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IDCOURSERIANS, A MOOCS LEARNING COMMUNITY IN INDONESIA

Abstract:

The notion of massive open online courses (MOOCs) has attracted thousands life-long learners worldwide to enrol. Following this, some face-to-face learning communities have emerged in societies either through MOOC providers or organically founded. Example of the latter is IDCourserian based in Jakarta, Indonesia. Since a little is known on how a MOOC being studied in such community setting, this study aims to investigate what is actually happening in the IDCourserians, using collaborative learning as the theoretical framework. Adopting an intrinsic qualitative case study, this research employed interview, observations, and document review to gather data from six IDCourserian members, community meetups, and its Facebook group. For analysis, this study utilised thematic analysis approach. The findings show that the methods the IDCourserians members learn MOOCs together evolved as the community progressed, ranging from face-to-face to online and synchronous to asynchronous. However, only several from seven identified learning methods can be regarded as collaborative learning. Furthermore, the findings also remark that such online learning platforms still need face-to-face interactions and disregard the notion that education can be fully delivered through online technologies. Moreover, how the learning methods are in tension between two types of MOOC (c-MOOCs and x-MOOCs) will be discussed further.

Keywords:

MOOCs, learning community, collaborative learning, distance and blended education, lifelong learners

Introduction

The notion of massive open online courses (MOOCs), where anyone can access higher education from reputable universities in developed countries gratis (Pomerol et al. 2015), has attracted thousands life-long learners worldwide to enrol (Beigi et al. 2014; Jordan 2015). However, in the midst of its budding popularity, some problems surfaced such as high dropouts and low completion rates, the latter of which fell below 10% (Clow 2013). Following this, some face-to-face learning communities have emerged in societies either through MOOC providers or organically founded. For instance, Coursera partnering with some public libraries around the world establishes MOOCs learning hubs (Coursera 2013). Typically, the hub invites public to form a learning group studying a particular course and provide mentors to facilitate the process (Coursera 2014). Meanwhile, another example of the latter is IDCourserians, based in Jakarta, Indonesia (IDCourserians n.d.). It is an independent community in a sense that the members organise themselves to convene as well as to decide what and how courses will be studied. Founded in April 2013 by Indonesian Coursera takers, IDCourserians has regular face-to-face meetings that they call as meetups. Apart from it the community also utilise a Facebook group as the communication channel among its members, which at the time being consist of 202 people. It is noteworthy to mention that since most members are Coursera takers, the community set its focus to study Coursera. However, they are also open to other providers both from local and overseas.

Since a little is known on how a MOOC being studied in such community setting, this study aims to investigate and to make sense what is actually happening in the IDCourserians. Accordingly the research questions is, "*How do the IDCourserians members learn MOOCs together within their community?*" Meanwhile, for theoretical framework, this study uses the theory of collaborative learning (Dillenbourg 1999).

C-MOOCs and X-MOOCs

Based on their underlying pedagogical principles, MOOCs can be classified in two categories: c-MOOCs and x-MOOCs. The former stands for connectivist MOOC which is named after connectivism, a learning theory that conceptualises learning as a process occurring in network of learners and learning objects (Siemens 2013). Some also refer the c as constructivist, in which the learners with peers and instructors construct the learning materials (Toven-Lindsey et al. 2015). C-MOOCs are mostly associated with their founding institutions such as Athabasca and Manitoba Universities in Canada. There are four typical key activities within c-MOOCs: (1) aggregation, curating learning resources and spreading out to participants; (2) remixing, making and documenting connections through blogging, tweeting, or social bookmarking; (3) repurposing, the process in which learners create their own connections; and (4) feeding forward, sharing new connections with others (Yeager et al. 2013). Thus, students in c-MOOCs are encouraged to create their own learning environments instead of relying on facilitators.

On the other hand, x-MOOCs in a nutshell are the online version of traditional courses as in universities (Toven-Lindsey et al. 2015). The learning materials such as video lectures, self-grading quizzes, and assignments are predetermined by the instructors and are informed to the participants in advance through course syllabus. Learners' role are more or less as the receiver only though they are encouraged to contribute in discussion forums (Ebben & Murphy 2014). Usually, participants in x-MOOCs would start a course by watching video lectures then continue to read assigned materials and complete all quizzes as well as assignments. In addition, they are also encouraged to ask, answer, or raise related issues in discussion forum. Should participants go through those steps and pass the minimum score, they will be given a certificate. By these, x-MOOCs adopt cognitivist-behaviourist approach (Conole 2013). X-MOOCs are mostly associated with providers such as Coursera, Ed-X, and Udacity which partnering with reputable universities in the world. These practices are criticised as if the academic institutions involved try to make the "junk education" as fast-food restaurants sell junk foods (Baggaley 2014).

