

# Cultural Study through ASEAN Cyber University Project: the Case of LPRU Students

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**Abstract** - In recent years, MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) has been recognized as an emerging technology for eLearning. A prominent advantage of MOOC is that it provides online courses aimed at unlimited participation of learners worldwide and open access through the web. ASEAN Cyber University (ACU) establishment project is an international education project in which its main purpose is to contribute to reinforcing higher education in ASEAN region by trying to utilize the power of eLearning. This paper aims to: 1) provide a better insight into ASEAN Cyber University project; 2) reflect on LPRU learners' experiences through ACU LMS in general Korean culture course; and 3) reflect on researcher's experiences as a lecturer in the course of Dynamic Korea, Exciting Hallyu on underway ACU LMS. The research instruments used for collecting qualitative data from learners who were learning journals and writing essay. The content analysis was used as a tool to draw conclusions regarding learners' experiences from both the journal and the essay. The students reflected on course participation as valuable experiences to learn Korean culture through online materials. Also, it was their first time to participate in online learning and get certificates from the underway cyber university of ASEAN.

**Keywords** - E-Learning, Massive Open Online Course (MOOC), ASEAN Cyber University (ACU) Project, Cultural Study

## I. INTRODUCTION

It can be said that eLearning has transformed the way people learn as learning can happen anywhere at any time on any device. MOOC is a relatively recent phenomenon which transforms traditional form of eLearning as hyped by some as a "revolution" [1]. However, some argue that MOOC is not conceptually as revolutionary as it seems (e.g. [2]). In contrast, it is the next logical step in two increasingly growing phenomena: online learning, which has been growing since the start of the millennium [3], and open educational resources such as MIT. OpenCourseWare and iTunes U [4]. Also, MOOC is an extension of a model which is quite common in the online world: the idea of making profit by offering free things. Still, MOOC helps a university achieve its non-profit goals of offering knowledge to society and widening access to education [5]. Examples of both profit and non-profit MOOCs which gain reputation from learners worldwide are: Udacity established by Stanford University, edX founded by Harvard University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Coursera established by Stanford University.

Republic of Korea is responsible for implementing ASEAN Cyber University (ACU) project which is an educational project in which its main purpose is to contribute to reinforcing higher education in ASEAN region by utilizing the power of eLearning. The ACU

project is currently underway, but could offer certain amount of online programs and courses effectively using its own LMS. However, if the ACU project can enhance the characteristics of its LMS to MOOC, the project will contribute more to ASEAN community as it can reach a wide range of learners.

## II. RELATED WORK

MOOC is a revolutionary of eLearning which emerged around 2008 within the Open Educational Resources (OER) movement. In addition to traditional online courses which provide materials such as videos, and electronic documents, MOOC provides interactive user forums that help build a community for students, professors, and teaching assistants (TAs). MOOCs in the early age emphasized open access features such as open licensing content in order to promote reuse and remixing of resources. However, some later MOOCs use closed licensing content for their course materials while maintaining free access for students [6]. Classically, there are two types of MOOC which are: cMOOC and xMOOC. cMOOC, or connectivist MOOC, is built upon the learning theory of connectivism. That is, learning happens within a network, where learners use digital platforms such as blogs, wikis, and social media in order to make connections with content, learning communities, and other learners to create and construct knowledge. Typically, cMOOC is not sponsored or funded by higher education institutions, but is organized by individuals with a passion for a specific content area. On the other hand, xMOOC, or extended MOOC, is built upon content-based model. Thus, xMOOC is similar to traditional courses offered by higher education institutions except that it is made available via the web. Because of this characteristic, xMOOC was criticized by early MOOC creator, Stephen Downes, as “a resemblance of television shows or digital textbooks”. Recent MOOC developments such as Coursera, Udacity, and edX are considered to be xMOOCs. Another type of MOOC,

which is called vMOOC, has also been suggested. vMOOC stands for vocational MOOC and require simulations and related technologies to teach and assess practical skills and abilities. Regardless of types of MOOC, the main objectives of using MOOC to educate learners worldwide can be summarized as follows: 1) to offer quality education to the remote corners of the world; 2) to help people further their careers; and 3) to help people expand intellectual and personal networks with strong communities.

