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## **MOOCs: Global Business Goals and Local Educational Strategies**

### **Abstract**

MOOCs are prepared by universities, research centers, business and governmental bodies. That is a device with which academic centers spread state-of-the-art knowledge, while business entities facilitate the development of competencies, particularly in business, economics and IT. The paradox is that although MOOCs courses are open to global users, they contain distinctive features of their inventors' and administrators' culture because they have been created locally. In order to identify the cultural characteristics evident in the content of MOOC courses, 267 courses on creative writing posted on five platforms were analyzed: Coursera (USA), FutureLearn (UK), XuetangX (China), JMOOC (Japan) and Skill Academy (Indonesia). Skill Academy and Coursera were focused on business-marketing goals, although they represented different cultures. Chinese, Japanese and Indonesian courses reflected the responsiveness of those cultures and were people- and affiliation-oriented. They employed a holistic approach to teaching (emphasis on context), i.e. operated with live lectures, which had not happened on Western platforms. Therefore, the conviction that MOOC is a mirror of the culture in which it was created should be considered a myth. It is the MOOC platform that presents the interests of the administrators and owners. Platform owners differ in their goals: academic (general knowledge transfer becoming a thing of the past after the commercialization of Coursera and edX), marketing (focused on gaining customers and employees) or economic-political (XuetangX). For a MOOC to be useful to representatives of another culture, not only translation into another language is needed, but also a proper modification of learning objectives and methods.

**Key words:** MOOC, reactivity, individualism, collectivism, personal development, context

In all cultures, narrative discourse conveys patterns of thinking, acting, and feeling which are non-opportunistic and independent of power centers (Kaliszewski, 2011). It triggers psychological intimacy and empathy, deepens sensitivity, helps to understand the culture and one's own identity. It improves the quality of human life (Trzebiński, 2006). Therefore, the classic core messages of myths were rendered in the form of fiction. Today, narrative techniques are used in daily practice by missionary professions: teachers, priests, journalists, psychologists, and psychiatrists. They use narratives to practice linguistic forms and enrich the vocabulary of students, convey non-obvious truths, personify information to achieve the effect of empathy, and structure complex mental processes.

A narrative can also create a self-presentation of the author. Creative texts are often edited by talented amateurs. They share experiences and express their feelings. They produce publications using websites, social media and dedicated mobile applications, e.g. Storybird, Twine, WattPad.

*Creative writing* is skillful text-making, usually in the narrative mode, using cultural archetypes, literary tropes, and characters to tie together events. The forms of expression include novels, short stories, memoirs, biographies, dramas, and poems. *Creative writing* also includes learning how to write scripts for films, games, television, and web series, as well as transmedia stories. The first formal *creative writing* degree program at the Master of Arts level was launched at the University of East Anglia in 1970 by Malcolm Bradbury and Angus Wilson. At the undergraduate level, *creative writing* has been taught informally since the 1960s, and formally since 1995 (University of East Anglia 2020).

Thus, the teaching of *creative writing* has become widespread in Western culture. This is because *creative writing* is needed in the creative economy, where intellectual property counts more than material goods, and the most valued capital is creative thinking, giving a competitive advantage within the copyright works, patent industries, trademark and design industries, such as the game and film industries (Howkins, 2002; Florida, 2005). According to Richard Florida, universities have become centers of creativity, where creative and talented people make up the so-called creative class. The super-creative core includes professors, engineers, writers and poets, copywriters, editors, actors, architects, cultural figures and other people who influence public opinion. According to the creative economy (Howkins, 2002), creative professionals work in knowledge-intensive industries such as high-tech, business, financial, legal, and medical services. Other people perform routine activities, creating low-paid service and working classes.

The creative class is created globally to develop the creative economy also known as intangible industries. Programs of study in philology, journalism, or even economics with a marketing focus, thus consequently MOOCs, often refer to *creative writing*, and its techniques are used in journalism, business, and marketing (Avramova, 2022), education, personal development (Bauer-Maglin 2017) and even psychotherapy (Woźniak, 2005). Therefore, *creative writing* has been expanded to include practical skills, such as writing research papers, creating content for business, journalistic, and academic purposes, e.g., a resume, business correspondence, a portfolio of journalistic proposals, an application to study at an English-speaking university.

In Western culture, *creative writing* has become essential for effective communication, human development and professional success. The creative class works flexible hours (including nights, weekends), and for this reason, MOOCs have become a suitable tool for them to improve their professional skills.

## **Problem of Research**

When and to what extent are MOOCs mirrors of the culture in which they were developed?

MOOCs platforms are being developed in different regions of the world. They are suited to the needs, habits, communication practices and educational strategies of local audiences. *Creative writing* courses are a novelty in Asia. In China, Japan or Indonesia, they are being organized because of the close connection to learning English, which is necessary for global business interactions.

Still, we should bear in mind that the Internet originated in the US and bears the stigma of the American culture: it promotes egalitarianism, individualism, liberalism and competition (Hongladarom, 2001) and a cosmopolitan culture inherent in the technology. Western MOOCs, despite translation into other languages, remain distinct from local educational and cultural practices. MOOC platforms, therefore, are springing up around the world so that the needs of local users and the interests of platform owners are met.

