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## Learning outside the classroom through MOOCs

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## ABSTRACT

The rapid increase use of information technologies throughout educational institutions is changing the way teachers and students learn, work, and establish collaboration. The learning cycle is an ongoing process that is designed to improve the quality of, as well as collaboration among learners. Recent announcements from top Universities to turn to new forms of educational delivery called “MOOCs” (Massive Open Online Courses), have not only captured the interest of academics and students in higher education, but also the interest of students and teachers in the K-12 environment, in home schooling, or outside the classroom in general. With MOOCs, the teaching method is moving from the traditional transfer learning model where the teacher serves as the repository and transmitter of knowledge to the flipped classroom model where the learner interacts with other students, peers, and has flexible access to all information and resources around him before coming to the classroom. With the huge amount of online educational material this has become a useful and beneficial method in teaching. Speaking at the Association of Community College Trustees’ leadership meeting in Seattle, October 2013 ([gatesfoundation.org](http://gatesfoundation.org)), Bill Gates said “The value of MOOCs comes when you use them to create hybrids that are the best of both worlds. Rather than having the instructor lectures during class and then send the students home with assignments, many instructors are now using MOOCs to *flip the classroom*”. He also added “I’d be the first to say this is a period of experimentation, but we’ll learn much faster if people jump in and engage”. Hester Tinti-Kane Vice President of Marketing and Social Media Strategy, Pearson ([Seaman & Tinti-Kane \(2013\)](#)), said “The more we know about effective uses of technologies for teaching and learning, the faster we can adopt these new practices, facilitate their proliferation across higher education, and increase student success”. These massive open online courses which have global reach, unlimited participation, and open access over the internet via a combination of social networking and video podcasts is attracting a huge variety of students of different ages, nationalities, backgrounds, abilities, interests, etc. It’s all based on connection where you have the ability to learn, interact, and collaborate not only locally and globally but also universally from anywhere and at any time. With MOOCs providers in the USA (Coursera, edX, Udacity), Europe (FUN, Iversity), UK (FutureLearn), Middle East (Rwaq, Edraak), or in Australia (Open2study) students can work on learning content outside of the classroom, at their own pace, and practice the application of what they learned in class. While some educators consider MOOCs as the future of higher education, others said they represent the beginning of education downfall. According to many surveys, it has been found that faculty members are not rejecting technology, in fact most of them believe in the ability of technology to bring transformative change to education but at the same time they feel that commercial considerations, rather than pedagogical considerations are driving the phenomenon of MOOCs. The objective of this study is to provide insights into recent developments of MOOCs and how they can be incorporated into high school curriculum. While it’s too soon to say if MOOCs represent a substitution to traditional courses, they certainly bring a transformative change to our actual education in general and to the way our academic institutions are working. For high school for example MOOCs could be used as blended-learning approach particularly in math and science. In higher education there is a lot of excitement about MOOCs and universities are still working hard on how to use them and what impact they could have on the value of a degree. A survey has been conducted to understand how students perceive learning outside the classroom through social media, online courses, school website, and private tutoring. 310 students have been surveyed during their end of the year exams at Global International School, an international school licensed by the Saudi Arabian

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Ministry of Education and open to all expatriates in the Jeddah community, and accredited by the International Accreditation body “Advanced” (<http://www.advanc-ed.org/>). On the question “*Learning outside the Classroom has a Positive Impact on my Education*” 44.52% said they strongly agree with the statement and 51.61% said they agree while 2.58% neither agree nor disagree.

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## 1. Introduction

Educational systems around the world are under continuous and increasing pressure to use the new information and communication technologies to teach students the knowledge and skills they need in the 21st century as stated in the UNESCO report (Resta, 2003). In a recent survey released January 15th, 2014 by the Sloan (Allen & Seaman, 2014) “*Grade Change: Tracking Online Education in the United States*” the number of academic officers considering online education as a critical component to their long-term strategy has increased from 50% in 2002 to about 70% in 2012 but dropped to 65% in 2013 due to institutions without online offering as stated in the report. Recent announcements from top Universities to turn to new forms of educational delivery called “MOOCs” (Massive Open Online Courses) have not only captured the interest of academics and students at higher education but also the interest of students and teachers at high schools. In the traditional transfer learning model the teacher serves as the repository and transmitter of knowledge however, with MOOCs the teaching method is inverted by using the flipped classroom model where the learner interacts with other students, peers, and has flexible access to all information and resources around him before coming to classroom. The learning cycle is an ongoing process that is designed to improve the quality of learners as well as the collaboration among learners. As Bill Gates said at the Association of Community College Trustees’ leadership meeting in Seattle ([www.gatesfoundation.org](http://www.gatesfoundation.org)) “the benefits of using large-scale online education programs with individualized instruction could ultimately improve student learning outcomes”. Education is practiced not only inside the classroom but outside the classroom, in the community as whole where learners can develop collaborative learning through communities of interest, adapt courses according to their needs, and become partners in knowledge generation and sharing (Allen & Seaman, 2014; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Sarirete, 2009; Wenger, 1998).

