

Business Education Online

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Teaching revolution gathers pace

Massive open online courses are beginning to transform distance and campus learning, says *Della Bradshaw*

Regina Herzlinger is a bit of a superstar. She was the first woman to be a tenured professor at Harvard Business School, and is now leading its march into Moocs – massive open online courses – which promise to revolutionise the world of higher education.

Professor Herzlinger, whose 11-week course on Innovating in Healthcare will start this month, is an advocate of this model of free online education. “I believe Moocs can democratise education,” she says. “It’s fantastic to reach so many people.”

Harvard, MIT Sloan, the University of Virginia’s Darden school and several other big-brand US business schools are experimenting with Moocs. The Wharton school at the University of Pennsylvania has gone so far as to put 10 per cent of its MBA core courses online for free access. Like Prof Herzlinger, Wharton’s vice-dean of innovation Karl Ulrich believes the social impact of these programmes is a central reason for promoting Moocs. He cites the example of one Wharton Mooc that enrolled more than 130,000 students. “There’s just a huge, huge take-up.”

But he also argues that Moocs are a brand-building exercise for the school and can help professors run better courses back on campus. “It has changed the way I teach,” he confesses. “I think I am a better teacher

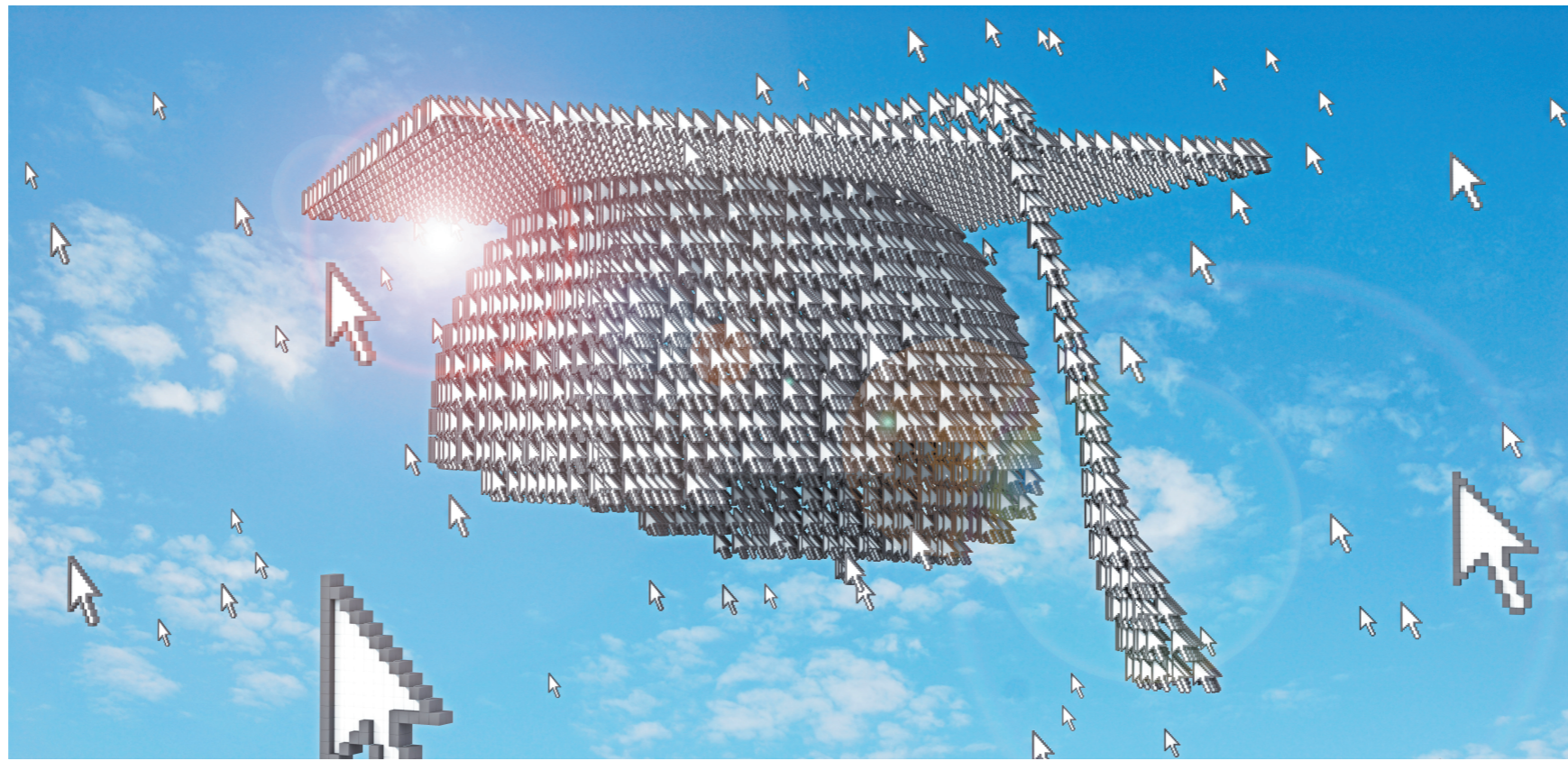


Illustration: Hit and Run

as a result, and that is to the benefit of everyone.”

Moocs are just one example of an explosion of both formal and informal online learning enabled over the past two to three years by advances in technology. Professors teaching campus-based degree courses are increasingly “flipping” courses, giving students video recordings of their traditional lectures in advance and then using classroom time for discussion.

The product design videos Prof Ulrich prepared for his Mooc are now used in his campus-based courses and

he says it has increased efficiency. “I’d like to see a third to a half of the learning part [of an MBA course] delivered online.”

In Europe, business schools such as IE in Spain and Warwick in the UK have taught online MBA programmes alongside their highly ranked full-time programmes.