## **The Research Focus**

Samuel Huntington distinguished nine global civilizations (1996) and stated that their differences lead to religious-cultural conflicts. The cultures of the West are

different from the Oriental ones located in East Asia and represented by Chinese, Japanese and Arabic, among others. Each is derived from a distinct civilization (Huntington, 1996). The Chinese recognized the superiority of their own culture and defended their identity, which resulted in expelling missionaries from China in 1722 in accordance with Tsi-Yong's slogan „Chinese learning for the fundamental principles, Western learning for practical use.” In later times, Oriental countries established contacts with the West; they retained traditional organizations of society and ways of teaching, though.

Geert Hofstede, Gert Jan Hofstede, & Michael Minkov (2010) recognized the dimensions by which cultures differ, and these are: power distance, individualism and collectivism, femininity and masculinity, uncertainty avoidance. The Chinese Value Survey added short-term orientation and long-term orientation. The authors focused on American and Chinese cultures as representing Western and Oriental cultures. They also mentioned indicators of the dimensions of the cultures of Arab countries, such as Indonesia, which is made up of many diverse cultures. These indicators were related to education and are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1.

*Educational indicators of cultural dimensions according to Hofstede et al. (2010).*

Country	Individualism / collectivism	High / low context	Power Distance Index (PDI)	Short / long term orientation
United States	Individualism: Pronoun „I”, task groups. Student treated individually. Taking the floor and expressing opinions.	Low context: detailed and literal explanation, instructions.	Low power distance: partnership with the teacher, encouragement to ask questions and to initiative. Knowledge as universal laws and facts.	Short term orientation: 26
United Kingdom				Long term orientation: 51
China	Collectivism: formation of particular groups. Student as representative of the group.	High context: the assumption that some information is obvious and needs no explanation.	High power distance: respect for the teacher as an organizer of the educational process. Knowledge as wisdom of the teacher.	Very long term orientation: 87
Japan				Long term orientation: 80
Indonesia				Reluctance to speak up.

Source: Own work based on G. Hofstede et al., (2010).

## Methodology of Research

### General Background of Research

On a wave of enthusiasm, the belief arose that MOOCs would help reduce cultural differences between Western and Arab worlds (Adham & Lundqvist, 2015, p. 134). However, the way we learn, especially in terms of educational imperatives, peer relationships and attitudes to a teacher, are culturally conditioned (Waard et al., 2014). That is why the enthusiasm for American MOOCs worried teachers, especially in developing countries, because of a different kind of pedagogy and the „top-down nature of the material being offered on MOOCs by professors from elite Western universities” (John 2013). They stated the *digital neocolonialism* (Altbach 2014; Adam 2019) because learning outcomes offered on MOOCs can distort cultural awareness and impede learning by transmitting Western lifestyles and neoliberal values, especially when it comes to MOOCs on literary, historical, political or artistic topics – the most culturally sensitive subjects. Lisa Rafferty Portmess concluded that participants’ activities recorded in MOOCs are used for educational research in order to create a postcolonial educational project (2013).

Subsequently, some questions have arisen as to whether MOOCs should encourage participants to speak in forums and communicate with representatives of other cultures (Liu et al., 2016). As a consequence of the global reach of MOOCs, the need arose to design them in such a way as to accommodate cultural differences in user learning. From the statements of 152 MOOC instructors analyzed by Meina Zhu et al., (2020), it emerged that not all of them understood the issue of cultural diversity. However, many of them offered subtitled translations of videos and podcasts to participants, spoke slowly and clearly, limited text in favor of multimedia, encouraged facilitating peer access to content, and organized small groups of students.

Cultural characteristics of MOOCs were also studied in terms of interface design, and user experience (Liu et al., 2020). It turned out that MOOC interfaces from the Coursera and Chinese Universities MOOC (CUM) platforms were designed according to either American or Chinese culture, i.e. individualistic or collectivistic, low-context or high-context and short-term vs. long-term orientation, among others, as these cultural characteristics affect the design of content layout, predicted user behavior, and cultural awareness.

As a consequence of the administration of MOOC platforms by business entities emerged *business model* of MOOCs (Belleflamme et al., 2014; Kalman 2014; Burd 2015) potentially disruptive for higher education (Jacoby 2014).

Thus, differences in MOOC and MOOC platforms design concern not only language but also learning objectives and outcomes, teaching methods, interface, and axiology. They also pertain to the way certain topics are addressed or the reasons why certain topics are left out. One of these is *creative writing*.

## Instruments and Procedures

The purpose of the study was to analyze the content of MOOC course platforms in terms of some cultural features of the courses containing *creative writing* elements. The research questions were:

1. What practical applications do MOOC creators associate *creative writing* with?
2. Which cultural features of MOOC creators were reflected in the design of learning methods in the courses on *creative writing* ?

The method used was exploratory content analysis. Using internal search engines, the resources of each platform were browsed by entering the keyword *creative writing* and in the case of failure to obtain results, the password *writing* was entered. Once the results were obtained, course titles and keywords, audits (when available), syllabuses, characteristics of courses, module summaries, content layout and user reviews were analyzed. The results were filtered by removing courses unrelated to *creative writing* from the lists provided by the search engines. The data was coded in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet for each course separately. The results were then analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively (Cresswell, 2009).

## Research Sample

Five platforms from MOOCs were selected to represent Western and Oriental cultures. The sample was purposively selected to include platforms that are important in both cultures and to see if the cultural dimensions highlighted by Gert Hofstede et al., are reflected in MOOC courses.