Collaborative Learning

Collaborative learning refers to a situation in which two or more people, who are more or less at the same level, attempt to learn something together (Dillenbourg 1999). Something here can be interpreted as course materials or activities such as problem solving. The process will generate a shared understanding between learners involved (Roschelle & Teasley 1995). Though in daily practice sometimes the term is used interchangeably with 'cooperative', they are, in fact, two different concepts. Cooperative learning is assumed to be happening when small groups of students are given an instruction to work together to optimise their own and each other's learning (Johnson & Johnson 1999). In this regard, individual within the group does not necessarily have more or less the same ability or even do the same thing. They can split their work into several division of labour.

Collaborative learning can take form as study group, which is defined as "small group of learners (3-6) who formed informal groups that would meet to work on set problems related to course material" (Zevenbergen 2004, p.6). However, learner interactions within it will distinguish whether a study group is collaborative or not. Related to this, Dillenbourg (1999) explains three types of collaborative interaction: interactivity, synchronicity, and negotiability. Interactivity is determined by the extent to which these interaction influence the peers' thinking process. For example, should two people are asked to measure children's height, they will do it collaboratively if only prior to measuring, they discuss and decide what kind of measurement they will use. Synchronicity deals with whether persons who collaborate can communicate and give each other feedback within relatively short term period or not. The more synchronous interactions means the more collaboration that can happen. Finally, negotiability makes people argue, justify, negotiate, and attempt to convince each other because more or less they are in the same position rather than under one single authority.

Research Design

This research adopted an intrinsic qualitative case study, which emphasises multiple sources of information to investigate a complex real-life situation in a bounded system perceived as the case (Stake 1995). Three data gathering methods was utilised, i.e. (1) in-depth interview (Cohen et al. 2011), (2) direct and nonparticipant observations (Baker 2006), as well as (3) document review (Mason 2002). Meanwhile for analysing the data, this study employed a thematic analysis approach, which is defined as “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke 2006, p.79). In some literatures, it has different names such as constant-comparison technique (Leech & Onwuegbuzie 2007) and coding (Miles & Huberman 1994).

The study participants were recruited through purposive sampling strategy (Punch 2009). Thus, six IDCourserians members consist of four males and two females with various degrees of engagement were selected. Those are Desman and Steven (active), Deasi and Rosi (moderate), Syifa and Yosef (passive). Members are considered active should they almost attend all the IDCourserians face-to-face meetups and have high contribution toward the community development. On the contrary, members are considered passive if they just attend very view of them and recently have fewer contribution. While moderate members are those in between. It is noteworthy to mention that all participants are full time workers, none of them are students. Finally, it should be noted that the learning community’s and the participants’ names in this study are real. The IDCourserians and its members have already given their consents for their identities published in research reports including this paper.

Findings

The methods the IDCourserians members learn MOOCs together evolved as the community progressed. They can be subsumed into two overarching categories based on the nature of the method used: face-to-face and online learning. The former refers to any learning condition where the members convened at the same place and the same time or in the IDCourserians’ term, it is called a ‘meetup’, while the latter refers to the one took place on the Internet. All of which are summarised in the Table 1.

Table 1. The list of learning methods done by the IDCourserians members

Category(s)	Learning Method(s)
Face-to-face Learning	Course Sharing
	Seminar
	Semi Guided Discussion
	Specific Study Group
Online Learning	Specific Online Study Group
	Crowd Discussion
	Course Review

It is noteworthy to mention that prior to deciding what kind of methods to use in learning MOOCs together, some IDCourserians active members discussed them in community meetings. Usually the meetings were held right after a meetup was done. For instance, after semi guided discussion, some members would stay and talked about their plans for the next meetups. In some occasions, the members deliberately arranged the meeting in particular day.