Now, top schools in the US, such as Kenan-Flagler at the University of North Carolina with its MBA@UNC, are validating the online mode of delivery.

Not a month goes by without a business school announcing an online

degree. Baylor University in Texas will be teaching its MBA programme online from May, and the business school at Imperial College in London, will launch its online MBA in January 2015.

Moocs rely on technology platforms that are developed by outside companies such as Coursera, but many business schools are looking at developing in-house platforms. At Imperial College, for example, Anand Anandalingam, dean of the business school, says its programme will be supported by the school’s own technology group.

Prof Anandalingam, formerly dean

at the Smith school at the University of Maryland, says the technology is “state of the art compared with anything I have seen in the US. Students get a rich learning environment”.

He believes the programme will prove popular globally with those who value the Imperial brand, but are deterred from studying on-campus because of high living costs in London. However, at £30,000, the fees are comparable to Imperial’s London-based EMBA, making this a premium online degree.

“It’s not a discount programme.”

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Alumni poll

What graduates wish they had known before their MBA studies began

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Business Education Online

Financial Times Online MBA 2014
The top 15 online MBA programmes

Rank	Business school	Country	Programme name	Alumni career progress					Online delivery		Programme diversity					Idea generation			Additional notes						
				Salary today (US\$)	Salary increase (%)	Value for money rank	Career progress rank	Aims achieved rank	Career service rank	Programme delivery rank	Online interaction rank	Women faculty (%)	Women students (%)	Women board (%)	International faculty (%)	International students (%)	International board (%)	International mobility rank	Faculty with doctorates (%)	FT doctoral rank	FT research rank	Course fee (local currency)	Average time to complete (years)*	Online teaching materials (%)	Rank in 2014
1	IE Business School	Spain	Global MBA+ Blended	136,034	42	7	6	4	12	8	5	34	30	28	55	90	82	1	95	5	7	€43,200	1.3	96	1
2	Warwick Business School	UK	Warwick MBA by Distance Learning	133,785	32	4	3	3	8	10	11	36	25	12	76	58	12	2	100	1	4	£22,500	3.5	100	2
3	Northeastern University: D'Amore-McKim	US	D'Amore-McKim Online MBA	141,692	38	9	4	13	3	7	7	31	39	17	19	3	4	10	90	13	5	\$69,300	2	100	3
4	University of Florida: Hough	US	Internet MBA	107,635	45	6	10	1	2	1	1	23	31	12	20	1	0	14	89	4	2	\$50,600	2	85	4
5	Indiana University: Kelley	US	Online MBA	124,494	25	11	11	8	5	2	3	22	23	21	26	22	4	7	81	6	1	\$62,900	2.5	95	5
6	Durham University Business School	UK	Global MBA	123,658	44	1	2	2	14	15	15	37	26	42	59	63	37	3	95	3	10	£19,000	3.5	100	6
7	Babson College: Olin	US	Babson MBA Blended Learning Programme	146,636	20	15	8	14	6	6	6	29	28	15	17	2	12	8	83	13	10	\$77,200	2	72	7
8	Thunderbird School of Global Management	US	Global MBA Online	100,000	25	14	7	6	9	4	2	34	32	24	32	30	36	5	91	13	10	\$69,800	2	80	8
9	Syracuse University: Whitman	US	iMBA	119,736	27	13	12	10	13	3	4	30	29	11	21	10	0	12	76	10	6	\$70,800	3	94	9
10	Arizona State University: Carey	US	Carey Online MBA	108,221	24	10	9	5	11	11	10	25	24	6	24	1	1	11	89	2	2	\$54,600	2	100	10
11	Bradford University School of Management	UK	Distance Learning MBA	96,503	30	3	1	15	4	9	12	39	33	36	30	76	36	4	86	7	13	£13,500	3	100	11
12	University of Nebraska-Lincoln	US	University of Nebraska-Lincoln Distance MBA	123,000	30	2	14	12	15	12	8	31	19	20	8	7	0	13	98	9	8	\$25,600	3	100	12
13	Open University Business School	UK	MBA	102,272	23	5	13	11	10	14	14	46	36	21	35	48	36	6	74	11	14	£17,100	4	100	13
14	Drexel University: LeBow	US	MBA Anywhere	98,000	29	12	15	9	1	13	13	35	36	17	32	7	0	15	80	8	9	\$64,000	2	85	14
15	Centrum Católica	Peru	Virtual Managerial MBA	78,106	14	8	5	7	7	5	9	17	21	31	30	10	85	9	80	12	14	S/64,500	3	90	15

* Data in these columns are for information only and are not used in the rankings

Students plot a positive course

Survey A majority of alumni found the MBA a worthwhile experience, reports *Laurent Ortman*

It has never been easier to learn. While distance learning programmes are nothing new, advances in information technologies have made e-learning available to an unprecedented number of students.

The 2014 inaugural Financial Times ranking of online MBA programmes recognises that "online" offers a credible alternative to "residential". Fifteen business schools from four countries are included in this ranking.

The FT ranking is based on two surveys of the business schools and their alumni who graduated in 2010. MBA programmes are assessed according to the career progression of their alumni, the school's "idea generation" and the diversity of its students and faculty.

The ranking also includes two criteria specific to online programmes. Alumni were asked to rate how well their programme was delivered online and the level of interaction participants experienced with the academic staff.

Spain's IE Business School takes the top spot of this new ranking with its "Global MBA Blended" programme. It came in third place for both the average salary of its alumni three years after graduation (\$136,000) and the salary increase since graduation (42 per cent).

IE also took top spot for the international mobility of its participants and their international diversity.

Alumni were full of praise for their programme. Jorge Picon, a senior manager based in Canada, says: "Despite some prejudices about online programmes, it proved to be a great experience with a lot of interaction between colleagues and teachers, building strong relationships that are still active. The programme was also extremely demanding."

