2020 Global MOOC Conference
<u>INVITATION LETTER</u>
REGISTRATION & CALL FOR INPUT REGARDING
BEIJING DECLARATION ON MOOC DEVELOPMENT

Dear colleague,

On behalf of Tsinghua University and UNESCO IITE, it is our honor to formally invite you to virtually attend the 2020 Global MOOC Conference. The main conference (high-level segment) is on December 11, 2020, from 20:00 to 22:30 Beijing local time, and four sub-forums will be held on December 9 and 10, from 17:00 to 22:00 Beijing Local time. The event will be hosted both virtually (for overseas participants) and onsite in Beijing, People's Republic of China.

In response to global educational challenges and opportunities presented by the age of internet, virtual interconnectivity, and most recently the global pandemic, the Global MOOC Conference aims to bring together world-leading universities and online education platforms across all geographical regions at this unprecedented time. With the theme "Learning Revolution and Higher Education Transformation", the *Conference* aims to:

- promote good practices and resources of MOOC development and online education,
- explore the role of technology in shaping the future of higher education,
- encourage international cooperation on educational technology innovation, and
- raise awareness for the inclusion and equity in education for achieving the UN SDG 4.

Please visit our website (https://mooc.global) for more details and to register.

To solidify our efforts and achievements during the *Conference*, we would compile the fruitful discussions and constructive input into the **Beijing Declaration on MOOC Development**. Embracing the interactive and collaborative spirit of the MOOC and online education, we welcome the collective participation in drafting this declaration. Please feel free to share your ideas or input on the following topics before **November 30 through submissions on our website https://mooc.global**

1. **Role and impact:** Higher education around the world has experienced profound changes. In your opinion, what has been the most defining role or significant impact of MOOC and online education, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. **Characteristics and advantages**: MOOC and online education has helped us to explore and transform global higher education. In your opinion, what were some of the enabling characteristics or unique advantages of MOOC and online education?
3. **Vision and recommendations**: How can we, as a community through international solidarity and multilateral cooperation, build, develop and promote MOOC and online education to better serve the society?
4. **Good practices showcase**: What were the major highlights, challenges, and decisions since the switch towards online in 2020? Any good case practices of using MOOC or online education tools?

Please feel free to include any additional materials (toolkits, reports, PPTs, photos, videos, etc.) to showcase your impact. We hope to put together the good case practices and share them with you all in the near future.

Lastly, don't forget to register online (and it's free) **before November 30**. We look forward to connecting with you for the Global MOOC Conference! Don't hesitate to reach out to conference@mooc.global if you have any questions.

Yours sincerely,

QIU Yong
President, Tsinghua University

Tao Zhan
Director, UNESCO IITE

Global MOOC Conference

Co-hosted by Tsinghua University and UNESCO IITE

9 December 2020, 10:00-12:00 & 13:00-15:00 (CET – Paris)

10 December 2020, 10:00-12:00 & 13:00-15:00 (CET – Paris)

11 December 2020, 13:00-15:30 (CET – Paris)

CONCEPT NOTE

1. Background

Context

In the pre-COVID world, the Fourth Industrial Revolution — enabled by "smart plus" and "internet plus" technologies, including artificial intelligence, big data, augmented reality, blockchain, the Internet of Things, and automation — was *the* disruptive force behind many industries and sectors across the world, including education. Although educators discovered ample of opportunities with the age of internet and virtual interconnectivity, we also quickly realized that the world was dealing with a severe problem of digital divide[1] and learning crisis, evidenced by high levels of learning poverty[2].

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated many of the existing challenges and has created the largest disruption of education systems in history, *affecting nearly 1.6 billion learners in more than 190 countries and all continents. Closures of schools and other learning spaces have impacted 94 per cent of the world's student population, up to 99 per cent in low and lower-middle income countries*.[3] Additionally, there is growing evidence that even the best distance learning solutions are weak substitutes for classroom interactions and millions of disadvantaged students may not return to school. In other words, progress towards the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) to achieve quality education and lifelong learning will slow, stagnate or even reverse.

Education is not only a fundamental human right, it is a global common good and a primary driver of progress across all 17 Sustainable Development Goals as a bedrock of just, equal,

---

[1] https://www.oecd.org/education/new-oecd-pisa-report-reveals-challenge-of-online-learning-for-many-students-and-schools.htm

[2] https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/edutech/brief/edtech-covid-19

[3] https://en.unesco.org/news/secretary-general-warns-education-catastrophe-pointing-unesco-estimate-24-million-learners-risk

inclusive peaceful societies. Though the world is faced with a learning crisis, but UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres believes that "the future of education is here," said during the launch of the *Policy Brief: Education During COVID-19 and Beyond* on August 4, 2020. "We have a generational opportunity to reimagine education. We can take a leap towards forward-looking systems that deliver quality education for all as a springboard for the Sustainable Development Goals."