“For example, we’d like to have a presentation format, we discussed it first. It was not determined by one person only. Usually after (a meetup) finished, new members will leave, we, the old one, remain there and discuss about this and that.” Deasi

Furthermore, since most of the IDCourserians active members were employees working at different locations, the meetings are sometimes conducted through the Internet. Desman explained, *“We usually discuss (future topics) through Facebook messenger. Only several of us. Should everybody okay, there we go!”*

Face-to-Face Learnings

There are four learning methods under this category: course sharing, seminar, semi guided discussion, and specific study group. These mostly in form of discussion. Steven explain the reason behind as follows,

“Doing an online course is like reading a book. We then need a medium for discussions. In learning, we cannot just listen and receive, take it for granted. We have to share, discuss, hone, and apply it. I think Coursera just limits itself toward essay or quizzes. There has not been really discussion yet. That is what missing from learning element which should have existed in the discussion forum ... We need to meet face to face, to share, and to discuss.”

The first learning method is course sharing. It refers to a meetup in which a member voluntarily presented the course they joined as well as facilitated the discussion process following the presentation. It did not require the audiences taking the same course. This format only happened three times taking place in two different institutions, which allowed the community to use their available resources such as screen and meeting places. As can be seen in Figure 1, the participants who did this were Steven delivering gamification and Syifa sharing personal financial planning course. Usually only 5-15 members attend this meetup. However, course sharing at the time being was not used any longer because there was a regulation change in the first institution, while in the second, the board limited the topic around entrepreneurship and business themes only. Since not everyone was interested in those topics, and not many were brave enough to share the courses they had undertaken, thereby the IDC decided to move to another learning method.

Figure 1: Some examples of course sharing method

Source: *The IDCourserians' Facebook group*

The next learning method is seminar, which shares characteristics with course sharing but has two distinctive features. First, the attendance was broader and most were considered as 'public' rather than members or even newcomers. Second, it was more about one direction sharing. The fact that it involved many audiences with various backgrounds constrained itself from affording two-ways discussion as it did in sharing method. Seminar format was done twice in the second aforementioned institution. Figure 2 shows how a member became a presenter facilitating the audiences to learn a financial course. Currently this method was not used any longer by the IDCourserians due to the same reason why the IDCourserians left course sharing method. Not all members were interested with the given topics.

Figure 2: An example of Seminar method

Source: *The IDCourserians' Facebook group*

Third, semi guided discussion encouraged attendances to share and to discuss their thoughts and experiences of joining Coursera course to each other. There would be one or two persons leading the process. Since each member had each own interest, the IDC tried to choose a topic as general as possible, for instance, online learning in Indonesia. By doing so, they hoped it would avoid silence. Semi guided discussion usually took place in cafés in central Jakarta to ease members in reaching the place as can be seen in Figure 3. Though it was still being used at the time being, several problems surfaced. First, sometimes the topic was too general which made the discussion less focus. Based on the direct observations conducted, the discussion went out of topic several times and then in the middle, it broke up to several sub forums. Second, only a few members (5-15) were able to join this meetup, which made the discussion a bit dull.

Figure 3: An example of semi guided discussion. (Left: a screenshot of the invitation)

Source: *The IDCourserians' Facebook group*

Finally, the fourth learning method in the face-to-face category is specific study groups. It usually began with a member posting an open invitation to study certain courses together in the community's Facebook group as can be seen in Figure 4. Should others studying the same courses replied and agreed the proposed time, they would arrange their own meetup.

"Usually in Facebook, we announce that currently we take this course then ask, "Anyone want to join?" If so, usually they make their own group discussions afterwards." Desman

Figure 4: Screen shot of an open invitation to form a specific study group



Source: *The IDCourserians' Facebook group*

Indeed the specific study group was not subject of the community meeting as regular meetups were. However, it is still counted as one learning method because the members did use the community channel, which was the Facebook group. However, a little was known on how many member were still doing this kind of study groups since the community did not control this type of interaction. One interviewed participant who did this was Rosi. He with other members learned an operation management courses in a coworking space in Jakarta. He told,

“When it comes to learning specific course, we usually make person-to-person appointments. We, I and several members, enrolled to an operation management course from Warton ... then we sat up meetings, where, in what day.”

Online Learning

There are three learning methods under this category: online specific study group, crowd discussion, and course review. The first method is considered synchronous learning since it requires the members involved communicating at the same time. On the contrary, the last two is regarded asynchronous because the members can access learning resources whenever they want and no need to be at the same time to interact to each other. The description of each methods is as follows.