However, career service was singled

Class of 2010

Profile of participants

When starting MBA programme

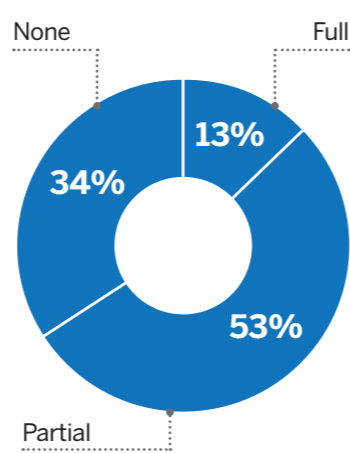
Age **34**
Female **20%**

Seniority
Professional (67%)

Sector of industry
IT/Telecoms (18%)

Financial support

Level of financial support (sponsorship and scholarship)



Main motivations

Motivations (out of 10) ... and achievement (%)

Management development	8.8	95%
Increased earnings	7.9	88%
Promotion within company	7.0	73%
Networking	6.7	78%

Salaries (\$, PPP adjusted)

Three years after graduation ... and salary increase since graduation

Female	\$98,000	26%
Male	\$119,000	28%
All participants	\$116,000	28%

Source: FT data

out as an area needing improvement.

The UK's Warwick Business School and D'Amore-McKim School of Business at Northeastern University in the US complete the top podium. Centrum Católica from Peru comes in at number 15.

Compared with full-time MBAs, online MBAs offer flexibility and allow participants to fit the programme round work, family and social life.

However, "online" does not mean a quick and easy route to an MBA degree. It is recommended students study for a minimum of 15 to 20 hours a week on top of their full-time jobs.

As one graduate said: "The programme was challenging in terms of time management and was possible thanks to a flexible approach to learning and online resources".

Selection for online and full-time students differs and the profile of participants varies significantly.

Online students are chosen primarily for their professional experience. They are expected to contribute to the programme and share their knowledge.

As a result, online students are more senior than full-time MBA students attending the top schools in the FT Global MBA rankings. One-third of

Eighty per cent of respondents achieved three or four goals

online MBA respondents said they held senior manager or higher level positions before beginning their course, against 15 per cent of respondents to the FT MBA 2014 survey.

At 34, online MBA participants are about six years older when they begin than those on full-time campus-based MBAs.

Finally, online students come from a broader range of industries: only 18 per cent were in finance/banking or consultancy before they began their programme compared with 38 per cent for their full-time counterparts.

Online students want to develop their management skills. This differs markedly from their campus-based counterparts, who primarily enrol on full-time degrees in order to increase earnings.

Increasing their earnings came a distant second. Getting promoted within their company or developing strong business networks were also important, coming third and fourth.

Were they successful? Three years after graduation, 80 per cent of respondents achieved three or all four goals and 92 per cent achieved their main ambitions.

"My MBA helped me achieve a fast-track career", says one happy alum-

nus. Three years after graduation, the average alumnus is a 40-year-old senior manager working in IT/telecoms on a salary of \$116,000, an increase of 28 per cent since graduating.

Online MBA programmes market themselves on their worldwide reach. Some 90 per cent of IE Business School's students reside outside Spain, while more than 50 per cent of students registered with UK schools do not live in the UK.

However, only 9 per cent of students registered with US schools reside outside the country. Seven out of nine US schools have 10 per cent or fewer international students.

Only the US-based Thunderbird School of Global Management and the Kelley School of Business at Indiana University have a significant proportion of international students, 30 per cent and 22 per cent, respectively.

Most "online" programmes are not delivered completely online. They include some face-to-face learning and team working.

New York's Whitman School of Management at Syracuse University, for example, requires three on-campus residencies a year and therefore draws a larger number of students from the domestic market.

Teaching revolution gathers pace

Continued from Page 1

says the dean, insisting it will have the same level of teaching and service as campus-based degrees. With intakes in January and August, Prof Anandalingam says the programme will support 200 students a year. Idalene Kesner, dean of Indiana University's Kelley School of Business, which launched its distance learning MBA in 1999, believes the market for online degrees will continue to grow in spite of the increased competition from Moocs. Her school has

launched targeted Moocs available free to business school graduates and the plan is to extend this service to the 580,000 alumni from Indiana University.

"We have a ready-made audience," she says.

Prof Kesner believes that the certification delivered by degree programmes will be the differentiating factor, and envisages a growing market for certified online learning for executives on shorter programmes that could build into a degree or other formal qualification.

Such systems are in place at some UK universities,

but there are obstacles. At Ashridge, Tony Sheehan, director of learning services, believes the biggest stumbling block to the certification of online programmes will be the regulatory framework.

"We take the latest technology and look at it through a 19th century lens. We have to iterate rather than innovate to comply," he says.

"It's a continual challenge and I think it is a global one," he continues, adding that, as a result, "it is in the [non-degree] executive education space that we do

more radical experiments".

There are other obstacles to overcome, in particular ensuring that those who enrol on programmes complete them.

At Harvard, Prof Herzlinger is experimenting with what she calls a "dating service" to match teams of between four and seven participants so they can work together on business plans for healthcare.

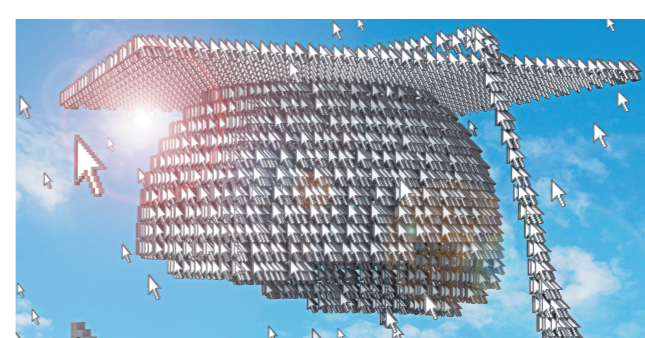
The 100 teams with the best plans will then form an exclusive group that will be eligible for a small private online course - or Spoc to use the latest jargon.

