FGD Analysis on Impact of SWAYAM MOOCs for Professional Development of Women Faculty of Institutes of Higher Education

Dr. BharatiGaniger

Assistant Professor

Department of Education

Karnataka State Akkamahadevi Women's University

Vijayapura

ABSTRACT

Background: MOOCs are online courses designed to give people access to high-quality training so they use information and communication technologies to maximize learning outcomes. **Purpose:** Through focus group a discussion, this article aims to quantify the effect of SWAYAM MOOCs on the professional growth of women faculty. **Methodology:** Explorative survey research has been employed in this study. The sample comprised of 40 women faculty from various higher education institutions of North Karnataka. FGD has been employed to collect the qualitative data from the sample. **Findings/Conclusions**: The findings demonstrated that SWAYAM MOOCs had special content and implementation techniques for faculty development program . They have agreed that the academic material covered in MOOCs helped to foster favorable attitude toward learning through online courses and was sufficient for comprehending the benefits of the SWAYAM MOOCs platform. The participants opined that how MOOCs gave them insights on aspects of evaluation and how each aspect had been thoughtfully incorporated into the program, to enhance professional activities. **Implications:** SWAYAM MOOCs helps empowering teachers in upskilling and reskilling and enhancing their career prospects. It also helped them in selecting and using various pedagogies to enhance their teaching practice and outcomes for their professional development.

Keywords: Focus group discussion, SWAYAM MOOCs, professional development, women faculty

Introduction

As the current piece of research is explorative and qualitative in nature. The process related to SWAYAM MOOCs as experienced by women faculty in institutes of higher education, this study is appraises the experiential learning with SWAYAM platform regarding to pursue their professional development endeavors. The women faculties have experienced various opportunities and challenges in undergoing various courses for their professional development in terms of organization of teaching-learning content, evaluation support services and other processes related to courses.

A major learning platform in the Indian educational system nowadays is e-learning. Even though there are many kinds of profit businesses that produce a lot of e-content, the government's effort to include massive open online courses (MOOCs) into normal courses has introduced new pedagogies into the educational system. Due to its unique blend of e-learning and remote learning features, MOOC is a unique and innovative procedure that combines regular, continuous instruction with learner engagement via a networked approach. MOOCs aim to provide access to top educational institutions, scholars, and a diverse range of courses throughout different locations, yet with a distinct ideology. Students get access to a wide range of learning possibilities through MOOCs. The process involves interactivity and blended mode of learning. Giving the access to education for all is another motive of the MOOCs.

This new indigenous e-learning platform for MOOC is called study webs of active learning for young aspiring minds (SWAYAM) by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD).The program's goal is to develop the greatest teaching-learning tools available to everyone. In the present condition SWAYAM MOOCs are in developing stage including different courses like school related, certificate courses, diploma, under-graduate and post-graduate courses. It has occupied different streams like engineering, law and other professional courses. The three guiding principles of education policy—access, equity, and quality—are what SWAYAM aims to accomplish. The courses offered on SWAYAM are: (1) video lectures; (2) readings that have been particularly prepared and can be printed or downloaded; (3) quizzes and tests for self-assessment; and (4) an online discussion.

A study on the benefits of MOOCs Interactions to get students involved in university course activities was done by Ostashewski et al. (2016). According to their findings, university students can benefit from individualized possibilities for active learning when they combine MOOCs with traditional classroom instruction. They also believed that online learning is helpful for learners to be more meaningful. The benefits of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) for improving students' English language communication abilities were covered by Hashim&Yunus (2018). Additionally, they thought that MOOCs could assist students in developing fresh and novel opportunities for independent knowledge exploration. Hashim et al. (2019) looked into how students felt about Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and how they were accepted as a teaching and learning tool in another paper. They have discovered that Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) can contribute to more meaningful learning for students, as the use of ICT encourages greater interaction and participation from them during class.

Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

The Focus group discussion brings together different individuals with similar experiences or backgrounds to discuss about a particular topic of interest. It is a type of qualitative study in which participants' views, attitudes, beliefs, opinions, and ideas are questioned. Unlike other research methodologies, focus groups allow participants to freely converse with one another, hence promoting conversations among participants. Typically, it entails conducting group interviews with a small group of eight to twelve persons. It is a loosely structured conversation about a variety of interesting topics that is facilitated by a moderator (interviewer).

FGD is a structured conversation with a pre-selected group of people to learn about their opinions and experiences on a given subject. Especially well-suited for gathering multiple viewpoints on the same subject. Helps in gaining insights into people's shared understanding of everyday life and the ways in which individuals are influenced by others in a group situation. The role of the moderator is very significant, as good levels of group leadership and interpersonal skill are required to moderate a group successfully.

Objectives

To study the impact of SWAYAM MOOCs on Higher Education with respect to Professional Development of Women Faculty of Higher Education Institutes through focus group discussion.

Research Question

To study on how SWAYAM MOOCS are facilitating Professional development of women Faculty of higher Education Institutions.

Methodology

Explorative survey type of research was used in this study. The sample compromised of 40 women faculty from various institutions of North Karnataka. Focus Group Discussions were held to collect qualitative data on various aspects of the SWAYAM MOOCs.

A discussion with all women faculty was held to collect opinions, advice, and suggestions on the following points –Organization of content of MOOCs, Teaching- learning of MOOCs, Content of MOOCs ,Evaluation of MOOCs and Support services of MOOCs for further improving the initiative of training, orientation, and capacity building of teachers through the SWAYAM MOOCs for strengthening technology enhanced learning in higher education.