The American Coursera (2012, Stanford University) and British FutureLearn (2012, Open University) platforms were considered most representative of Western culture, as they have the most resources in the West and the most participants. On the other hand, China's first platform XuetangX (2013, Tsinghua University), Japan's JMOOC (2013, Japan Massive Open Online Education Promotion Council) and Indonesia's Skill Academy administered by the largest in Indonesia edtech startup Ruangguru (2014, Ruangguru) were singled out as representing Oriental culture.

The resources of these platforms were analyzed in August 2023.

## Limitations

267 MOOCs from five purposively selected platforms were analyzed, so the sample is not representative and the results cannot be referred to all MOOCs. In addition, due to cultural differences in the approach to the topic and in the provision of resources on the platforms, different ways of searching for courses were used: by typing „creative writing” into the internal search engines or „writing” in the absence of results, and as a last resort, by browsing the subject categories of the courses.

There were some difficulties noted in obtaining detailed information about selected courses. Complete information was posted on the FutureLearn platform, but on Coursera, some data could be obtained only after paying a high fee to participate in a series of courses, or in so-called Specialization.

Coding the proposed uses of *creative writing* and teaching strategies into four categories involved decision-making in the case of ambiguous situations. For example, when peer assessment or discussion forums were stipulated as optional or available only in the paid version, the course was qualified as interactive. The subject of the course *Make interesting Writing with Storytelling & Creative Writing* was qualified as business because of the addressees: novice writers of non-fiction and non-fiction articles in a storytelling style (Azzura, n.d.) for brands and career development rather than gaining theoretical and general knowledge by students.

## Results

### Ownership and Educational Goals

Among the most important five platforms with MOOC courses in both cultures, four of them had commercial types of ownership and management. Only China's XuetangX was administered by the government to implement the country's economic policies.

The Coursera platform, founded by Stanford University employees, was transformed into a joint-stock company in March 2021, leveraging its globally respected brand. In 2022, it had 118 million users and brought in revenue of \$524 million. The resources are created by employees of universities, research institutes, educational institutions, and business entities. An internal search engine found 478 courses on *creative writing*, but many of them turned out to be unrelated to the topic, such as *Introduction to Psychology* and *Fashion Systems*. 162 courses were analyzed. The over-representation of Coursera's offerings resulted from the reference of *creative writing* to practical skills developed within MOOCs by Coursera Network-affiliated IT and engineering business entities promoting their products (e.g. software programs) and paid educational services: courses, verified professional certificates, specializations and even degree courses in the form of bachelor's and master's qualifications.

The UK-based FutureLearn platform, with 17 million users in 2021, has been owned since December 2022 by a corporate group Global University Systems, managed by Aaron Etingen, who took it over from Open University and SEEK Ltd. Due to the platform's financial problems. It has introduced AI to guide learners' activities, facilitate their career development, and increase the platform's range

(Shah, 2022). A temporary access to courses is free of charge. For a small fee, access to thousands of courses and even printed materials can be purchased. An internal search engine indicated 46-course results on *creative writing*. After excluding unrelated ones (e.g., *Become a Musician*, *Essentials in Arts Fundraising*), 27 courses were analyzed.

China's XuetangX platform was established in 2015 at the initiative of the Chinese Ministry of Education in response to the growth of US MOOCs. In April 2020, it had 58 million users. By 2030, there will be about 3,000 National Elite Online Courses – selected as the best in China, funded by the government, free of charge, and open to the general public (Zhang et al., 2021, p. 7). An internal search engine indicated one course devoted to *creative writing*. However, when „writing” was typed in, it listed 56 courses, 37 of which had topics similar to those included on the Coursera and FutureLearn platforms. These were subjected to analysis. However, 19 courses unrelated to *creative writing* were eliminated, such as *Basic Science in Nursing*, or *Medicinal Botany*.

Japan's most important platform with MOOC courses is JMOOC, established in 2013 and administered by the Japan Open Online Education Promotion Council. JMOOC had more than 1,620,000 users in 2023 and provided Japanese and English: titles, educational texts, and subtitles for movies. The completion rate is 38.7% (Keskin, 2017). 610 courses recommended by institutions, academic or educational organizations, and businesses were available on the JMOOC platform. MOOC courses on *creative writing* were not posted. Entering the keyword „writing” into the internal search engine also did not yield results. The 14 courses related to *creative writing* were therefore found by browsing through categories such as *Digital / IT Tools*, and *Education*.

The Indonesian Skill Academy platform was created in 2014 by Ruanggur, the largest edtech startup in Indonesia. During the COVID-19 pandemic, it noticed a 3000% increase in traffic and a fivefold increase in active users, with nearly 750,000 of them in 2023. It addresses courses not to students, but to employees since there are three times as many of them as there are K-12 students (Florene, 2021). Access to materials from purchased courses is for life. The search engine identified 49 courses. Twenty-seven of them were considered related to the topic of *creative writing*, discarding e.g. *Graphic Design: Creating Motion Graphics*.

Thus, the design of MOOCs on the largest platforms is dictated not by educational considerations but by the strategy of the platform owner. Commercial entities are focused on profit from the sale of educational services, while the government is focused on the implementation of the state's economic policies – including the conquest of Western markets. MOOC platforms, founded by university entities and focused on disseminating quality education, have become business products (Coursera, FutureLearn) or tools for implementing internal state policy (XuetangX).

