



# THE UNIVERSITY IS DEAD, LONG LIVE THE UNIVERSITY?

THIRD INDIGO ARENA

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Is the MOOC a simple tool to help education or can it revolutionize the classroom organization? How can we quantify their effectiveness and what would be the objectives of a massive deployment of public MOOCs? What would be the economic model for the French MOOCs against the English-speaking world competition?

## THE MOOC IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) is a phenomenon that has been growing in the recent years but in which France has been sluggish in its development. The progressive generalization of MOOC in France and all around the world raises the question of the impact that this new way of learning will have over time.

In higher education, some lectures in which student interaction is limited, have been replaced by the SPOC (Small Private Online Courses) registered in advance by a professor and only accessible by his students. Some higher education institutions are considering re-using MOOCs (recorded and available to a wider audience) to replace some lectures given by their teachers. This immediately raises two major problems. First, we need to consider the potential impact on the relationship that exists between students and a professor. The professor in question could be stripped of his legitimacy or rather his role of knowledge holder. Furthermore, this could be a long term threat to employment in higher educational institutions who receive fewer state subsidies. Universities and colleges could be tempted to replace teachers with MOOC courses to reduce their costs.

Nevertheless, it is possible to avoid these pitfalls and to make the most of technology, adapting it to education. In higher education, it will be possible to convert the time that is used for lectures to a time for practical work, tutorials, etc. For some teachers these lectures are a waste of time since, no matter what the subject is, lectures consist of stating theoretical concepts that have been defined in many publications. The lecture, sometimes boring, often noisy, would then be replaced by a video and a high quality interface that would allow students to pause the video and search for terms and concepts that need to be clarified. The quality of the content will be partially controlled by the users' criticism, who are less inhibited online, due to indirect interaction, than if they to confront a teacher face to face.

This will also allow students to search for different MOOCs treating the same subject in order to have a variety of methods, perspectives, points of view and thought processes. In this regard, it would make sense that the MOOC would also become an open social network where everyone would be able to help each other, express their opinions, challenge the teachers, seek help, bring details to the content, etc... Similarly, the advent of MOOCs will also be an opportunity to create a plurality of knowledge, with, for the same module, an access to several different approaches and MOOCs taught by different teachers.

## MOOCs THAT BECOME SCHOOL?

In primary and secondary education, certain MOOCs, most importantly those of the Khan Academy, have led to classroom revolutions. The Khan Academy MOOCs are real tools for the classroom as well as for the teacher. It primarily introduces a new way of explaining with a playful interface and tracks the students' results. The teacher is at the heart of the device, informs his students about what videos to watch at home or on the school computers and how they can practice online. Class time is then used to do exercises, and carry out personalized tutoring for the students. The teacher is no longer put in the position of choosing between abandoning students in difficulty or helping the most advanced students. The ones with facilities can progress at their own pace and ask questions about what triggers their curiosity while the teacher can spend more time tutoring struggling students to help them understand and master the concepts.

We are moving from an educational system of constant advancement to an education of mastery without penalizing the students who do best. Students can also help and correct each other and studies have proved that students learn by correcting their comrades. It is important to note that the use of MOOCs in SEGPA classes (social integration classes composed of students with serious and lasting difficulties) is believed to have a promising future in France, based on the positive results observed from past experiences. For the students often excluded and denigrated, the possibility of being able to evaluate and discuss in class is rewarding and allows them to make great progress. The possibility for the teacher to give them a more personalized use of time is also an important asset.

If a dominant position is always given to the teacher, the Khan Academy takes the role of parents to heart. Experience shows that parental involvement is a key factor in the children's academic success. The Khan Academy allows parents to track their children's progress and their level of investment. This can be crucial when some parents do not have time to go to the institution to discuss their children's difficulties with the teachers or do not feel comfortable in a school environment because themselves have met many difficulties. Here again it will take some time for the teacher to explain to parents the functioning of the Khan Academy tool. The instructor has therefore a central position in the students' education.

## POSITIVE EXTERNALITIES OF MOOC

It would have been possible to believe that, with the MOOC system, we find ourselves at the end of education as a means of socialization but it is in no way the case, since the time used in the classroom is dedicated to questions, debate and group work, regardless of the school grade. Khan Academy studies in Cameroon show that the use of the program in institutions allows to find time for debate and helps develop the students' level of sociability, creativity and critical thinking.

In this regard, it could be possible to use the platform's collected data to help personal development professionals and develop ways of enhancing the learning process. If the samples are large and consistent enough, it will be possible to detect how a particular individual learns and understands best (visual, audio, with exercises, etc...), what kind of intelligence is predominant, what are his best assets and most problematic difficulties. This data will be extremely valuable for personal use but it will need to stay out of the reach of companies and private organizations (to end targeted advertising, recruitment, salary re-evaluation of promotion). Even if he could bring some objectivity, particularly in terms of human resources management, this raises obvious ethical problems and the results of these data will never be completely reliable.

## ABOUT THE REASONED USE OF MOOCs

For the MOOCs to be effective and to give the user an added value thanks to their use, they have to be used nevertheless as a tool for improvement in the classroom. Experiences conducted in courses made exclusively of MOOCs reveal that a minority composed of the best students are doing well whereas the others fail to keep up easily. Those courses are most of the time about higher education and the students difficulties can be explained quite simply when we understand that some subjects can't be introduced only as MOOCs (negotiation, defense speech for example) and need to be completed by practical work or tutorial classes. The use of MOOCs will be relevant and revolutionary only if it gives time to focus on those modules which will allow every students to grasp the practical aspect of the teaching. This extra time will also be a time which could be used to adopt new means of assessment. The assessment of the students would be more specific, less focused on the grades and will be part of the aim of the formation (to see if the student manages to use what he learned, if he's able to be critic about it, to qualify his opinion and not only able to repeat the content of a course or to tell what's true and what's false). But to reach this goal, the teacher has to get involved because the preparation of such a support of teaching takes more time and energy than the repetition of the same lecture over the years as some do.