Engagement is just one of many problems to be resolved in this new online world. Who owns the copyright for these programmes? Who bears the costs of production? And how are professors paid?

Prof Ulrich says that developing Moocs is labour-intensive, although at the University of Pennsylvania the fee for developing a Mooc is just \$15,000.

"We relied on the fact that most faculty were not motivated by money but were motivated by fame," he says.

The move appears to have



been successful, and as he concedes, "I've used that video in eight courses, so maybe it was a good investment of my time."

The big-brand schools are

confident that Moocs will not replace or threaten their flagship programmes such as the MBA.

The consumers of Moocs are very different from tra-

ditional business students, says Prof Ulrich. "It's an adult learner who just needs to know something," he says.

At Harvard, more than 40 per cent of those registered for the healthcare Mooc hold a masters, professional, or doctoral degree.

But Prof Ulrich also says that the selling-point of top schools is the total experience, not just content delivery.

"Learning about net present value is not going to be a differentiating factor for the Wharton school."

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Relationships take on fresh meaning in interactive academia

Networking

Charlotte Clarke

looks at the ups and downs of developing online contacts

Business school is as much about building a network of contacts as it is about mastering discounted cash flow or Michael Porter's Five Forces. So, can online MBA programmes deliver the same quality of networking experience as their campus-based rivals?

Technology is clearly sufficiently sophisticated, says Kshitij Gopal, an MBA student at the National University of Singapore.

"Technology has got to a stage where it is almost as personal as it can get," he says.

Mr Gopal recently wrote about his experiences at business school in an FT blog. "There are some students who approach networking with a fervent zeal that is usually reserved for troops going into battle – they have a game plan, study the invitees and their backgrounds and go in armed with more questions than a subcommittee."

However, opinion is still divided as to whether an online programme can deliver the same wealth of contacts and support as a face-to-face programme.

Linda Groarke, an MBA student at the UK's Open University Business School, is benefiting from the experience.

"My group at the moment is fantastic – lots of chatter, plus an enthusiastic and helpful tutor who's always asking thought-provoking

questions that conjure up conversation and dialogue," she says.

But, she adds: "Others [say] their tutor groups are like ghost towns with tumbleweed blowing through them."

Phil Powell, faculty chair of the Kelley Direct online MBA programme at Indiana University's Kelley School of Business, believes the success of online networking depends on the strategy used by the business school.

If online programmes copy templates used on campus to guide students, they will fail, he says, in the same way that teaching online fails when you try to recreate the structure used in the physical classroom.

The strategy used at Kelley starts with an assessment of students' networking skills. Students are invited to campus for a

week at the beginning of the programme, when they are reminded of the importance of networking.

Then they are given exercises to complete online. These give the school a sense of where they are in their networks. Career coaches are then brought in to work with them online at the speed they wish.

Prof Powell says: "Our online programme is a hop-on, hop-off model [spanning two to five years], so we have stages of developing business acumen, but students take them at their own pace, which varies."

"This gives more power to the students, as they can say 'don't put us in a strait-jacket, meet us where we are.'" Prof Powell believes that is a good thing. He thinks students of residential programmes should use the same approach.

Françoise Dany, dean of the faculty and vice-president of EMLyon Business School in France, thinks online networking could become extremely effective because of its sense of anonymity. "The very fact that

a common shared expertise to build trust," she says.

But other professors disagree. Evgeny Kaganer, professor of information systems at Iese Business School in Spain, says: "At this stage, it's difficult for an online programme to deliver the networks that are equivalent to that of face-to-face programmes."

"People form deep relationships through shared experiences, and face-to-face is still best for allowing the rich interactions and experiences between students that facilitate those strong connections."

Neil Bearden, associate professor of decision science at Insead, which has campuses in France, Singapore and Abu Dhabi, also prefers networking in person. "From what I've seen, long-lasting, meaningful connections are made at

unpredictable times. These moments can happen when working together on a group assignment or they can happen when travelling together.

"Until students in online programmes start taking weekend trips to Cambodia together, I cannot see how they will form the same kinds of bonds people form when they're face-to-face."

"Helping a limping friend who's twisted her ankle down a mountain is more likely to create a meaningful bond than just about anything that can happen online," he says.

One thing online networking programmes do guarantee, however, is scale. People create bigger networks more easily, as they are not constrained by distance.

Murray Dalziel, director of the University of Liver-

pool Management School in the UK, is proud of this fact. "Our students benefit from being part of a global network with more than 10,500 students from 160 countries," he says.

Prof Dany, meanwhile, points to the benefits of Moocs. The EMLyon Mooc designed for entrepreneurs, for example, attracted a vast variety of participants.

"Their experience was so rich that we had the opportunity to discuss their own stories – about 200 – rather than working on case studies selected by the head of the programme," he says.

"In a nutshell, we found that the Mooc offered a very good quality of exchanges among a wide network of people sharing the same interest and volunteering to spend some free time on this programme."

Mobile learning revolution helps empower Africa

Soap box

GUY PFEFFERMANN

Demand for education is booming in Africa.

Its people are striving for personal growth and material improvement. What they may lack in material resources, they make up in an enormous thirst for learning, hence the exponential growth in online education.

Rebecca Stromeyer, founder of the annual eLearning Africa conference, says: "Over the past eight years, homegrown innovation and entrepreneurship have driven a boom in the sector".

In the case of business education, this may soon lead, counter-intuitively, to Africa becoming a global leader in mobile technological innovation.