### ***Creative Writing Usage***

Course developers have suggested the use of *creative writing* in philology (learning the rules of character construction, composition, literary genres, etc.), business and marketing (writing marketing texts for social media, writing skills for engineering leaders, etc.), personal development (preparation for writing a thesis or research paper, shaping one's own identity in stories, etc.), and popular culture (preparing pilot episode for a TV or Web Series, narrative development for video games, etc.). The percentage of these applications on particular platforms is shown in Table 2.

Table 2.  
*Applications of creative writing in the MOOCs under study (%)*

	Philology	Business, marketing	Personal development	Popular culture
Coursera	35	49	12	15
FutureLearn	41	19	33	7
XuetangX	16	8	76	0
JMOOC	50	7	36	7
Skill Academy	0	96,3	0	3,7

Source: Own work.

Table 2 shows that the Coursera platform courses are dominated by business and marketing usages, while on FutureLearn dominate philological applications. The two platforms, which represent Western culture, are therefore radically different. Coursera dominates in business applications, as many professional courses have been developed by Meta, Google and IBM. However, Indonesia's SkillAcademy offers the most business courses, as it is administered by a commercial entity and offers courses for employees rather than students.

Philological aspects of *creative writing* are discussed primarily in the courses from the JMOOC platform, relating e.g. to linguistics theory, pictograms, kanji – i.e. local, reactive culture, as opposed to Western culture. The two Western platforms also have a relatively large number of philology courses, due to their close ties to universities. By contrast, on the XuetangX and Skill Academy platforms, philological training has been virtually eliminated in favor of personal development (XuetangX) and professional preparation (Skill Academy). This is because Oriental cultures are characterized by a long-term orientation to new technologies and deferred results subsequent from their use (Hofstede, 2010).

The collectivist personal development focus was primarily on China's XuetangX, preparing users to find their way in the world of Western culture in order to run international businesses (e.g. *Writing for General Academic Purposes, Business Correspondence for International Trade*). In the second place, in terms of personal

development participation, was JMOOC with courses like *Avoiding offenses in English* or *Practical communication course to deepen trusting relationship*. These courses, in turn, fit training into the traditional Oriental culture, which is characterized by far-reaching politeness and building lasting relationships (Mikułowski-Pomorski 2003, p. 142). On the FutureLearn platform, on the other hand, the user's personal development, was treated as preparation for study (*Academic Writing for Healthcare Students in Higher Education*) or perception of cultural messages (*Fairy Tales: Meanings, Messages, and Morals*).

On the Coursera platform, on the other hand, business entities offered communication skills development through storytelling by engineering leaders, business and technical professionals, e.g. *Writing Skills for Engineering Leaders*. These courses were linked to personal development understood here in an individualistic way, as career advancement, especially when co-created by private companies, such as: Google, IBM, Amazon Web Services and Coursera Project Network affiliates.

The application of *creative writing* to the preparation of popular culture texts has been strongest on the US platform due to the dominant role of the US in the global entertainment market. Here, *creative writing* has been associated with transmedia storytelling and content marketing. Many MOOC courses have been profiled for media, including *Story and Narrative Development for Video Games*, *Script Writing: Write a Pilot Episode for a TV or Web Series*. In contrast, the Chinese platform does not provide for similar applications, focusing on practical preparation of users for *creative writing* applications for business and academic purposes, such as *Hospitality English* and *Comparative poetics*.

Thus, the proposed applications of *creative writing* are determined not so much by cultural considerations but by business (Coursera, Skill Academy), academic (FutureLearn by 2022), branding (JMOOC) and political-economic (XuetangX).

## Learning Design

In order to analyze the proposed ways of learning, four criteria for cultural differences in the educational design of MOOCs were specified. They are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3.  
*Cultural characteristics of educational design MOOCs*

Western cultures	Oriental cultures
<b>Individualistic</b> culture – focus on individual success, work	<b>Collectivist</b> culture - focus on collective action, other people
<b>Low</b> importance of <b>context</b> , large role of record	<b>High</b> importance of <b>context</b> , dialogue, face-to-face contact
<b>Low index of power distance:</b> discussions with the teacher, co-creation of course content	<b>High power distance</b> index: authority of the teacher, live lectures and live webinars
<b>Short-term</b> orientation. Orientation to the present and the past, to quick results, individual achievements.	<b>Long-term</b> orientation. Orientation to belonging, future, new technologies, deferred results. Persistence, perseverance.

S o u r c e: Own work based on G. Hofstede et al., (2010).

MOOCs are available to students from different cultures. Socrates and Confucius linked education with the development of autonomy, virtues and spirituality (Tan et al., 2015, p. 4). Despite this recently Western and Oriental MOOCs design is often subordinated not only to educational purposes, but also to business ones. Therefore, cultural characteristics are not always reflected in educational practices.

Sarah Judith Stager’s research showed that students’ activity in MOOCs (participation in discussion forums, submitting assignments, peer assessment, ability to process course content, etc.) has a statistical relationship with individualism versus collectivism, but long- / short-term orientation showed no relationship (Stager 2016, p. 34–35). Fernanda Francielle de Oliveira Malaquias et al., (2020) conducted a multivariate regression analysis and found that only individualism has a significant and positive impact on the breadth of MOOC offerings in 55 countries. Other cultural factors proposed by Hofstede et al. do not show any significant impact.

Bjarke Lindsø Andersen et al., (2018) using the method of cultural contrast showed that the worlds of the participants’ lives collide during MOOCs because of differences in perception of power. As a result, a cultural authority is created that imposes appropriate practices and preferential treatment of certain students.