As for ASEAN Cyber University (ACU), the idea of establishing this project was firstly initiated by Dr. Surin Pitsuwan, former Secretary General of ASEAN, at the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of ASEAN – the Republic of Korea in June 2009 with the aim of promoting education cooperation and people-to-people exchange. As a result, two main objectives were formally set which are: 1) to bridge the development gap among ASEAN member states and to support ASEAN’s efforts for regional integration and 2) to promote education cooperation and people-to-people exchange. In order to achieve these goals, eLearning has been considered to be a powerful tool to exploit. ACU project has been implemented by Ministry of Education, ROK, and Seoul Cyber University. The initial member states of ACU are: Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam. However, Thailand has joined the project recently. In year 2014, ACU offered 8 certificate courses which are: 1) Introduction to Korean Language (Listening, Speaking, Reading); 2) Case Study of Socio-economic Development of Korea; 3) Operating System; 4) Use and Meaning of Color; 5) Basics in Smartphone Game Development; 6) Introduction to Civil Engineering; 7) eLearning Basic; and 8) Dynamic Korea, Exciting Hallyu.

Faculty of Education, Lampang Rajabhat University (LPRU) chose to run “Dynamic Korea, Exciting Hallyu” course as it was considered to be general and suitable for students to take part since it was a non-credit course in which the students had to spend extra

hours to study on their own. Also, it was considered that the students would gain benefits from their participation such as learning experiences through ACU LMS, cultural knowledge about Republic of Korea, and learning communities. The aims of the course are: 1) to familiarize learners to Korean daily culture through Hallyu keywords and culture; 2) to understand the fundamentals of Korean culture; and 3) to learn how to speak Korean by studying various situations and how to communicate appropriately.

### III. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This research aims to: 1) reflect on LPRU learners' experiences via ACU LMS in general Korean culture course and 2) reflect on researcher's experiences as a lecturer in the course of Dynamic Korea, Exciting Hallyu on underway ACU project.

### IV. DEFINITIONS

ACU LMS refers to a software application used for administration, documentation, tracking, reporting, and delivery of electronic education courses or training programs and is developed to be used among education institutions in member states of ASEAN Cyber University project.

### V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### A. Research Scope

The population of research was 11 LPRU students and 2 LPRU lecturers who volunteered to take part in this online course. The course started from 1<sup>st</sup> of October to 29<sup>th</sup> of November 2014 and consisted of 15 topics.

#### B. Research Instruments

The research instruments consisted of a learning journal and a writing essay. As for the journal, the learners were asked to write about their learning experiences through ACU LMS. For the essay, the learners were asked to write about what they like most in Korean culture and why?

### C. Data Collection and Analysis

The orientation for "Dynamic Korean, Exciting Hallyu" course was conducted on 29<sup>th</sup> of September 2014 to introduce the volunteer learners to ACU LMS (Fig. 1) and to get them registered. The course was continuously run for 8 weeks and the learners had to finish 2 video lectures each week so that they could finish the whole course on time. The learners were asked to do self-study in their free time and the course lecturer kept tracking the learners' progress regularly. A notice board was made available for the course and was used as an online communication channel between the learners and the lecturer apart from a face-to-face appointment. The facebook community for ACU students was also suggested to the learners. About two weeks prior to the end of the course, the learners were asked to write the learning journal and the essay.

Only five learners could complete the whole requirement of the course and the content analysis was used as a tool to draw conclusions from their writings. The results could be summarized as shown in the next section. As for other learners, those who are lecturers reported to be busy with their teaching in regular classes and other work. Thus, they could not take part in the course after their registration. For those who are students, they only attended the class (watching video lectures), but did not complete the writing tasks as they reported to have many assignments in their regular classes to complete.