First, online specific study group is actually the online version of face-to-face specific study group. It was inevitably done because of some barriers the group faced when conducting the offline version such as Jakarta's traffic jam. Forcing themselves to manage a meetup by waiting for the jam would be wasting time only that is why they decided to use online tools instead such as Google hangout to make video call. Besides, the fact that most of members were internet savvy become one of the main reasons that made this as a convenient way to discuss and learn MOOCs together.

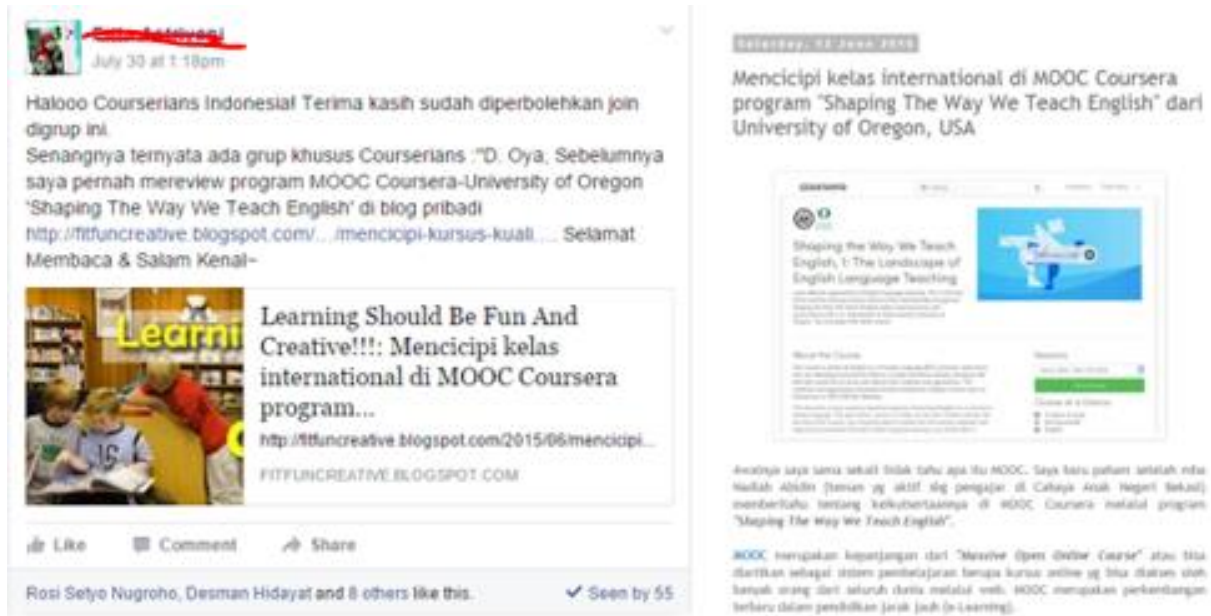
“Should we look the characteristics of Coursera users here, most of them are internet savvy. They do not have many times and live in nowhere. So we understood if we insist to meet face-to-face, most of them might not make it. ... Then we made an (online) appointment instead, on every Friday night from 9 pm until 10 pm we would discuss this. ... in Jakarta, though it is close but many traffic jams.” Rosi

Second, crowd discussion was loose “conversations” taking place in the Facebook group. The topic and the time was not predetermined as any member could get started with any topic in any time. As can be seen in Figure 5, there was a member faced problem with his course about computer science. Then he posted the difficulties, a screenshot, and got replies and solutions from other members. The fact that there were more than two hundred members within the Facebook group made the crowd discussion was one of the easiest way to get information related to MOOCs or to solve problem faced. However, sometimes, they had to wait for a long time before their questions got responded.

Figure 5: A screenshot of an example of crowd discussion method

Source: *The IDCourserians' Facebook group*

Third, course review somehow share some characteristic with course sharing but it used blog as the medium instead. In this learning format, members would voluntary review courses they had taken and gave testimony about them. Usually they wrote these in personal blogs and or in the community blog. Should members write in the former method, usually the link would be shared in the Facebook group as can be seen in Figure 10 so others could read and give feedbacks. If the member preferred the latter method, the link will also be posted in the community's Twitter accounts. Unfortunately, due to some members found themselves not able to write properly, the community's blog went to hiatus.