While traditional high-cost business schools are struggling to cope with online and blended pedagogy, very soon thousands and then millions of Africans – many of their first-time learners – will be able to fit management learning into their hectic daily lives, at unprecedented low costs. How can that be?

In Africa, necessity is the mother of invention. Only three or four dozen quality business schools serve this potential market of more than a billion people.

Luckily, mobile phones have spread like wildfire and are now ubiquitous, with the fastest growth in broadband mobiles.

In 2001, about 25m people in Africa had a mobile phone subscription; by 2013, that number had ballooned to 780m. The innovation revolution that began in Kenya with mobile financial transactions is spreading across the continent. The next wave of mobile technology-enabled innovation will be mobile learning.

This has not caught on in high-income countries, where nearly everyone has access to computers and broadband. In sharp contrast, in Africa mobile learning is the only practical way to sidestep huge physical and computing infrastructure deficits, and so allow busy people to learn wherever they happen to be at incredibly low cost.

Mobile learning solutions have the potential to combine scalability, very broad geographical availability, very low unit costs, and the flexibility required to adapt to life in Africa.

To achieve their promise, mobile learning solutions will require:

- suitable technological platforms;
- mobile-friendly locally relevant content and pedagogy;
- and sound business models.

These have

Pioneers' progress: Guy Pfeffermann sees education for millions

come together in Africa. For example, in Nigeria, the continent's most populous country, Tunji Adegbesan, a social entrepreneur who teaches strategy at Lagos Business School, is this month launching Gidimo – a mobile server for learning, entertainment and connection.

In partnership with the Pan-Atlantic University's Enterprise Development Center, Gidimo will offer a basic management course, complete with videos of locally developed case studies, group discussions and reading materials, available on any mobile phone – smart or not – or tablet anywhere in Africa with a network signal.

They are also working with Nigeria's Nollywood – the second largest movie industry in the world by number of films made annually – to create low-cost mobile video teaching cases. One seven-minute example shows various ways of handling dissatisfied customers.

Such "bite-sized" materials focus on the most crucial and relevant business topics for African entrepreneurs.

Gidimo's business model also sets an innovative example. Private investors initially funded a world-class platform with very low marginal costs. Low variable costs make scaling economical.

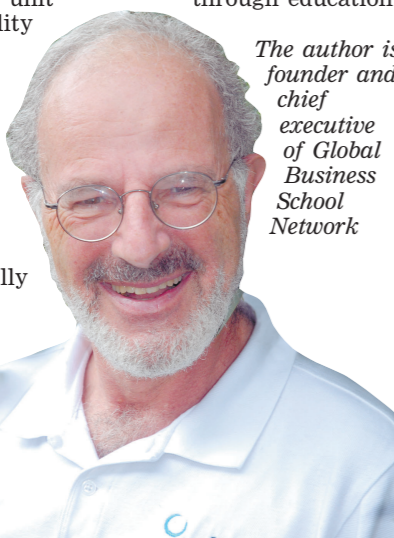
Different courses will be offered to high-value users, such as professionals or students cramming for tests. They would be charged more, while prices for poorer users or their partners will be much lower.

Other such mobile learning initiatives are springing up. As these initiatives grow and mature, they have the potential to reach millions of youths and small business owners, women and men. Providing access to quality, practical education on that scale will be the biggest quantum jump in education since the spread of Gutenberg's printing press five centuries ago.

As a development economist dedicated to expanding access to quality business education across the developing world, I am eager to follow these pioneers' progress.

They are seizing this exciting moment in history to help drive economic growth in Africa by empowering people through education.

The author is founder and chief executive of Global Business School Network



Options A new world beckons for those not able to attend class, writes Emma Boyde

Far away from the debate about whether online learning can ever match the classroom experience is a group of people for whom online is king. For them, the nearest tertiary institution of any quality is too distant or too expensive, or both – making attending in person logistically and financially prohibitive.

To be able to access a quality online programme is a big plus.

One such student was Brenda Phiri, who is now an assistant manager, back office, in the Bank of Zambia, Zambia's central bank.

The 33-year-old mother of two had been working with Deloitte & Touche as an accountant in the audit department when she decided she needed to return to her studies.

"I realised I was lacking in certain skills and I decided I had to upscale myself," she explains.

Ms Phiri decided to pursue an MBA. However, to gain a degree from a respected school, it looked as though she would have to go abroad. It was not a decision she relished. To begin with, she did not want to leave her children. And she could not afford to give her up her job. Finally, the sheer cost of the fees and the cost of supporting herself made the overseas option impossible.

"Then I came across Heriot-Watt," Ms Phiri says, referring to the online MBA offered by Edinburgh Business School, part of Heriot-Watt University in Scotland. EBS offers MBAs, MScs and DBAs (Doctor of Business Administration) and has been specialising in distance learning for 20 years. The school has developed programmes that allow students to study at their own pace, paying for each module when they are ready to begin it.

The business school has about 11,500 students, about half of whom are studying online. Of the total, 3,700 are studying in Africa. Ms Phiri is one of nearly 400 graduates in Zambia.

Alick Kitchin, joint head of school at EBS, says students in Africa pay £550 per course, a rate that has stayed the same for nearly a decade. Students then apply to sit an invigilated or "proctored" (verified) exam when they feel they have mastered a partic-



ular course and pay a fee of £125 per exam.

For Ms Phiri this type of course beat all other options. She could continue to work and spend time with her family. It also gave her the flexibility to study at her own pace and spread the cost of her course over a time period of her choosing.

"Basically, for me I mainly read on my own. It was quite a marathon," Ms Phiri says. But she did attend classroom sessions in Lusaka for the economics module, as she had never studied the subject before. EBS offers students the option of classroom tuition in approved centres.

