


# Decoding Digital Learning Outcomes Among Diverse Learners: A Study on the Effects of MOOCs

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## ABSTRACT

The democratization of online platforms through technological advancements has helped in the growth of new tools for digital learning. The global pandemic in 2019 accelerated the shift to a digital environment for organisations worldwide. With a shift to online learning, there has been a sudden spike in enrolments for massive open online courses. The present study addresses this gap in the literature by analysing the impact of MOOC courses on the achievement of program outcomes of a formal education program. The authors attempt to understand if digital learning outcomes vary among diverse learner groups, if the adaption of MOOC courses enhances the achievement of program outcomes among diverse learner groups. The data for this study were collected using purposive sampling from students pursuing a management course at a B-school in India. The results of the study indicate that diversity has no impact on the achievement of program outcomes.

## KEYWORDS

E-Learning, Learner Diversity, MOOC, Program Outcomes

## INTRODUCTION

When the pandemic hit countries across the globe in 2020, all forms of economic activity had come to a halt. School and college going children and young adults were the worst hit as educational institutes had suspended all forms of in-person learning. A study by KPMG states that around 250 million students in India were affected due to the closure at the onset of lockdown announced as a result of the global outbreak of Covid-19. Results of the emergency report of the School Children's Online and Offline Learning (SCHOOL) survey clearly point out the learning disparities that existed across the rural and urban hamlets of India. The results from a simple reading test of the SCHOOL Survey showed alarming results that nearly half of all children were unable to read more than a few words (Pari, 2021). Even though technology was seen as a key enabler to ensure continuity of learning among

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young learners, macro factors such as the digital divide has slowed down learning progress among learners across age groups. One of the ways in which educators have been actively trying to bridge the digital divide and the learning gap is by recommending learners to take up various Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). Though we have plenty of literature discussing the advantages and the benefits of Massive Open Online Courses and its effectiveness, the authors identified a significant literature gap in the role of Massive Open Online Courses in helping learners achieve the learning outcomes of a formal education program. As universities and educational institutions encourage and recommend young learners to adopt to Massive Open Online Courses, it becomes consequential for scholars to investigate if they are effective in helping achieve the program outcomes of their existing formal education programs. Through our study, the authors aim to understand how the achievement of Program Outcomes of an existing formal learning program varies among diverse learner groups and analyse if Massive Open Online Courses play a role in the achievement of Program Outcomes of the formal learning program.

## **AIMS OF THE STUDY**

The main objective of this paper is to understand how program outcomes vary among diverse learner groups & the moderating role of Massive Open Online Courses in helping achieve the program outcomes. The specific objectives of this study include:

- To understand the concept of Massive Open Online Courses & Program Outcomes.
- To examine how achievement of Program Outcomes of the formal learning program varies among diverse learners' groups.
- To analyse if Massive Open Online Courses play a role in the achievement of Program Outcomes of the formal learning program.
- To observe the moderating effect of Massive Open Online Courses in achieving Program Outcomes.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **Learner Diversity**

The propagation and promulgation of an inclusive education model across various countries has been driving greater attention to the concept of Learner Diversity in the past few decades. Global organisations and academia today recognise the fact that diverse identities and experiences of learners makes it imperative for educators to be sensitised and trained in order to meet the diverse learning requirements of learners (Jelas, 2010). Studies in the past have proven to us that paying attention to learning styles and learner diversity can improve student's academic achievement as well as their attitude towards the course, interest, and motivation (Nettles et. al., 1997).

In India, the cultural diversity within the country makes every learning community diverse within itself. This diversity is also attributed to the movement of learners within and to different parts of the country to meet their learning and career requirements. Data from the official census shows that diversity in the country greatly varies across several dimensions such as age, gender, disability, religion, ethnicity, native tongue, caste, and domicile state to name a few. The highly stratified nature of the Indian society in terms of caste, income, geographical location can play the role of important determinants of the learner's awareness, learner's access to any kind of E-Learning facilities.

Studies in the past have given scholars an insight into the affective outcomes of having a diverse learning community. However, through the current study, the authors attempt to investigate if the achievement of learning outcomes are affected by the learner's diversity.

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