## STATE MOOCs?

The question of the widespread use of MOOCs starting from the top has to be asked. In France since July 2013, a platform of share and creation of MOOCs of higher education in French was created by the ministry of Education, Higher Education and Research. France Université Numérique (FUN) has now 16 600 users and 300 000 people inscribed to the 36 MOOCs it offers. The creation of this platform woke up the domain of education and research in France and brought the digital technology in the academic debate. On the level of higher education, MOOCs are nowadays a source of voluntarism and enthusiasm even if a wide spread use of MOOCs isn't planned. In the primary and secondary education the ministry is concerned about the reactions of the teachers but some of them, on a voluntary basis and working hand in hand with the rest of the staff of their schools, are leading tests and using the MOOCs of the Khan Academy with positive results.

Some are in favor of non-interventionism and of construction from the bottom so that the teachers who want to use MOOCs will be encouraged to do so but nobody will be compelled to use those new tools. Like every other technology, it will be first exploited by the most advanced people before being generalize naturally. This position seems reasonable but sets out a certain number of inconvenient. First, the quality of the MOOCs that will be advised to the students by the teachers is questionable. Some suppliers like the Khan Academy have their contents checked by an authentication comity, but some MOOCs are offered online autonomously with the problems it might cause. The state would benefit from offering its own MOOCs for which it will control (or even create) the content like the scholar programs and the textbooks.

Some might say that the quality will be defined by the critics of the users and by the number of views but it's best to keep in mind that the most popular videos on YouTube are not always the best in terms of quality (conspiracy videos, buzzing videos, Nabilla etc...). If the state doesn't offer its own content, it should at least create control mechanisms that will permit to legitimate or to give its approval to some MOOCs and to set aside some others with a poor scientific content. But this solution raise a new problematic linked to the legitimization of a MOOC and the rejection of another. It won't be a problem for the hard sciences whereas the social sciences are made of a multitude of approaches, theories and interpretations. How can the state choose what will be taught and what won't be without becoming a censor authority? The state would fall in a paradoxical situation, being responsible of the quality of the content while having to offer a vast number of approaches, contents and means to carry out the full extent of the potential of MOOCs. This may be the biggest challenge the state will have to take up on the subject.

In the same way, the state will have to reflect on employment and the teachers' salaries. The temptation will be great to replace a certain number of courses by MOOCs as well as a certain number of teachers by the digital tools to reduce the costs. But as we have noticed before, MOOCs don't fulfill their goals without the complement of the education provided by the teacher. The salary of the ones who are going to produce and register the MOOCs needs to be taken into account. When will they get paid? For every new view or at the moment of the registration? And what about intellectual property? If the remuneration is based on the number of views, it will become a problem if some contents are preferred to others because they're more accessible and not for their content. Some subjects need to be produced even if the users are not as fond of them as others and, if the remuneration is based on the number of views, the market principles of those who would want to make a living thanks to the production of MOOCs will compel the state to protect the minority academic trends in the era of MOOCs.

The state is also one of the only organisms able to centralize and deal with the data relating to the use of MOOCs to develop the domain of cognitive sciences and the capacity of learning of the future students. Nevertheless, about the collection of data, the fact that the state is taking care of it doesn't suppress the ethical questions. In fact, many informations can be gathered about the personality and the psychology of individuals by analyzing the time they spend using MOOCs, the time they take to think, the movement of the mouse...

## THE SPREADING OF THE FRENCH-SPEAKING MOOC OR THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF THE FRENCH MOOC?

The State is the only institution in France that have the necessary strike force to expand the use of MOOCs on a large scale. The other actors of MOOC creation are medium companies, which are doing well for now but won't be competitive enough against institutions or companies with bigger means. For example, Harvard budget is 2,4 billion and the capital invested is 30 billion. If the staff of Harvard team up with other American universities, they have the opportunity to flood the world market with English-speaking MOOCs and translated ones.

The MOOC will be in the future an exceptional tool of Soft Power and influence. Other countries have already a strategy of MOOC creation. If France doesn't start soon and with important means, it will be outmatched and lose the chance to use this strategic and geopolitics tool. In the meantime, the spreading of French and French-speaking MOOCs worldwide should be anticipated beforehand. As a mean of knowledge, its spreading has to be careful thought, especially the content in the domain of social sciences and the various number of theories in this field of research. There is a risk for the MOOCs to miss their goal if the attitude of their designers is paternalistic or neo-colonialist towards those who are going to use the products. It is an evidence that a special attention will be given to some subjects, especially history. All in all, a French MOOC won't be enough and various MOOCs for a large number of subjects seems to be the best prospect. An interesting direction to follow for the development of MOOCs would be a collaboration between teachers from different French-speaking countries to create a common basis. France would have the opportunity to become a major influence in the French-speaking world as a leader in this field of initiatives and to guarantee the diversity of the approaches.

But it may be useful to be freed of the French-speaking logic. In the one hand, a tendency to anglicize the education can be observed while the influence and the prestige of the French-speaking domain needs to be preserved. On an international scale, English is winning over other languages so French-speaking MOOCs with subtitles in different languages may be created in the future. It is also possible to imagine creating MOOCs in many languages and to add French subtitles. In the end, the users will choose what kind of content they want to view, for the language won't be a problem as long as subtitles or translations are available. The quality of the content and of the interface will prevail over the language. The main challenge is to ensure the diversity of the contents despite the change of tendency.