Studying on her own, as she did for the majority of her modules, was not difficult, Ms Phiri says, because she had become accustomed to independent study while qualifying as an accountant. She says EBS encourages students to network with one another through the school's online portal. She was also able to meet up with students who lived in Lusaka who were studying for an MBA at the same time as she was.

For Ms Phiri, the greatest advantage of the MBA was that it opened doors. She says the MBA from Edinburgh Business School is well regarded in Zambia and was crucial to her gaining her job at the Bank of Zambia in 2012.

"At the time I applied for the job,

Bank of Zambia required a masters degree," she explains, adding that the bank was impressed with the qualifications she had gained from EBS.

Bank of Zambia may have been swayed by the MBA, but it must also have been impressed with Ms Phiri's other achievements. In 2010, she was invited to participate in US President Barack Obama's forum with young African leaders held in Washington DC. She was one of three Zambians who attended the event. "Even when I was nominated, I thought it was too good to be true," she says.

The same year she was selected by the World Bank to attend a young African leaders conference on strengthening responsible business and governance, held in Brussels. That event led to the formation of the Young Africa Business Trust and later to her helping co-ordinate the participation of young professionals in the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act conference in 2011.

"This very busy time in her life coincided with finishing her studies with EBS. Ms Phiri says she finished her general MBA in 2010, but went on to do two "specialisations" with EBS, one in finance and the other in strategic planning.

"I think it's good the way I have done it, because it has given me the chance to be with my family. Now



Family friendly: (above) Brenda Phiri with husband Musongo and daughters Nkwanjwa (left) and Ngambo; (below) Meeting US president Barack Obama

'I mainly read on my own. It was quite a marathon'

they are able to see the fruits of my labour."

Ms Phiri does not intend to rest on her laurels. She says her recent commitments outside work have included serving on the board of Restless Development, a youth-led development agency. She has also been a member of the ACCA Zambia ambassador programme and is a volunteer member of a group that cares for mothers and children who are in prison.

She has also set her sights on a further distance learning qualification. Ms Phiri is thinking of a DBA, also available as a distance learning programme through EBS.

The one thing she is certain about, however, is that she will be looking for a course that she can study online.

Join in on FT.com

Online Q&A

On Wednesday March 12, at 14.00-15.00 GMT, a panel of experts will answer questions about online MBAs

www.ft.com/ask/onlinemba

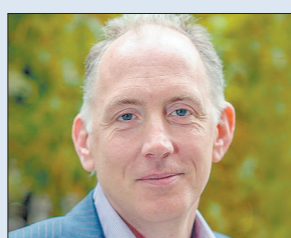
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Dean of the Kenan-Flagler school, University of North Carolina



Simon Nelson

Chief executive of FutureLearn, the UK Mooc platform



Mark Taylor

Dean of Warwick Business School in the UK



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Business Education Online

Learning becomes a joy again

Moocs The FT's *Barney Thompson* has fallen for the intellectual charms of the mass classroom

Some people finish work and go to the gym, or hit the sofa and watch TV, or compose symphonies, paint portraits, create apps, write poetry. Me, I Mooc. Since I discovered Moocs – massive open online courses – six months ago, I have become a Moocaholic.

Scrolling down Mooc providers' course lists gives me that child-in-a-sweet-shop feeling – a giddiness that explains in part the somewhat scattered nature of my selections.

I have taken Coursera's The Power of Macroeconomics, a 12-week course provided in conjunction with the University of California Irvine, and Central Challenges of American National Security, Strategy and the Press: An Introduction, an eight-week course from the Harvard branch of edX.

I am currently in the middle of the more lugubriously entitled ChinaX, a series of modules spread over 15 months – a commitment I completely failed to notice when I signed up. And I'm about to start The Analytics Edge, an edX/MITX 11-week course in handling big data.

But I'm tempted by dozens more – Shakespeare and his World, Networks, Crowds and Markets, Applied Cryptography, The Greatest Unsolved Mysteries of the Universe, although I draw the line at An Introduction to Aeronautical Engineering or Discover Dentistry.

Given this reckless, wide-eyed attitude, I try to apply two rules: any Mooc I study must be relevant to my employment – actual or desired – and I am allowed to take no more than two at a time. But, even then, it has been hard to keep up.

Central Challenges of American National Security called for two 600-word memos to the US secretary of state outlining what American policy should be on Iran and Syria, and one to the editor of a fictional newspaper recommending what to do with a WikiLeaks-style dump of secret documents on North Korea.

Each had to be done in three days and each was accompanied by about 70-80 pages worth of reading material, plus video lectures and online discussions. It is not easy fitting all that in around your job when you have a professor from the University of Cali-



Addicted: Barney Thompson says some Moocs are little more than infodumps; others stimulate and provoke

Dave Parry

fornia Irvine coming at you from another direction with his lectures on the components of the Keynesian Expenditure Function or the factors shifting the aggregate supply curve.

I have had to adjust the pattern of my day to fit it all in. Choosing the longest possible commute, for example, to win more time to read, watch and listen to all the material I download on to my tablet. Using my lunch breaks and a few late nights have helped me keep up with the work, but not without some nasty grinding of mental gears. And, as with any new material, one needs to find the time to revise if it is to stick.

If Moocs had not evolved, I would have given up: The Power of Macroeconomics, for instance, was basically a weekly hour-long lecture split into five or six chunks accompanied by some PowerPoint slides and rounded off with a short test. Given these constraints, the amount of information it packed in was both overwhelming and

unappealing. (To make matters worse, I was trying and failing to learn shorthand at the same time, with the result that my notes are incomprehensible where they are not indecipherable.)

But ChinaX is an entirely different animal. It uses video lectures, readings, interviews, footage from Harvard's classrooms, multiple choice

For those who are hungry to learn, Moocs are where the feast is

quizzes and discussion forums, annotated texts, songs, drawings, artefacts and maps over which you can lay kingdoms, populations, trade routes, rivers and so on. It is hugely imaginative and innovative, and when one week's work is done, I find myself impatient for the next.

