

-       The platform establishment behind the MOOCs

-       The social recognition of these MOOCs

In the second part of this paper the Chinese MOOC System "MOOC.CN" will be examined concerning the following three aspects: development, management and evaluation.

The third and the forth part of this paper will focus on the analysis of the problems and the corresponding strategies to deal with them. As a conclusion of this paper, there will be given some suggestions on how to develop Chinese MOOCs in the future.

Betreuer: Dr. rer. nat. Holger Rohland
Betreuender Hochschullehrer: Prof. Dr. rer. nat. habil. Gerhard Weber
Institut: Software- und Multimediatechnik
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1 Introduction

1.1 Motivation of the Study

The term Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) was first introduced in 2008 by Dave Cormier for a course called "Connectivism and Connective Knowledge" [1]. In 2012, two Stanford professors, Sebastian Thrun and Peter Norvig, decided to offer "Introduction to Artificial Intelligence" for free online, attracting more than 160,000 learners from more than 190 countries [2]. Inspired by this, professor Sebastian Thrun launched the MOOC platform Udacity. Stanford professors Daphne Koller and Andrew Ng co-founded Coursera, designed to work with the world's top universities to provide free university network courses. In the same year, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and Harvard University co-founded the non-profit platform Edx. In March 2012, Coursera announced that its five courses can be recognized by universities, which marked the official entry of MOOCs in the field of higher education.

Chinese MOOCs have been mainly developed by some well-known Chinese universities. In July 2013, Fudan University and Coursera signed a cooperation agreement, and at the end of 2013 Fudan University join the MOOCs plan of Universitas 21 Union. In October 2013, Tsinghua University built the world's first Chinese MOOC platform — "XuetangX" (www.xuetangx.com). Based on study and innovation, Chinese MOOCs began to fall into place and grow continually.

Under the influence of MOOCs, the process of education informatization in China has accelerated, and online education has become a new way for people to acquire knowledge and learning. MOOCs are a concept introduced from foreign countries, and research on MOOCs is very rich in foreign countries. This has great significance for the construction of MOOCs and the development of higher education in China. As China's higher education is facing a different political, economic and cultural environment than other counties, the construction of Chinese MOOCs platforms must fulfill its own characteristics [3]. China needs to draw on the experience of other countries and use this as a basis for strengthening the construction of their own MOOCs platforms. Combining such experience with the status of the development of China's MOOCs in terms of realistic development of China's higher education is the correct response to facing the challenges in China's MOOCs development. Taking full advantage of the opportunities offered by MOOCs to achieve sustainable development of MOOCs will promote better development of China's higher education. Considering the increasing advances in Internet technology, the popularity of mobile Internet terminals, and the rapid development of online higher education, the issue to be resolved in China now is how to combine this situation with China's national conditions and the actual development of higher education in order to speed up the development of China's MOOCs, improve its international competitiveness and attractiveness, and thus become invulnerable in the face of education informatization.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to study the development of MOOCs in China based on the learner's perspective in order to determine the development status of MOOCs in China, identify the advantages and disadvantages of this development, and then make advanced reasonable proposals, respectively promote effective development of countermeasures. During the course of her studies, the author used MOOCs many times and had positive experiences with this, which is the reason for the choice of this topic. A case study and questionnaires from the perspective of learners will be used to summarize the current development status of MOOCs in China. In the face of high-quality global education

resources, the hope is that local universities in China can make good use of Chinese MOOCs to improve the quality of teaching in China. MOOCs in China have just started and everything is still being explored. If MOOCs develop well, they will be able to promote education in China, and will be of critical importance regarding the spreading of traditional Chinese culture and the improvement of national soft power, so as to allow international academic exchange.

1.3 Structure of the Study

This study is organized into six chapters.

Chapter 1 introduces an overview of this study. First, it presents the motivation of this study. Then it describes the purpose of the study, i.e., the reasons why the author chose this topic. Finally, it summarizes the structure of this paper.

Chapter 2 describes basic information about the current status of MOOCs research worldwide. First, the development history of massive open online courses will be presented, followed by the introduction of the two kinds of MOOCs: cMOOCs and xMOOCs. In the third part, the origins of MOOCs platforms will be described.

Chapter 3 introduces the history of MOOCs in China and its milestones. First, an overview of the development history of MOOCs will be provided, and then the key events of MOOCs development in China will be explored.

Chapter 4 presents five interviews as well as a survey performed with Chinese MOOCs learners. The questionnaire used for the survey elicited the learners' personal basic situation, career information, their motivation for participating in a course, their favorite MOOCs platform, etc. The survey and the interview data will also be analyzed in this chapter based on the learners' perspective.

In Chapter 5, the problems faced by Chinese MOOCs will be analyzed. In combination with the development status of Chinese MOOCs, appropriate measures for solving these problems will be suggested.

Chapter 6 provides a summary of the whole study, reflecting the lack of research and proposing ideas for improvement as well as future prospects.