Preparing the ground for the Global MOOC Conference

Universities have always served as the lighthouse of human civilization, demonstrated their resilience throughout history as one of the oldest types of institutions in existence, surviving countless wars, crises, and challenges of all kinds. "*If universities are to fulfil their mission to advance human development and expand the boundaries of knowledge, we must become more open, more integrative and more resilient*."

Infectious diseases know no boundaries and certainly have no nationality. In the face of this common challenge for humanity, universities once again proved their resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic by adjusting teaching and learning models and playing an irreplaceable role supporting global health by understanding the virus and developing vaccines and treatment in a short span of time, and through these efforts will make humanity better prepared for future health crises. Universities of the future will likely be more integrative and will continue to break through physical borders, disciplinary barriers, technological limitations, and identity constraints, and seamlessly connect with societies, governments, NGOs and industries.

At this critical moment, universities should play an essential role in promoting confidence, trust and unity among people and collectively call for humanity to rise to its highest potential. Despite the uncertainties and profound challenges that humanity faces such as global health emergencies, climate change, economic volatility, social inequality, and ecological degradation, there remains hope for a brighter future.

2012 marked an explosive year for MOOC, and the worldwide phenomenon was eventually declared as "the year of the MOOC." After almost a decade later, during the pandemic outbreak in 2020, educators are once again reminded the power and the potential of MOOC, as online education are bursting into the mainstream media. At the same time, many questions were raised, such as, What is the future of the MOOC model? How will such online learning platforms evolve to better serve the mission of higher education? How best integrate online technology and higher education?

2. Organizers — and their experience in MOOC & online education

Tsinghua University

Actively promoting online education has been a key part of Tsinghua University's strategic plan. In 2013, Tsinghua University launched xuetangX, and since then, the MOOC platform has become the largest in China and one of the largest in the World. In April 2020, the platform launched its international version which has an English language interface. The decision aims to actively gather high-quality educational resources from the world-leading universities and institutions for meeting the urgent needs of students and teachers around the world who have been impacted by the COVID-19 outbreak.

During Spring 2020, in response to the sudden outbreak of COVID-19, Tsinghua has undergone a rapid institutional transformation — from a traditional classroom teaching model to a university-wide fully online model. Subsequently, Tsinghua has worked throughout Summer 2020 to upgrade its infrastructure in order to prepare for another transformation — from fully online to hybrid teaching and learning.

The 2020 pandemic will indeed have a profound impact on global higher education. Tsinghua University is committed to work together with the wider community to overcome difficulties, continue to explore new teaching methods and models, promote the effective use of open educational resources, and lead the sustainable development of global higher education and online education.

UNESCO IITE (UNESCO Institute for Information Technologies in Education)

In line with the new Education 2030 Agenda, IITE has developed its strategic priority areas to meet new demands and tasks ahead. The mission of IITE in the new era is promoting the innovative use of ICT and serving as facilitator and enabler for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) through ICT-enabled solutions and best practices. Bearing in mind that SDG 4 highlights *inclusion* and *equity*, *quality of education* and *lifelong learning*, IITE focuses its activities on the following strategic priorities:

- Facilitating the innovative use of ICT to enhance inclusion and equity in education and lifelong learning;
- Empowering teachers in Member States to improve the quality of education by promoting ICT-enabled pedagogies and best practices;
- Fostering the potential of ICT for education transformation through global dialogue and networking.

In promoting digital pedagogy, IITE works with policy-makers, civil society and various other stakeholders, drawing on its own research and existing research evidence, focusing on how pedagogical and technological innovations can enhance learning. IITE exerts efforts to facilitate the transfer of innovation research into educational practice and support effective

learning through ICT-enabled pedagogy. The Institute promotes innovative approaches, methodology, tools and techniques of integrating ICT and pedagogy into different levels and sectors of education, in particular higher education and TVET.

Over the twenty years since its foundation, IITE has accumulated rich expertise and experience in promoting ICT in education, with strong support and guidance from UNESCO Headquarters, UNESCO IITE Governing Board and the host country.

3. Theme: "Learning Revolution and Higher Education Transformation"

In response to the COVID-19 outbreak, governments, teachers, and students have led and participated in an online education experiment of unprecedented scale and scope. Using MOOC (massive open online courses), OER (open educational resources) and other online learning tools, schools and universities were able to continue providing education, largely undisrupted, although most campuses were closed. While different level of education faces its distinctive challenges, higher education is unique in that university students are both old enough to handle the pressure and rigours of online work, while at the same time technologically savvy enough to navigate new online tools and platforms. Therefore, the higher education segment likely ends up, by necessity, triggering a "learning revolution."