What started as a mission to plug a gaping hole in my knowledge of the world has become learning for the sheer joy of it; the next two weeks' topics, the poetry and calligraphy of the Tang Dynasty, are unlikely ever to be of any practical use, but I do not care. ChinaX beats any component of my formal education hands down.

I suspect this is why dropout rates for Moocs are so high: some are little more than infodumps; others stimulate, provoke and encourage, and you cannot know how it will be until you try them out. But when you find one that works, you gain access to knowledge and skills that a few years ago would have required a trip to night school – which might have been half-way across town – or a lonely wrestle with a pile of textbooks.

The naysayers are wrong. Whatever your motive – life-long learning or upgrading the CV – for those who are hungry to learn, Moocs are where the feast is.

Schools choosy of company they keep

Brand appeal

Concern for their reputation for rigour and quality has seen top institutions proceed with care, says *Adam Palin*

The rise of online alternatives to campus-based learning presents a threat to established providers of higher education. Incumbents face the challenge of engaging in online delivery – which continues to be seen as an inferior product – without undermining their reputations for rigour and quality.

Top business schools have held back from competing with large-scale, low-cost online MBA providers such as the University of Phoenix. Instead, many have launched select online programmes that adopt the same content and standards as their campus-based counterparts.

The Kenan-Flagler business school at the University of North Carolina and Carnegie Mellon University's Tepper school are among those that have pioneered distance MBAs that use advanced technology to connect small student groups in an online classroom environment.

But many leading schools – particularly in the US – have been less cautious about embracing massive open online courses (Moocs). As non-degree courses, they are by no means a substitute for degrees. However, by making high-level content available on demand and free, Moocs do represent a disruption to higher education.

While the University of Virginia's Darden School of Business has yet to deliver an online degree, it has been an early mover in creating Moocs. Six of the school's courses are offered on Coursera, the largest Mooc platform by number of students.

Peter Rodriguez, senior associate dean for degree programmes at Darden, says: "Fear of brand dilution was deeply ingrained in our thinking on online strategy."

He says Darden's brand has been safeguarded by not offering degree credits or equivalent on its online courses, and by emphasising differences with campus programmes. "Joining Coursera took the risk out of Moocs, from a brand perspective... [as] we are comfortable with association with the top schools present." Coursera's partners include

the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton school and Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management.

For IE Business School, one of the small but growing number of leading European business schools to launch Moocs, the consideration of brand was important to platform choice, says Martin Boehm, dean of programmes.

It was crucial that Coursera had partner universities with which IE was happy to be associated, says Prof Boehm. He compares platform membership with airline alliances, which are very cautious and selective in extending membership.

For Robert Jones, a brand consultant and professor at the University of East Anglia in the UK, universities' brands are increasing in importance as international competition for students rises. Being seen to be among the first to venture into Moocs has been viewed positively, he says.

Not only do Moocs enhance schools' international presence, says Prof Jones, but being seen to be generous with content is good for their reputation.


'Fear of brand dilution was deeply ingrained in our thinking on online strategy'

Prof Boehm says that employing these courses as a means of allowing universal access to top research, content and faculty for no fee "probably helps the brand".

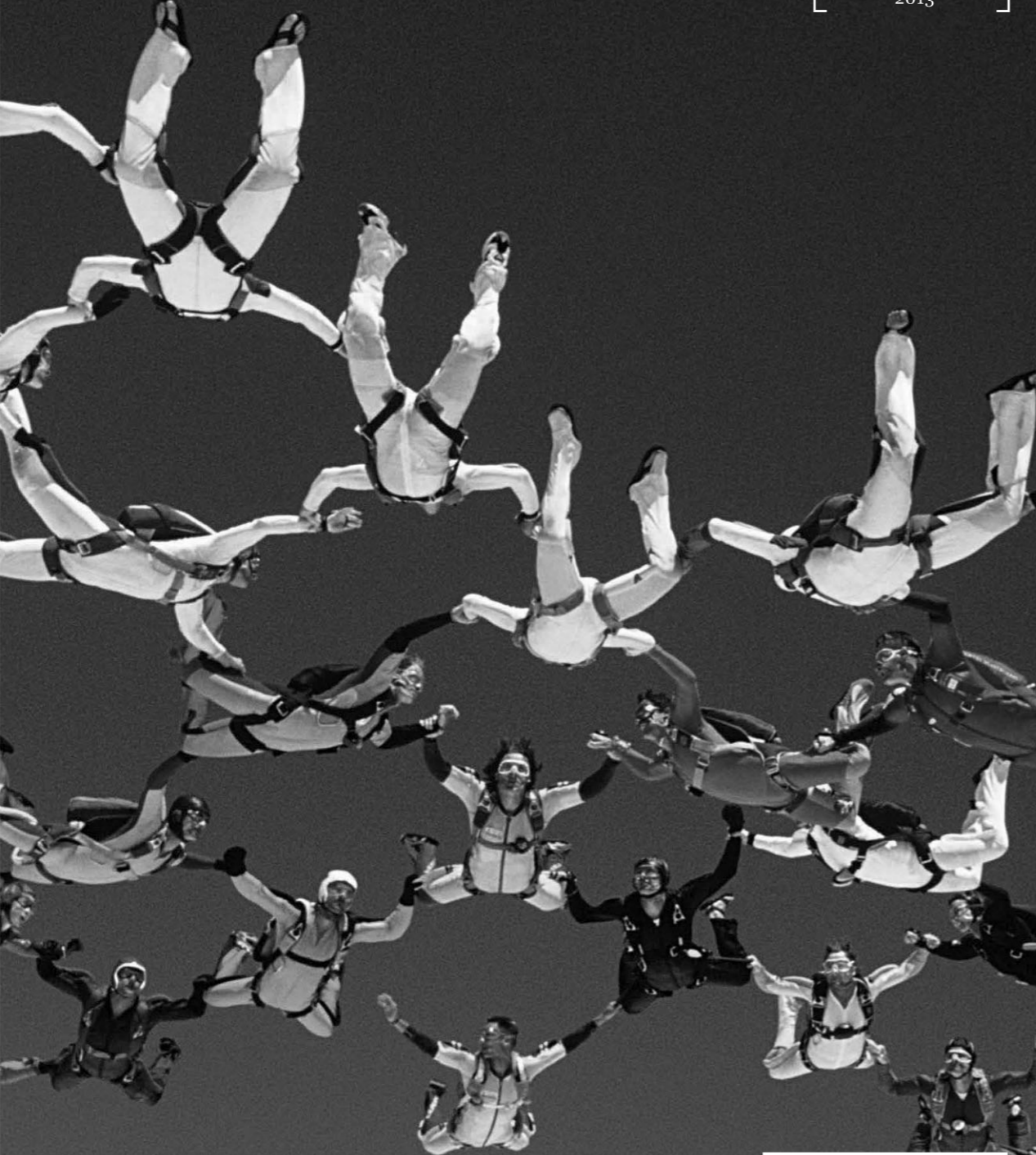
He contrasts the selective approach of leading business schools with those for whom online delivery offers a way of lowering costs. "It's different for institutions that are trying to launch entire degree programmes through Moocs," he says, believing it will undermine reputations and brands, as Moocs are poor substitutes for face-to-face programmes – as shown by low student engagement levels to date.