Therefore, it was checked to what extent the dimensions of culture proposed by Hofstede are reflected in the design of the analyzed courses. The percentages of criteria met on each platform are summarized in Table 4 and explained in the following sections of the article.

Table 4.  
*Cultural features of teaching creative writing on the MOOCs platforms under study (%)*

	Learning		Teaching		Outcomes		Lectures	
	Individual	Social	Interactive	Lectures	Fast	Deferred	Recorded	Live
Coursera	67	33	98	2	99	1	100	0
FutureLearn	4	96	30	70	22	78	100	0
XuetangX	22	78	76	24	14	86	97	3
JMOOC	43	57	57	43	0	100	71	29
Skill Academy	37	63	63	37	100	0	37	63

Source: Own work.

### Learning – individual or social?

The highest percentage of courses for users working individually (67%) was found on the Coursera platform. Analysis of user evaluations showed that peer assessment enforced, as a condition for passing an assignment, was here not supportive of learners. Peer reviews were sometimes vague and unhelpful, and it was not possible to interact with them, observe the development of the selected work, or make self-corrections after receiving a review. The forums also included off-topic content about problems and frustrations:

Non-existent content, lack of usable feedback from peers, writers' group mechanism is not workable on this platform, and long periods of time that a section cannot be completed (if at all) because there is nothing to review. (Leonie, 2020).

But in contrast, on the FutureLearn platform, peer assessment played a positive role. After logging in to the course, assignments for assessment were systematically sent. Reviews of peer work were also made available. These were kind and insightful. The user was notified by e-mail about new observers or when someone responded to comments. The high level of discussion in the forums was due, among other things, to the fact that they were placed under videos rather than in separate places as on Coursera. Social learning was designed in 96% of the surveyed courses, including discussion forums and peer assessment. So there were big differences between Western platforms in the use of interactivity and social learning. In this case, such a dramatic difference is probably due to the fact that Coursera has been a commercial platform from the beginning, while FutureLearn has only been a commercial platform since December 2022. Therefore, Coursera

focuses on low-cost, independent learning, while FutureLearn continues the British tradition of university debating.

Platforms representing the Orient's educational culture have also relied on social learning. On the government's XuetangX platform, 78% of courses were based on it. However, interactivity is an organizational challenge. Therefore, in some of the courses on this platform, the free version did not include it – lectures were summarized with tests. The introductory *Creative writing* course created and conducted by Juan Wang et al., of Hunan Normal University (2014) taught, among other things, how to create a bond with the reader, characteristic of Oriental, collectivist cultures, and how to tie poetry to music in the traditional manner. It included the creation of open-ended poetic forms and visual poetry, as Oriental cultures are open to new technologies. Also, learning to write creative non-fiction there included genres related to technology: visual poetry, video essay, graphic essay, blog, film script. The course was embedded in Chinese culture, reflecting its commitment to tradition, as the creation of historical forms is covered: sonnet, cinquain, iambic pentameter, ode, elegy, epithalamium, as well as philological issues: perspective in narrative, autobiography, suspense. References to *creative writing*, Hollywood, Valentine's Day, on the other hand, illustrated the reactive nature of Chinese culture (Mikułowski-Pomorski, 2003, p. 122), i.e., referring to Western models, instead of taking their own initiative.

Also, the JMOOC on its cover page, in the mode characteristic of the collectivist culture, declares „to expand individual values to the whole of society's shared values through learning for Japan and Asia based on business-academia collaboration” (JMOOC, nd.).

Thus, it can be said that in terms of designing individual and social learning MOOCs reflected the cultures of their creators and administrators. Even FutureLearn, seemingly diverging from the individualistic nature of Western culture, referred to the Western paradigm first-ever MOOC course, created in Canada by Stephen Downes and George Siemens *Connectivism and connective knowledge* (2008). Moreover, subsequent research revealed that forum participants were mainly Western young adults i.e. high-performing students, who formed crowds, not communities of learners (Gillani et al., 2014).

### **Teacher – partner or leader?**

Substituting teacher lectures by discussion forums is common in the MOOCs connectionist model. In the analyzed courses, lectures were often supplemented with discussion forums and peer assessment. Such courses were classified as interactive. It turned out that Coursera (98%) and all Eastern platforms relied on such interactivity. On the FutureLearn platform, on the other hand, courses were based most often on lectures (70%) and quizzes, which follow the European and British tradition of academic training. Discussion forums were attached to lectures here and did not constitute separate modules as in collectivist courses.

The use of discussion forums on the Coursera platform emerged from Western connectionist tradition, i.e. the technical need to provide users with interactivity along the lines of social media, and a reliance on procedures based on an unambiguous written word that requires no context. It also reflected the decline of teacher's authority. On the Eastern and FutureLearn platforms, on the other hand, the discussion forums with the high quality of most user contributions reflected the collectivist nature of Oriental culture, the importance placed on context and dialogue, and the teacher's authority as a master due to the high rate of power distance. In Oriental platforms, this was due to the pedagogical tradition, while in FutureLearn it was the result of selecting a teaching strategy and presenting high technology.