Fig 1. ACU Learning Management System

## VI. RESEARCH RESULTS

### A. The Reflections of LPRU Learners towards ACU LMS

From the learning journals, generally, the learners reflected on their course participation as valuable experiences to learn Korean culture through online materials. To be specific, they reflected on their learning experiences through ACU LMS in two aspects: Korean culture and the LMS itself. For the first aspect, the learners reported to know more about general culture of Korea such as greeting manners, food, medical and health care, culture in campus, etc. For the aspect towards ACU LMS, the learners considered it as a “convenience” since learning could happen anywhere at any time. Also, there was a learner who reflected on the LMS as providing a chance to take part in a course held by a foreign country which was Korea in this case. Although, the learners reported to experience some problems when using the system; for example, some buttons could not be clicked, and some parts of the content could not be viewed. However, there was a learner who reflected on the content of the course interestingly. The learner wrote “...the content was interesting and well-designed. Also, tools which are necessary for learning (e.g. dictionary) were made available on the system and easy to access.

As for the essays, the learners were asked to write about what they like most in Korean culture and why? The details from the content analysis can be summarized as shown in Table I.

**TABLE I**  
**REFLECTIONS FROM WRITING ESSAYS**

S#	Favourite culture	Reasons
1	Greeting manners –bending	- National Korean culture
2	Tourist attractions e.g. <u>Andong Hahoe Village</u> , <u>Wolseong</u> , etc.	- Could learn history and traditional culture
3	Korean’s play culture and Korean culture at campus	- Fun and help could develop thinking skill
4	Korean food e.g. <u>Tteokbokki</u>	- Know how to cook quick and easy Korean food
5	Korean’s play culture and Korean medical and health care	- Korean games e.g. <u>Bbang 007</u> were fun - Traditional Korean medical and health care e.g. acupuncture treatment was interesting

As can be seen from the table, the learners could specify the culture in which they like most and provide reasons. The results confirm the issue of what they learned from their participation on ACU LMS. Also, some reasons show they were intrinsically motivated to learn the content such as “...it was fun and help develop thinking skill...”, and “Korean games e.g. Bbang 007 were fun”.

### B. The Reflection of me as a Course Lecturer in Dynamic Korea, Exciting Hallyu on ACU LMS

Based on my role as a lecturer for this online course, I would reflect on it as a “great experience” since I had to establish a process for running the course. The committee for ACU certificate course was set up and the course orientation was conducted. I, personally, faced some difficulties during the running period of the course such as other teaching workloads, making appointments with students and problems with the LMS itself (e.g. the suitable assessment criteria, technical problems with the LMS). At the end, it was great though when I saw what the learners reflected on their learning journal

because they could learn a lot from this 8-week online course apart from the certificates in which some of them would receive from the ACU project.

## VII. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

It could be said that the aims of research were achieved. The reflections were done by both the learners and researcher and they reflected on their participation as worthy experiences. The learners reported to have a better insight into Korean culture and felt fun, especially when it came to the topic of Korean's play culture. Also, there was a learner stating in her essay that every topic appeared in the course is attractive in itself. However, they faced some difficulties when learning through the system. Similarly, the researcher reported to have a good experience, but get struggle with some problems when running the course such as other teaching workloads and technical problems like Thai translation. In sum, the ACU LMS could function well in general. The content of the course is attractive and well-designed. It can be said that the project has made a contribution to students in Faculty of Education, Lampang Rajabhat University, in the aspect of learning apart from certificates in which the learners who complete all course requirements will receive from the ACU project. However, if the major aim of the project is to contribute to reinforce higher education in ASEAN region. The upgrade development from LMS to MOOC may be considered as important since MOOC will provide more open access and can reach a wide range of learners in ASEAN community. xMOOC may be considered as the appropriate model used for this upgrade development because according to the literature described in section II., xMOOCs are built upon content-based model and thus, they are more similar to traditional courses offered by higher education institutions except that they are made available through the web. Also, some features may be considered to be added on ACU MOOC (if it will be about to develop) such as interactive forum, peer and self assessment, electronic certificates, and so

on similar to other xMOOCs like Coursera which is very well-known among global online learners.

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