Mike Boxall, a higher education expert at PA Consulting, highlights top schools' decision to launch Moocs through platforms rather than on their own.

Prof Rodriguez at Darden says that partnering with a platform was based on what Coursera could offer the university. "They did lots of the heavy lifting at the start," he says.



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


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Young students from developing countries are still in the minority

Access

Educated middle class citizens are the norm, reports *Adam Palin*

Massive open online courses, or Moocs, have promised to throw open access to university-level content.

By offering online courses on demand and without charge, Moocs give students anywhere in the world the chance to learn irrespective of their circumstances – so long as they have an internet connection.

Anant Agarwal, president of edX – a non-profit Mooc platform founded by Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) – emphasises their capacity for "incredible democratisation of education". Every country is represented among the platform's 1.9m learners, who are "from all walks of life... all ages and qualifications", he says.

Prof Agarwal concedes, however, that, despite the potential, two years after their launch, Moocs are far from achieving their target of universal franchise.

Among students who have enrolled on edX courses, 72 per cent are university graduates. Almost one-third (31 per cent) have masters degrees, and a further 7 per cent doctorates.

Students enrolled on courses offered by Coursera, a Mooc platform that boasts more than 6.6m

users, are similarly qualified – 77 per cent have a university degree, with 43 per cent educated to masters level or above. The average age of Coursera's students is 37 years.

Moreover, the majority of students live in developed countries. The US accounts for 28 per cent and 29 per cent of Coursera and edX participants, respectively.

A working paper published last year by the University of Pennsylvania, an early partner of Coursera, examined the student population of its first 32 courses. "The individuals the Mooc revolution is supposed to help the most, those without access to higher education in developing countries, are conspicuously under-represented," the authors concluded.

Harvard and MIT conducted a similar study of the student demographic on edX courses. Andrew Ho, an associate professor in Harvard's Graduate School of Education and one of the report's authors, says it is not surprising that the well-educated form the majority of participants.

Gayle Christensen, executive director for global initiatives at the University of Pennsylvania, concurs, noting that most participants have been well educated and tech-savvy.

Pennsylvania's survey of its Mooc students found that the most cited reason for enrolment was curiosity. Half of respondents reported that they chose to join one of the university's courses "just for fun".

That the main beneficiar-

ies of Moocs to date have been educated recreational learners is contentious, particularly as the costs of developing courses have been partially shouldered by the universities offering them, rather than consumers of the content.

Diana Laurillard, professor of learning at the Institute of Education, part of the University of London, is dismissive of the "hype" about Moocs transforming access to higher education.

She sees the free provision of these courses by universities as "irrational" in the context of high and rising tuition costs for undergraduates in the US,

Participants are mainly recreational learners who are capable of paying for education

the UK and elsewhere.

"These courses are being taken largely by competent learners... who often have plenty of money and are capable of paying for education," she says.

Despite the number of educated recreational students, universities and platforms emphasise the capacity of Moocs to connect with very large numbers who would otherwise be beyond their reach.

EdX says about 48 per cent of its students come from developing countries. India accounts for 12 per cent of enrolments.

The University of Pennsylvania's analysis indicates significantly higher engagement by younger learners in big developing countries. Nearly two-thirds (63 per cent) of students in Brazil, China, India and Russia are under 30. Among US students, under-30s only account for 24 per cent of those enrolling.

There is also circumstantial evidence that engagement levels may be higher in countries where significant shifts in employment are under way. Harvard and MIT found that the rates of optional certification for their courses were highest in Spain and Greece, two countries where unemployment exceeds one in four.

Mike Kerrison, director of academic development at the University of London International Programmes, pointed to "the surprising number of students" from these countries on its Coursera courses as an illustration that "Moocs can provide opportunities to gain skills".

Prof Agarwal of edX points to the advanced content of early Moocs, and the absence of elementary courses, to explain the highly qualified study cohort on his platform.

"Initially, we did not think very carefully about who is taking our courses." Analysis of demographic data will allow providers to target specific groups.

A priority for the platform may well be to address the gender gap. Females currently account for only 29 per cent of students enrolled on edX courses.

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