The Asia-Pacific Regional Seminar on MOOCs for Higher Education:

Seizing digital opportunities to achieve SDG4

11-12 June 2018
Shenzhen, People's Republic of China

CONCEPT NOTE
(As of 15 May 2018)

The rapid growth of digital economies throughout Asia and the Pacific continues to challenge traditional higher education systems. Increasing demand for relevant education and training requires a rethink of how to promote the development of new skills throughout life.[1] There is increasing awareness that Information and Communications Technology (ICT), including blended learning and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are important to ensure equitable access to quality higher education and lifelong learning opportunities for all. However, there are also concerns about the gap in ICT use that may cause more serious social polarisation in the future. Given concerns such as rising youth unemployment and inactivity, as well as rapid shifts in skills demand in many countries in Asia-Pacific, there is urgent need for innovative policies and practices in higher education.

Building on this need, the Education 2030 Framework for Action, adopted in Incheon, Republic of Korea in May 2015[2] and Qingdao Declaration[3] set an ambitious goal to ensure access to quality education and unleash the potential of digital technology to transform learning. This vision is central to Sustainable Development Goal Four (SDG4). In line with SDG4-Education 2030, multi-stakeholder partnerships were recognized as key strategies to help promote innovation, based on cooperation between governments, industry partners (e.g. EdTech), civil society organizations and academia.[3]

To accelerate progress to achieve SDG4, the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau for Education (UNESCO Bangkok), together with the National Commission of the People's Republic of China for UNESCO, and the Southern University of Science and Technology (SUSTech) will co-organize the **Asia-Pacific Seminar on MOOCs for Higher Education**,

---

[1] Asia-Pacific Regional Strategy on Using ICT to Facilitate the Achievement of Education 2030 Asia-Pacific Ministerial Forum on ICT in Education 2017 (11-12 May 2017, Seoul, Republic of Korea)

[2] Incheon Declaration, World Education Forum 2015 Education 2030 Towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all (19-22 May 2015, Incheon, Republic of Korea)

[3] Qingdao Declaration International Conference on ICT and post-2015 Education: Seize digital opportunities. Lead Education transformation(23-25 May 2015, Qingdao, China)

generously hosted by the International Centre for Higher Education Innovation under the auspices of UNESCO (ICHEI) from 11-12 June 2018 in Shenzhen, P.R. China. Based on three years of stocktaking with UNESCO partners, the seminar will focus on MOOC policies and practices to promote higher education innovation. Previous regional expert meetings on MOOCs were held in Chengdu, China (2015), Seoul, Republic of Korea (2016), and Bangkok, Thailand (2017). In Shenzhen in 2018, regional experts and stakeholders for higher education will map the contributions of MOOCs to ensure access and promote quality higher education in Asia-Pacific. In this regard, strengthening collaboration across diverse stakeholder groups remains critical to advance the Education 2030 agenda.

Advancing MOOC Policies and Practices to Achieve SDG4

A cross-cutting theme of SDG4 is the importance of technology to promote inclusive quality education and effective governance. The main challenge going forward is to better understand how platforms such as MOOCs can serve all audiences and participants in higher education, including those who were not interested or could not access higher education for various reasons – e.g. economic, geography, availability, and/or lack of prior knowledge of how to access and use ICT effectively.[4] In this way, MOOCs can help drive innovative policies and practices to reach all learners, including vulnerable and underserved groups such as rural youth and adults, women and girls, and people with disabilities.

In the context of SDG4, the aim of the regional seminar on MOOCs is to develop a research framework to map innovative policies and practices to ensure equal access to quality higher education. The seminar focuses on five key stakeholder groups in Asia-Pacific:

a. **Policy-level:** At policy level, data-driven monitoring and evaluation is critical for guiding, planning, and assessing policies to achieve SDG4. Invited policymakers will explore the challenges of developing and sustaining strategies on MOOCs for higher education, and how to leverage insights to promote innovation and effective governance.

b. **National MOOC platforms:** National platforms for MOOCs have spread throughout Asia and the Pacific. A network of national MOOC platforms is emerging to share lessons learned, including how to develop and localize new knowledge. National representatives will be invited to share strategies to promote local knowledge and ensure equitable access to quality higher education and training.

c. **Institutional level:** Inclusive learning environments are necessary to thrive in today's digital world. However, traditional boundaries between learning environments at higher education institutions are being blurred by other formal, non-formal and informal education and training pathways. How expected learning outcomes are defined and assessed in the context of higher education remains an open debate,

---

[4] UNESCO & Commonwealth of Learning (2016). Making Sense of MOOCs:
A Guide for Policy-Makers in Developing Countries - http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002451/245122E.pdf

including about the relevance of MOOCs and higher education as a whole. Higher education leaders and operations staff will share strategies and practical experiences with how to drive institutional change to support next generation learners.

d. **Youth and adult learners:** A truly learner-centred experience is fundamental to quality higher education. How students perceive these needs and the changing role of higher education institutions will be explored in the context of ensuring learning is responsive and relevant for individual learners and society for sustainable development.

e. **EdTech and cross-sector partnerships:** Multi-sectoral engagement, including EdTech providers, is key to sustainability and innovation. Such partnerships must be based on strategies that cut across formal, non-formal and informal sectors at regional and national levels. How these partnerships are managed in the context of higher education is critical for further research and development.