Figure 6: An example of course review method

Source: *The IDCourserians' Facebook group*

Discussion

It is fair to say that all learning methods in the IDCourserians as shown in the findings take form as study groups (Zevenbergen 2004). Even the course review which seems individual in nature can be included as well since following the blog posting, the members would discuss the written subjects. However, only several of them can be considered as collaborative learning (Dillenbourg 1999). That is specific study group conducted both through face-to-face and online, in which the members studied the same course. Indeed in some points they might have different level of knowledge about the subject matters. Yet it did not prevent them from interacting, giving each other's feedbacks, and arguing their opinions. As the result, it generates a shared understanding (Roschelle & Teasley 1995) between the involved members.

On the other hand, the rest of learning methods such as course sharing, seminar, and crowd discussion, in which the members studied different courses then share the lessons learned to the others, count as cooperative learning (Johnson & Johnson 1999). In this regard, there were division of labours though it emerged naturally without particular direction in advance. As shown in the findings, for instance, Steven delivered gamification while Syifa personal finance. Thus, it seems that doing cooperative learning is an inevitable way to accommodate all members' needs. Since each members has each own interest, enforcing to study one particular subject might encourage them to leave the learning groups or even the community instead. It is also the reason, why the IDCourserians tried to make the topic for semi guided discussion as general as possible.

Though it is clear which IDCourserians' learning methods can be considered as collaborative learning and which one as cooperative learning, in the real practice, it

seems two of them are mixed. As illustration, I will use Steven and Deasi's case. Both of them are educators and follow education courses. They then share a course about education in semi guided discussion. The discussion involves other members who do not have background in education and some of them do not take the same course. Indeed both Steven and Deasi still could do such collaborative learning since they have more or less the same knowledge and both of them study the same course. But when the point of view is expanded to the group, it seems the study group is more about cooperative learning. In this respect, Steven and Deasi take roles as a facilitator while the rest became the audience. Thereby, it can be said that collaborative learning is a matter of degree, ranged from learning with full collaboration to learning with less collaboration.

Furthermore, the fact that the community preferred face-to-face study groups benefited the members in term of increasing the intensity of collaboration. It is because doing so increases the level of synchronicity (Dillenbourg 1999) which enables the members to give each other feedbacks instantly. Thereby, the learning process becomes livelier. On the contrary, discussions taking place in the Facebook group or blogs, though they also afford collaborative learnings, due to have some delay in receiving others' feedbacks, the intensity of collaboration is not as much as in the face-to-face study groups. For example, as shown in the findings, some questions in some posts needed a very long time from the day it was posted until it was replied.

In addition, though the IDCourserians was a learning community concerning with Coursera, x-MOOC provider which adopts cognitivist-behaviourist approach (Conole 2013), its activities somehow resonate c-MOOCs which champion constructivist approach (Toven-Lindsey et al. 2015). Hereof, both learning materials and learning methods are not predetermined though they are given in the courses' syllabuses the members undertake. Instead, as shown in the findings, the members discuss and decide which one fit with their condition. Moreover, the online activities happen in the IDCourserians scope also resemble key activities in c-MOOCs (Yeager et al. 2013) as follows. Curating learning materials and sharing them through either the Facebook group or weblogs, share characteristics with aggregation. In this respect, materials from the MOOC courses are combined with other resources such as from the members' own experiences. This also can be argued as a remixing activity since by doing so the members making and documenting connections which are available for the rest of the IDCourserians members. Meanwhile, when it comes to looking for other members who have the same interest through the IDCourserians' repertoire can be argued as a repurposing. In this respect, the members make their own connection. In some occasion, a connection will be followed up by learning together as it is the case with specific online study group.

Conclusion

What the IDCourserians does actually is an attempt to fulfil the drawback of x-MOOCs practices, which only deliver such learning materials without providing enough facilities

for further learning. Indeed the providers have tried to address so by providing teaching assistant and forming learning hubs in some places. Yet, in Indonesia, where English is not the main spoken language and the hub is not provided, those are still meaningless. Thereby, creating a face-to-face community, in which the members know each other, have more intense interactions, and share the same goals to study MOOCs together is more likely to be an alternative solution. This also remarks that such online learning platforms still need face-to-face interactions and disregard the notion that education can be fully delivered through online technologies. Furthermore, the fact that what the IDCourserians does resemble c-MOOCs activities such as aggregation, remixing, and repurposing shows that even x-MOOCs which champion behaviourist-cognitive approach need such constructivist principles in order to make the learning practice more lively and meaningful.

Finally, for future research, it is suggested to investigate how joining a MOOCs learning community impacting its members' learning experience. In addition, it would be interesting to see the difference between what happens in organic learning communities and in those founded by MOOC providers.

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