6 Conclusion and Outlook

6.1 Conclusion of the Research

Based on the research status of MOOCs in China and abroad, the author summarized the development of MOOCs in China, presented the milestones, introduced the Chinese MOOCs platforms as well as some typical Chinese MOOCs, and summarized the development status of MOOCs in China. The author participated in two courses: "Historical Records" on Coursera and "Flipped Classroom Teaching Method" on China University MOOC, and completed both courses. These two courses were used for a case study. After the study, the author interviewed five learners who are taking courses on Coursera, XuetangX, and China University MOOC. On this basis, the development status of Chinese MOOCs was summed up. At present, the development of Chinese MOOCs does not look very optimistic. It is still in an early development stage. In order to develop Chinese MOOCs faster and better, there are many traditional concepts that need to be changed, and it will take a long time to develop into a mature stage. How to implement student orientation and how to motivate teachers to invest more into MOOCs teaching are difficult problems to overcome. First of all, the teachers should change their teaching concept. In the past, all teachers did was to teach, but now they need to answer the questions of students and other learners from outside the school. The teacher should play a guiding role in education, to guide learners in self-study and inquiry-based learning. Second, the concept of learners also needs to change from the previous style of being accustomed to listening to the teacher and being under the supervision of the teacher, to the current active learning without teacher supervision. The development of Chinese MOOCs should promote the transformation of teacher education and teaching ideas, lead the reform of teaching content and teaching methods, and realize the co-construction and sharing of high-quality curriculum resources through modern information technology. These are the problems encountered in the development of Chinese MOOCs and the changes that teachers and learners need to make, which also represent a challenge for them [29].

MOOCs are a new thing. They are the latest achievement in the effective use of advanced information technology and educational technology. They enable high-quality educational resources to be opened to the whole society at low cost [30] . In recent years, MOOCs development has taken off in China, and MOOCs have become popular among Chinese and foreign learners. In order to develop Chinese MOOCs faster and better, it is essential to build Chinese MOOCs platforms. The construction of Chinese MOOCs platforms and open Chinese MOOCs will help China's culture to spread all over the world, which can not only enhance its soft power, but also promote understanding and communication between different cultures and enhance the influence of the Chinese culture in the world as well as China's overall strength.

6.2 Threats to Validity and Future Research

6.2.1 Threats to validity

During the writing of this thesis, the author read a lot of literature and relevant MOOCs reports to consolidate the relevant knowledge, but because of the limited knowledge, the author believes that this thesis is subject to the following threats to validity:

1. The description of the present situation of MOOCs was divided into four aspects, namely, the status of the platform, the status of the course, the status of learners, the status quo of learning support. However, the depth of elaboration is not enough for each aspect. Each

of them needs to be further investigated and a detailed study analysis of the interviews and questionnaires should be performed.

2. In the implementation and design of the interview method, the number of interviewees was only five. This number is rather low and needs to be increased to improve the validity of the results. As for the questionnaire, 1472 valid questionnaires were received. Compared to the population of China, this number is also very small, and should be increased in order to further validate the results.

6.2.2 Future research on Chinese MOOCs

MOOCs are a new thing that combines information technology and the innovation of educational concepts, thereby providing a new way of learning. The development of Chinese MOOCs has brought about a profound change in traditional teaching and learning, and is bringing great opportunities and challenges for the reform of higher education in China. It can deepen the reform of traditional university education, promote the sharing of quality education, and improve the quality of higher education. In future education and teaching, MOOCs could also be a good alternative for learners who are in no condition to return to the classroom, but still want to learn more knowledge [31].

The author firmly believes that the Chinese MOOCs will have a bright future in China, but to make this a reality, the efforts of the Chinese government, society, and colleges and universities are required. MOOCs can help to overcome the educational imbalances between regions and schools by sharing resources on curriculum platforms, to improve the general teaching quality of universities in China at all levels, and can serve the lifelong education and learning society through Chinese MOOCs platforms. With the growing scale of MOOCs in colleges and universities, quality education resources have been expanding. Chinese universities should keep up with the development trend of higher education in the world. Future work should include an in-depth study of Chinese MOOCs, exploration of Chinese MOOCs, and gradual establishment of Chinese MOOCs platforms offering Chinese MOOCs with Chinese characteristics. On this basis, traditional teaching can be improved with the help of Chinese MOOCs.

Despite the evolution of MOOCs in China and abroad in recent years, MOOCs at this stage are still unable to replace traditional education. Looking at the last two years of Chinese MOOCs development, it can be seen that it is gradually being integrated with the current school education in order to achieve mixed learning through the tight integration of traditional face-to-face teaching and MOOCs online learning [32].

In short, the future prospects for Chinese MOOCs are very good. MOOCs can not only speed up the reform of traditional university education and improve its quality, but can also promote the sharing of quality education resources in China and make education fairer for all. In addition, the good development of Chinese MOOCs has great significance in terms of promoting China's cultural soft power.

Glossary

CNY Chinese Yuan

BBS Bulletin Board System

MOOC Massive Open Online Course

MOOCs Massive Open Online Courses

PLENK Personal Learning Environments and Knowledge Networks

LINK Learner, International, Network, Knowledge

SMS Short Message Service

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