### **Learning outcomes – fast or deferred?**

On the Coursera platform, courses (99%) are geared toward quick success for the user who may write a novel during 127 hours of instruction (*Write Your First Novel*), for example, or develop the ability to use narrative in order to build leadership, brand and competitive advantage through course completion. Similarly, on the Indonesian Skill Academy platform for employees, training is 100% geared toward quick career success, e.g. *Make Interesting Writing with Storytelling & Creative Writing*, *Storytelling for Interesting Content Writing*.

In contrast, on the other platforms, soft skills were developed in most courses, bringing deferred profits. On JMOOC, this was true for all the courses. The authors took care of promoting traditional Japanese culture, such as: *A Pictogram that Conveys Meaning in Shape*, *Practical Communication Course to Deepen Trusting Relationships*, *Manga, Anime and Game Theory*. In addition, the user was forced to learn about the full range of offerings, choosing courses carefully and in the context of similar MOOCs, because of abandoning the internal search engine and dividing courses into thematic categories. Similarly, on the XuetangX platform, where the goal of *creative writing* was considered as characteristic of a collectivist culture to connect to ourselves and to connect with others (Wang et al., 2023). The term *connect* refers to the reactive culture's characteristic feature of maintaining contact with the West for far-flung educational and business purposes, in courses such as: *Academic English and Literacy*, *Business Letters and Emails in International Trade*.

Created in Western culture with a short-term orientation, Coursera reproduces this characteristic feature, but short-term goals have also been set for Skill Academy users, despite the fact that commercial administrators and most course authors are connected with a long-orientation culture. The focus on quick or deferred learning outcomes depends on the type of administrating the platform – commercial (Skill Academy), government (XuetangX) or academic (FutureLearn by 2022 administered by the Open University), not on the cultural orientation of authors or administrators toward short- or long-term goals.

## Lectures – recorded or live?

On Western platforms Coursera and FutureLearn, the lectures were recorded, hence participants lacked a direct contact with the teacher who could answer their questions in real-time as it was in remote teaching during a pandemic. On the other hand, lectures were broadcast in real-time on Oriental platforms. This was most common in Skill Academy (63% of courses) and JMOOC (29%). In this way, Western platforms reflected the culturally characteristic strict adherence to procedures, linear order of monochronic culture and suppression of feelings, while Oriental ones reflected spontaneity, polychronic time perception and lack of structuring, as well as vivid displays of emotion (Mikułowski-Pomorski, 2003, p. 143).

XuetangX's main page offered a live streaming of the *Global MOOC and online Education Conference* (2021) available later in the registered version. Also, on other Oriental platforms, the main pages announced upcoming lectures in a live version, with the opportunity to chat with the lecturers. Users registered for the course were informed by e-mail about similar courses with live lectures.

Advanced search on the JMOOC homepage provides for Search by face-to-face learning course option, and live lectures are announced on the homepage of the plugged-in Gacco platform. Additionally, Ritsumeikan University offers live lectures. All of this is indicative of the distinctive attention paid to live words and dialogue in Eastern cultures, i.e. to context rather than to transcript.

English is compulsory at most universities in Japan, but „creative writing has not been widely used” (Honda, 2011). Japanese students tend to be afraid of making mistakes in class, especially in front of other students, and hesitate to be active (Honda, 2011, p. 45). In contrast, remote learning of *creative writing* emboldens students to communicate despite making mistakes, involves invention and the use of imagination, and thus it is more satisfying and intrinsically pleasurable (Honda, 2011, p. 48–49). For teachers, it provides an opportunity to promote national culture. For example, Professor Tsukasa Yamanaka in the course *Theory of Linguistics as Education: Language Deceives Us and Makes Life Difficult* (Yamanaka, 2018) highlighted an important role of non-verbal expression in high context cultures and “(Unfair) Privileges for Written Language” (Yamanaka, 2018). Thus, the course reflects the features and problems of high-context cultures resulting from the dominance of written language on the Internet. JMOOC includes 29% of courses with live lectures, confirming the local demand for this form of instruction. The incorporation of *creative writing* into English language instruction has reflected the reactive nature of the Japanese culture (Mikułowski-Pomorski, 2003, p. 122), i.e., relating to Western models instead of exclusively promoting one's own. However, Japan has an original literary tradition: classic waka, haiku, tanka, renga, and manga. Waseda University (n.d.) presents Japanese literary culture in the electronic and print media. Professor Kunihiko Nakajima of this

university associated the term *creative writing* with drawing letters in a pictogram form that make up English words (Boggio, 2019). Also, the students' work on Japanese poetry – a project for *creative writing* combined haiku and tanka poetry with Oriental music, Japanese landscapes, graphics and costumes, cherry blossoms, a bonsai tree, etc. (Brokenmemories7, 2009). The course *A Pictogram that Conveys Meaning in Shape* is also rooted in the Japanese culture. Participants learn to communicate using pictograms that verbalize actions or depict animals. They study the design principles of non-verbal visual communication, inquiring into what people understand from numbers and how they shape their consciousness through the creation of pictograms (Shirao, 2014).

After registration, emails were received from FutureLearn and Gacco (a subplatform of JMOOC). The administrators of the first one contacted us only three times within three days, informing us about the work plan for the first week and about two reviews of our poem. On the other hand, the Gacco office sent us 26 e-mails, at intervals of 1–7 days, from August to November 2023 (when the article goes to press), inviting us to participate in field trips and off-line seminars, in workshops and stationary classes, in live broadcasts and public lectures. They informed us about broadcasts of discussion meetings and invited to participate in projects sponsored by universities. They recommended new courses, the national Nikkei TEST business intelligence exam, and offered career counseling and support in changing jobs. It can, therefore, be concluded that social learning on the Gacco platform takes place in real contacts with lecturers and other participants of MOOC courses, while FutureLearn is limited to virtual contacts.