Findings

The participants opined that the content was adequate for better understanding the utility of the SWAYAM MOOCs platform. Level of difficulty of the content is very important for a clear explanation of the MOOCs and its utility in the true sense; participants found that the content was as per the levels and standards of the participants and rightly addressed the needs of developing online courses. Learning through online courses the participants developed a favorable outlook towards the content covered in MOOCs. They felt that the language used in MOOCs was easy to understand which made the teaching- learning process effective. All the participants have opined that the content of the MOOCs should also be made in regional languages. Participants found the presentation of content of the MOOCs to be systematic and logical.

Overall organization of content is an important means of motivating the learners in online education. Attribute of the content and its language and presentation yield better results if the organization of content is effective and efficient. Through FGD it was found that the content was in order and its structure facilitated and promoted a better explanation of the concept in the MOOCs. They had positive perceptions about the e-text of MOOC and considered it a powerful means for developing learners' technical knowledge, thinking, and attitudes through effective teaching learning processes.

Evaluation is an important dimension of the whole teaching-learning process and one of the core components of instructional design. The participants said that the MOOCs taught them various components of evaluation and each of the components was rightly integrated in the MOOCs which provided them an opportunity to make use of the components effectively. Information was shared in a timely manner by the instructors and mentors in each component of the evaluation followed by constant guidance by mentors which helped them understand the concept of online evaluation in the MOOCs and taught them various concepts of online evaluation.

As SWAYAM MOOCs have the facility of alerting about the courses, weekly assignments through, email is the best practice, hence the learners will not fail to attempt them. They appreciated the guidance given by the instructors during the implementation and the use of examples and illustrations in the MOOCs for better understanding and skill development. The respondents felt that the MOOCs taught them how to give appropriate feedback to learners in each phase of the evaluation and were of the opinion that the technical aspects of evaluation were clearly explained in the MOOCs and were spoken by the instructors and mentors. They agreed that the material included in MOOCs prepared students to handle the challenges of higher education's online learning which self-motivated and developed an interest in realizing the relevance of MOOCs in the process of teaching and learning. The respondents said that exposure to this MOOC will certainly help them in developing their professional competencies in the creation and design of online courses.

Discussion

The purpose of these FDGs was collecting qualitative data so that a clear picture of how SWAYAM MOOCs affected higher education teacher's professional development. Important points of discussion were shared with the participants. The investigator acted as a facilitator for the conversation and interaction in each phase.

Participants opined they were under the learning curve since it's a new concept for them and it involved a lot of technical aspects and their application. The content of the MOOCs was adequate and need based. However, because of heavy dependence on theoretical aspects and lack of integration of activities, illustrations, and a practical approach, it was difficult to sustain the same level of motivation and encouragement.

The participants enjoyed the MOOCs as a new ways and means of learning using the four-quadrant approach were concerned. However, regarding skill development and its application were concerned they agreed that there was hardly any scope for this. They expected demonstrations, practice, and follow-up sessions with a provision for resolving their individual issues, difficulties, and queries to enable them to get

a start taking particular examples/illustrations from the areas of their specialization. Additionally there should also be a provision for assessment and follow-up of their work and provision of individual support to make them competent and confident.

Participants expressed clearly that it had unique content and implementation strategies for a faculty development programme (FDP) in higher education. Quality content had been incorporated in each module of the MOOCs to allow the participants to develop awareness and knowledge about the MOOCs, the SWAYAM platform and its guidelines which made MOOCs unique. They appreciated this platform for knowledge enhancement and skill development.

Few important suggestions received from the participants during discussions and interactions are:

Though the content was found to be satisfactory and convincing there should be a serious effort to further develop it with more activities, illustrations, and with practical components to facilitate skill development and an application of acquired skills. In such types of courses where skills and applications are important, there should be multiple means of assessment instead of having MCQs only. Practical assignments and activities for evaluation rather than weekly quizzes for better learning will broaden learners' minds and facilitate creativity. Both weekly quizzes and practical based assignments may be integrated to further facilitate this. Increasing the time limit (duration) of this course and ensuring availability of appropriate devices and network facilities including speed of connectivity are important in such training initiatives.

The MOOC may be offered multi-lingual to widen its scope and it should be contextualized incorporating components of hands-on experience. There should be more live sessions and open discussion sessions for clearing doubts and resolving queries to reduce dropouts and enable more learners to complete the course in time. As MOOCs is being implemented in different languages, it is advisable to make it multilingual for the interest of target groups. Perhaps more facilitators are needed to provide timely support to the participants during implementation. This is among the major issues (non availability of timely support) in implementation which is the cause of demotivation leading to drop outs. Integrate online group discussions with the course content; simplify the course design to facilitate learning of each component of the course. Incorporate practice as a means of developing technical skills and more such trainings following content based approach. Make provisions for the accessibility of technical facilities in the institutions of higher education; allocate budgets for teachers/academics with a flexible approach; such courses should be offered bilingually to widen reach. Real time discussions and interactions with co-learners and instructors may enhance motivation

Conclusion

From the FDGs it was found that during the course of implementation of the MOOCs, instructors and facilitators should spare considerable time to ensure that the learners' queries are addressed in a timely manner. Support, cooperation, and motivation to the learners should be provided with a strategic plan be the instructors so that a day there are one or two instructors active online all the time. Besides, qualitative assessment strategies should be incorporated to make the implementation more meaningful and productive in achieving the instructional objectives of MOOCs.

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