The objective of this study is to provide insights into recent developments of MOOCs and what are the possibilities to incorporate it into high school curriculum.

## 2. Learning outside the classroom

Traditional learning inside a classroom is well-known; however, learning outside the classroom has always been a challenge to students and learners alike; especially with the fast growing technology, media, telecommunications, life sciences, and so on. Local authority and schools should take into account the value of learning outside the classroom and support it by including it in their programs. National and International accreditation bodies also must ensure that such learning process is clearly indicated in the institutional curriculum.

In a survey conducted to understand how students perceive learning outside the classroom through social media, online courses, school website, and private tutoring, we surveyed 310 students during their end of the year exams at Global International School (GIS, <http://www.gis.sch.sa/>), an international school licensed by the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Education and open to all expatriates in the Jeddah community, Saudi Arabia. It is also

accredited by the Commission on International and Trans-Regional Accreditation “CITA” as well as by “Advanced” (<http://www.advanc-ed.org/>). Out of the 310 students surveyed, Fig. 1 and 68% of respondents indicated that YouTube was the most valuable social media tool; WhatsApp was identified as the second most valuable social media tool (63%); then come Twitter (40%) and Ask.fm (35%). Finally 50% said they used the school website.

Respondents are using social networking sites primarily to connect with classmates and stay current with class news regarding exams and homework. The survey also found that more than 77% use private tutoring in Mathematics and English as shown in Fig. 2. The reason behind that is that most universities in the middle east region require high scores in Mathematics and English, in addition the international exams also has similar requirements, for example in the SAT (<https://sat.collegeboard.org>) two-third of the total score is for English (1600 points) and the remaining score, one-third, is for Mathematics (800 points). It’s interesting to note that the survey was done at a time where the students were completing their final exams and at this time of the year (May and June) students are either doing their end of year exam or are preparing for their IGCSE ([www.cie.org.uk](http://www.cie.org.uk)) or SAT exams, hence they are active in having private tutoring or learning outside the classroom.

On the question “*Learning outside the Classroom has a Positive Impact on my Education*” 44.52% said they strongly agree with the statement and 51.6% said they agree while 2.6% neither agree nor disagree as shown in Fig. 3.

Based on the above findings, we believe that local community and parents should reinforce the message to students, schools, and educators about the value of learning outside the classroom and support it by forcing the schools to incorporate it into their curriculum and programs. Accreditation bodies such as *Advanced* (<http://www.advanc-ed.org/>) for High School or *ABETS* (<http://www.abet.org/>) for University and Engineering programs should also take this into account and includes it in their external review visit. Institutions seeking to gain or retain accreditation must meet some Standards regarding learning outside the classroom before being accredited. With all the technology around us, we believe that students should use new means of learning outside the classroom such as MOOCs where students would be able to combine free online learning with private tutoring services which may at least reduce the amount of money spent for private tutoring.

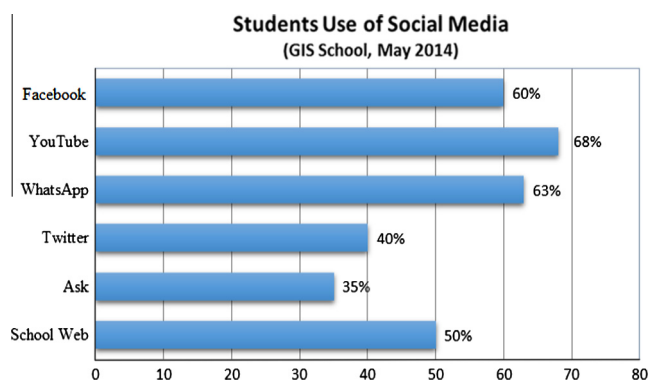


Fig. 1. Students use of social media at GIS School (Jeddah, KSA).

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