Thus, Western platforms, as representing a low-context culture, are dominated by the written word requiring no explanation. In contrast, real-time face-to-face contact and a variety of contexts are relatively common on Eastern platforms. The difference, therefore, is due to cultural learning practices rather than the commercial or governmental/academic nature of the platform.

## Discussion

On each of the surveyed platforms, MOOCs were presented in a specific design, enforcing content layout, ways of applying social learning and technology. This means that platform administrators influence MOOCs design. In this way, MOOC courses turn out to be not so much a mirror of cultures as a reflection of the business (Coursera, Skill Academy) or a political-economic (XuetangX) strategy of the administrators.

Platform administrators' strategies are reflected more clearly in the proposed applications of *creative writing* than in the accessible learning practices, which

are more culturally and organizationally determined by the learning systems in each country.

Coursera reflects the features of modern Western culture created by the expansion of technology and globalization: *creative writing* has become popular in Western culture and has multiple applications in business, education, popular culture, and even personal development. The pandemic, meanwhile, has accelerated the trend of targeting MOOCs to employees and future employees, rather than the most ambitious students who want to develop their specialized interests. Skill Academy resources confirm that this is a global trend.

*Creative writing* courses serve different purposes, depending on the platform owner's strategy, including a business strategy. According to Dhaval Shah (2022), the takeover of MOOC platforms as edX and FutureLearn from academic entities by commercial administrators means feeding learners into different entities belonging to new owners, thereby reducing the acquisition costs of platforms.

In Asia, however, *creative writing* has also been linked to the national literary tradition, especially in poetry. This is because the English language is seen as a manifestation of the expansion of Western culture. Therefore, on JMOOC and Xuetangx platforms Oriental MOOC authors combine *creative writing* with learning English and use literary education to deepen users' relationships with their native culture.

The results of our analysis of teaching strategies correlate with the cultural dimensions identified by Hofstede et al., and confirm the validity of the digital neocolonialism model of learning outcomes (Portmess 2013, Altbach 2014; Adam 2019), which, as it turned out, is implemented not only on Western platforms, but on commercial ones (Coursera, FutureLearn, Skill Academy et al.).

This means that the increasing commercialization of Western and Oriental platforms with MOOCs will probably replace their social learning in the real world by individualism and will limit the role of the e-teacher as a leader.

## Conclusions

The idea of spreading quality education to improve quality of life, which accompanied the creation of the first MOOCs, is becoming a thing of the past. More and more courses are being made available for a fee and without free versions. In-depth humanities courses are proving unprofitable, so commercial and governmental administrators tend to choose a few-hour courses to improve practical skills, especially business, and marketing. Contemporary MOOCs, therefore, do not tend to reflect the characteristics of the culture in which they were created, but the concentration and commercialization of the market for educational services.

Today, it is not culture, but the creative economy that often regulates education and exacerbates the reluctance of many academic entities to MOOCs.

In order for MOOCs to meet the educational needs of a different culture representative, not only translations into other languages are needed, but also modifications to learning objectives, content design, and layout. However, on commercial platforms, these are subordinated to business goals, not educational ones.

Adapting MOOCs to audiences from different cultures could help deepen mutual respect and understanding, and reduce or creatively resolve cultural, economic, and social conflicts internationally. This is possible because education, especially humanistic courses, strengthen cultural identity, deepen awareness of cultural differences, and develop cultural intelligence for their creative use. Therefore, financial and organizational support is needed for universities that still offer non-commercial, academic MOOC courses.

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Anna Ślórsarz

## MOOC: Globalne Cele Biznesowe i Lokalne Strategie Edukacyjne

### Streszczenie

MOOCs to kursy e-learningowe tworzone przez uniwersytety, instytucje badawcze, podmioty biznesowe i rządowe. Uniwersytety upowszechniają w nich najnowszą wiedzę, a podmioty biznesowe ułatwiają rozwijanie kompetencji, szczególnie z zakresu biznesu, ekonomii i informatyki. Paradoks polega na tym, że choć MOOCs są otwarte dla globalnych użytkowników, to jednak prezentują cechy charakterystyczne dla kultur swych twórców i administratorów, ponieważ są tworzone lokalnie.

Aby zidentyfikować cechy kultur widoczne w strukturze i treści wybranych kursów MOOC, przeanalizowano 267 kursów na temat *creative writing* zamieszczonych na 5 platformach: Coursera (USA), FutureLearn (Wielka Brytania), XuetangX (Chiny), JMOOC (Japonia) i Skill Academy (Indonezja). Okazało się, że Skill Academy i Coursera są najbardziej ukierunkowane na cele biznesowo-marketingowe, choć reprezentują odmienne kultury. Natomiast kursy chińskie, japońskie i indonezyjskie konsekwentnie odzwierciedlają reaktywność tych kultur i są zorientowane na ludzi oraz afiliację. Prezentują holistyczne podejście do uczenia (nacisk na kontekst), czyli wykorzystują wykłady na żywo, co nie zdarza się na obu platformach zachodnich.