There are complex challenges and relationships among these diverse stakeholder groups that must be addressed to leverage the potential of MOOCs and transform higher education. The following seminar objectives will guide the discussions and expected outputs.

Seminar objectives

The overall aim is to support implementation of the Qingdao Declaration and the Education 2030 agenda (i.e. seizing digital opportunities and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all). In particular, the seminar will focus on the following objectives:

- Highlight state-of-the-art technologies from the public and private sectors to enhance the quality of teaching and learning in higher education;
- Identify strategies to strengthen institutional governance and partnerships for technology-enriched learning to reach the most vulnerable in Asia-Pacific;
- Convene experts from national platforms to exchange experiences and assess readiness for a regional network on MOOCs in Asia-Pacific;
- Develop a research framework for a new flagship publication to analyze gaps and opportunities for MOOC policies and practices to achieve SDG4.

Expected outcomes

- Statement from the Asia-Pacific Regional Seminar on MOOCs for Higher Education
- Consensus to develop a regional network on MOOCs in the Asia-Pacific region
- Research framework to map inclusive MOOC policies and practices to achieve SDG4
- Development of a regional work plan and steering committee for a new UNESCO publication on seizing digital opportunities to achieve SDG4 in Asia-Pacific

Participants

Key participants include policymakers, university presidents, entrepreneurs, faculty, researchers, and postgraduate students throughout Asia and the Pacific. Stakeholders with expertise on MOOCs, blended learning, Open Educational Resources and Open and Distance Learning are encouraged to attend. The regional seminar will involve international officials and stakeholders from Asia-Pacific, including delegates from Least Developed Countries and developing economies, as well as participants from the People's Republic of China.

Organisation

The Asia-Pacific Regional Seminar on MOOCs for Higher Education is organised by the following partners:

- UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, Bangkok, Thailand
- National Commission of the People's Republic of China for UNESCO
- Southern University of Science and Technology (SUSTech), Shenzhen, People's Republic of China

Generously hosted by the International Centre for Higher Education Innovation under the auspices of UNESCO (ICHEI), Shenzhen, People's Republic of China

Dates

11-12 June 2018

Venue

Shenzhen Kylin Villa
Shenzhen, P.R. China
http://kylinvillashenzhen.com/

Tentative programme

Day 1: Monday, 11 June (full day)

- Welcome address
- Meeting objectives
- Keynote: Taking stock of progress in higher education – Leveraging MOOCs for SDG4
- Policy-level forum: Regional, governmental and institutional strategies
- National MOOC platforms: Promoting innovation through national portals
- Gallery walk: Demonstrations of inclusive EdTech in Asia-Pacific
- Welcome reception and dinner

Day 2: Tuesday, 12 June (full day)

- Welcome and overview of Day 2
- Institutional level forum: Enablers and barriers that influence regional, national and institutional collaborations, programmes and services
- Youth and adult learners forum: Experiences with MOOCs for lifelong learning
- Breakout discussions:
    1. Policy-level: National vision and strategies on MOOCs for higher education
    2. National MOOC platforms: Inclusive tech
    3. Institutional level: Developing a self-assessment framework for MOOCs
    4. Youth and adult learners: Drafting a problem statement on MOOCs
    5. EdTech and cross-sector partnerships: Inclusive tech (or join another group)
- Synthesis and presentation of breakout sessions
- Refining a research agenda on mapping innovative policies and practices for SDG4
- Closing remarks and seminar statement

Day 3: Wednesday, 13 June (Steering Committee only; half day)

- Welcome
- Synthesizing meeting outcomes
- Goals for a publication to map innovative policies and practices to achieve SDG4
- Finalizing a research framework and timeline
- Launch of the regional network on MOOCs in Asia-Pacific

Working language

English and Chinese will be the working languages

For further information, please contact:

Mr. Libing Wang
Chief of Section for Educational Innovation and Skills Development, UNESCO Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, Bangkok, Thailand
l.wang@unesco.org

Mr. Andrew Zhao
Head of Higher Education, International Centre for Higher Education Innovation under the auspices of UNESCO (ICHEI), Shenzhen, People's Republic of China
j.hzhao@qq.com

Mr. Wesley Teter
Senior Project Officer, Educational Innovation and Skills Development, UNESCO Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, Bangkok, Thailand
wr.teter@unesco.org

Ms. Fan Li
Chief, Asia-Pacific Programme Office International Centre for Higher Education Innovation under the auspices of UNESCO (ICHEI), Shenzhen, P.R. China
fanli@ichei.org