International organizations also played a crucial role throughout the COVID-19 education disruption. For example, in March 2020, UNESCO launched the Global Education Coalition, a multi-sector partnership to meet the urgent need worldwide for continuity of learning on an unprecedented scale, by monitoring global school closures and provide distance learning solutions and recommendations. Governments, higher education institutions, and relevant stakeholders around the world were also prompt to mobilize resources for developing effective responses; coordinate action for maximizing impact and sustainable support to teachers and communities; further increase access of MOOC and online learning platforms for matching on-the-ground needs with local and global solutions; leverage hi-tech, low tech, and no tech approaches for providing diverse quality education programs and learning services.

As a result of individual efforts and collective actions across sectors and stakeholders, higher education has witnessed how MOOC, OER and online education have led a movement of "higher education transformation" during the crisis, and these transformative "bold steps" will no doubt help to create inclusive, resilient, quality education systems fit for the future.

Sub-theme 1: "Learning Revolution" for MOOC Platforms

This sub-theme is co-chaired and co-organized by iCourse and xuetangX — two of the largest MOOC and online learning platforms in China. As identified, MOOC, OER, and related online learning tools are integral to the "learning revolution," therefore, this sub-theme aims to review

MOOC development in the past, and come to consensus regarding the role of MOOC platforms in "learning revolution", as well as to conclude experience and share vision as we look beyond the pandemic.

Sub-theme 2: "Higher Education Transformation" with Virtual Simulation

This sub-theme is chaired and organized by ilab-x (Virtual Simulation Experiment Teaching Innovation Alliance). Throughout school closures during the pandemic outbreak, lab courses and practical classes have been one of the most common challenges in higher education. This sub-theme aims to discuss some of the challenges faced, while sharing experience from around the world before forming possibilities of how higher education can better use pioneering technology, such as virtual simulation, as we envision the future of "higher education transformation."

Sub-theme 3: Global "Higher Education Transformation" for Inclusion and Equity

This sub-theme is chaired and organized by UNESCO-ICHEI (International Centre for Higher Education Innovation under the auspices of UNESCO), which recently launched the IIOE (International Institute of Online Education) in April 2020. As highlighted by numerous addresses from UN agencies and development partners, global collaboration is critical in achieving SDG 4. This sub-theme aims to reach consensus through reviewing our progress, share experiences as we find ways to overcome challenges, and create a global vision through "higher education transformation" that ensures inclusive, equitable, quality education and lifelong learning.

Sub-theme 4: "Learning Revolution" for Better University Education

This sub-theme is chaired and organized by Steering Committee on Digitalized Teaching and Pedagogical Innovation under the MOE, People's Republic of China. This sub-theme recognizes "learning revolution" requires strong and resilient leadership from universities. Therefore, this sub-theme aims to engage stakeholders across universities to review past actions and share experiences, while discussing the possible future and role of university in promoting this wave of "learning revolution."

4. Conference Objective & Expected Outcome

In response to the "emergency for global education" as recently described by the UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay, as well as the global educational challenges and opportunities presented by the age of internet and virtual interconnectivity, the Global MOOC Conference aims to bring together world-leading universities and online education platforms across all geographical regions at this unprecedented time.

Additionally, the *Conference* aims to:
- promote MOOC development and online education good practices and resources,
- explore the role of technology in shaping the future of higher education,
- encourage international cooperation on educational technology innovation, and
- raise awareness for the inclusion and equity in education for achieving the UN SDG4.

During the *Conference*, two other expected outcomes include:
- launch the Global MOOC Alliance,
- release of the "2020 Beijing Declaration of MOOC Development" outcome document

Global MOOC Alliance

Global MOOC Alliance is a small and diverse group of world-leading universities and online education platforms across all geographical regions that will serve as a mechanism for exchange and cooperation, providing leadership of global higher education efforts to address digital education challenges and to implement practical policies in local communities and around the world. Key activities include joint teaching, capacity building, knowledge sharing, and public advocacy (UN SDG 4).

2020 Beijing Declaration of MOOC Development

Before the Conference, input will be collected through online consultations and submissions on the draft outcome document. This document covers the consensus, experience, and vision regarding MOOC development and online education during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. These inputs will then be fed into the Conference's four sub-forums through thematic discussions, where participants will further review and consolidate the Declaration before the final presentation by the end of the Conference.

Furthermore, the 2020 Beijing Declaration of MOOC Development is expected to send a strong signal to underscore the commitment of high-level decision-makers and prominent personalities to put MOOC development and online education at the heart of the movement for "Learning Revolution and Higher Education Transformation" and beyond.

5. Provisional Agenda

The Global MOOC Conference will consist of a main conference (high-level segment), a sub-forum, and related events (hosted by other organizations).

1. The main conference is expected to launch the Global MOOC Alliance, and to adopt the 2020 *Beijing Declaration on MOOC Development*. Representatives of international organization, MOOC platform, universities and ministry of education will be invited to deliver presentations and remarks on MOOC development and online education.