Dlatego za mit należy uznać stwierdzenie, że MOOC jest lustrem kultury, w której powstał. Platforma MOOC prezentuje interesy administratorów i właścicieli. Platforma odzwierciedla jednak tylko niektóre kulturowe cechy głęboko zakorzenionych praktyk edukacyjnych. Właściciele platform diametralnie różnią cele ich działalności: akademickie (przekazywanie wiedzy ogólnej odchodzące do przeszłości po komercjalizacji Coursery i edX), marketingowe (nastawione na zdobycie klientów i pracowników) lub gospodarczo-polityczne (XuetangX).

Aby MOOC był użyteczny dla reprezentantów innej kultury, potrzebne jest nie tylko tłumaczenie na inny język, lecz także modyfikacja celów i metod nauczania, treści i szaty graficznej.

Słowa kluczowe: MOOC, reaktywność, indywidualizm, kolektywizm, rozwój osobisty, kontekst

Anna Ślósarz

## MOOC: Objetivos Comerciales Globales y Estrategias Educativas Locales

### Resumen

Los MOOC (cursos masivos abiertos en línea) son cursos de aprendizaje electrónico preparados por universidades, centros de investigación, empresas y organismos gubernamentales. Se trata de un dispositivo con el que los centros académicos difunden conocimientos de última generación, mientras que las entidades empresariales facilitan el desarrollo de competencias, particularmente en negocios, economía y TI. La paradoja es que, aunque los cursos MOOC están abiertos a usuarios globales, contienen y difunden características distintivas de la cultura original de sus inventores y administradores porque han sido creados localmente.

Para identificar las características culturales evidentes en el contenido de algunos cursos MOOC seleccionados, se analizaron 267 cursos de escritura creativa publicados en cinco plataformas: Coursera (EE.UU.), FutureLearn (Reino Unido), XuetangX (China), JMOOC (Japón) y Skill. Academia (Indonesia). Resultó que Skill Academy y Coursera eran las que más se centraban en objetivos de marketing empresarial, aunque representaban culturas diferentes. En cambio, los cursos de chino, japonés e indonesio reflejaban sistemáticamente la capacidad de respuesta de esas culturas y estaban orientados a las personas y a las afiliaciones. Emplearon un enfoque holístico de la enseñanza (énfasis en el contexto), es decir, operaron con conferencias en vivo, lo que no había sucedido en ninguna de las plataformas occidentales.

Por tanto, la convicción de que los MOOC son un espejo de la cultura en la que fueron creados debe considerarse un mito. Es la plataforma MOOC que presenta los intereses de los administradores y propietarios. Sin embargo, la plataforma refleja sólo algunas de las diferencias culturales de prácticas educativas profundamente arraigadas. Los propietarios de plataformas difieren dramáticamente en sus objetivos: académicos (la transferencia general de conocimientos pasa a ser cosa del pasado después de la comercialización de Coursera y edX), marketing (centrado en ganar clientes y empleados) o económico-político (XuetangX).

Para que un curso MOOC sea útil para los representantes de otra cultura, no sólo se necesita una traducción a otro idioma, sino también una modificación adecuada de los objetivos y métodos de aprendizaje, un contenido modificado y un diseño adecuado.

Palabras clave: MOOC, reactividad, individualismo, colectivismo, desarrollo personal, contexto

## **MOOK: глобальные бизнес-цели и местные образовательные стратегии**

### А н н о т а ц и я

MOOK (массовые открытые онлайн-курсы) — это курсы электронного обучения, подготовленные университетами, исследовательскими центрами, деловыми и государственными органами. Это инструмент, с помощью которого академические центры распространяют самые современные знания, а субъекты предпринимательства способствуют развитию компетенций, особенно в сфере бизнеса, экономики и информационных технологий. Парадокс заключается в том, что, хотя курсы MOOK открыты для пользователей со всего мира, они содержат и распространяют отличительные особенности оригинальной культуры своих изобретателей и администраторов, поскольку были созданы локально.

Чтобы выявить культурные особенности, очевидные в содержании некоторых избранных курсов MOOC, было проанализировано 267 курсов по творческому письму, размещенных на пяти платформах: Coursera (США), FutureLearn (Великобритания), XuetangX (Китай), JMOOC (Япония) и Skill. Академия (Индонезия). Оказалось, что Skill Academy и Coursera больше всего ориентированы на цели бизнес-маркетинга, хотя и представляют разные культуры. Напротив, курсы китайского, японского и индонезийского языков неизменно отражали отзывчивость этих культур и были ориентированы на людей и их принадлежность. Они использовали целостный подход к преподаванию (акцент на контекст), то есть оперировали живыми лекциями, чего не было на обеих западных платформах.

Поэтому убеждение в том, что MOOK является зеркалом культуры, в которой он создан, следует считать мифом. Именно MOOK-платформа представляет интересы администраторов и владельцев. Однако платформа отражает лишь некоторые культурные различия глубоко укоренившихся образовательных практик. Владельцы платформ кардинально различаются по своим целям: академические (общая передача знаний уходит в прошлое после коммерциализации Coursera и edX), маркетинговые (ориентированные на привлечение клиентов и сотрудников) или экономико-политические (XuetangX).

Чтобы курс MOOK был полезен представителям другой культуры, необходим не только перевод на другой язык, но и правильная модификация целей и методов обучения, измененное содержание и соответствующая верстка.

**К л ю ч е в ы е с л о в а:** MOOK, реактивность, индивидуализм, коллективизм, развитие личности, контекст