11 December 2020 Main Conference (high-level segment)	
Paris: 13:00-13:10 Moscow: 15:00-15:10 Beijing: 20:00-20:10	**Opening,** introduce conference theme, opening video (keywords: quality, open, responsible, sharing, caring)
Paris: 13:10-13:45 Moscow: 15:10-15:45 Beijing: 20:10-20:45	**High-level opening addresses** (by conference co-host, international organizations, host-country's MOE) • President, Tsinghua University • Assistant Director-General for Education, UNESCO • Senior representative, OECD (tbc.) • Minister of Education, People's Republic of China
Paris: 13:45-14:00 Moscow: 15:45-16:00 Beijing: 20:45-21:00	**Official launch** of the Global MOOC Alliance • Representative(s) of Global MOOC Alliance
Paris: 14:00-14:15 Moscow: 16:00-16:15 Beijing: 21:00-21:15	**Official reading** of the 2020 Beijing Declaration on MOOC Development. Distribution of printed and digital copies will be in all six official UN languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish. • Director, UNESCO IITE
Paris: 14:15-14:30 Moscow: 16:15-16:30 Beijing: 21:15-21:30	**Live demonstration** of synchronous teaching using virtual reality (Biosafety in Space and Public Health Protection) • Beijing Institute of Technology and partner institutions from four locations across China and South Korea
Paris: 14:30-15:25 Moscow: 16:30-17:25 Beijing: 21:30-22:25	**Keynote addresses** (6 speakers, 8 minutes each); Statements and presentations on MOOC Development and Online Education by international organization (1), MOOC platform (1), universities (3), Ministry of Education (1): • Unit Chief for Digital Pedagogy and Learning Materials (DPLM), UNESCO IITE • Founder and CEO, edX • Rector, Saint Petersburg University • Vice-Chancellor, University of Nairobi • President, University of Chile • Director of the Higher Education Department under the MOE, People's Republic of China
Paris: 15:25-15:30 Moscow: 17:25-17:30 Beijing: 22:25-22:30	**Closing** (Education for a brighter and more prosperous future)

2. The sub-forums will review the recommended priority actions of the 2020 Beijing Declaration of MOOC Development through thematic discussions and consolidate the Declaration to be presented to the main conference (high-level segment).

9 December 2020 Opening address and setting the scene	
Paris: 10:00-10:10 Moscow: 12:00-12:10 Beijing: 17:00-17:10	• Director, UNESCO IITE

Sub-forums: thematic discussion on priority actions

9 December 2020 Theme 1: "Learning Revolution" for MOOC Platforms	
Paris: 10:10-12:00 Moscow: 12:10-14:00 Beijing: 17:10-19:00	Co-organized by • iCourse • xuetangX

9 December 2020 Theme 2: "Higher Education Transformation" with Virtual Simulation	
Paris: 13:00-15:00 Moscow: 15:00-17:00 Beijing: 20:00-22:00	Co-organized by • ilab-x (Virtual Simulation Experiment Teaching Innovation Alliance)

10 December 2020 Theme 3: Global "Higher Education Transformation" for Inclusion and Equity	
Paris: 10:00-12:00 Moscow: 12:00-14:00 Beijing: 17:00-19:00	Co-organized by • UNESCO-ICHEI (International Centre for Higher Education Innovation under the auspices of UNESCO) o IIOE (International Institute of Online Education)

10 December 2020 Theme 4: "Learning Revolution" for Better University Education	
Paris: 13:00-15:00 Moscow: 15:00-17:00 Beijing: 20:00-22:00	Co-organized by • Steering Committee on Digitalized Teaching and Pedagogical Innovation under the MOE, People's Republic of China

6. Participants – by invitation

- UN agencies and other development partners
- Regional organizations
- Civil society organizations
- Private sector and foundations
- High-level representatives of higher education institutions
- Leaders, researchers, practitioners of online education
- Youth and learner representatives

Participants will be invited to register online and upon registration, they will receive a link to the online meeting platform. The meeting will be made available for public view through streaming.

7. Working Languages

All segments will be conducted in English with simultaneous interpretation in Mandarin Chinese.

Working documents will be made available in English, including the draft 2020 Beijing Declaration on MOOC Development. After its adoption, the Declaration will be translated and will be available in in the six official languages of the United Nations (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish).

8. Contact

For additional information on the conference, or any questions, we kindly invite you to contact the conference organizer by sending an e-mail to conference@mooc.global or through telephone at +86-185-2060-8064 (accessible 24 hours) or +86-10-6279-6128 (accessible between 9AM to 5PM, Beijing time, Monday to Friday). Correspondence: Mr. Enoch Wong, Tsinghua University.