

PROMOTING ENGAGEMENT IN MOOCS THROUGH SOCIAL COLLABORATION: COMMON LESSONS FROM THE PEDAGOGICAL MODELS OF UNIVERSIDAD GALILEO AND UNIVERSIDADE ABERTA

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Massive open online courses (MOOC) have been dramatically expanding online learning opportunities due to the emergence of new platforms and MOOC aggregators that facilitate access and search for courses according to the needs of each user, growing from a selection of specialist courses to an offering of hundreds of courses on major online platforms with millions of registered users. All this has caused a very interesting debate about their influence in the future of higher education.

Initially, MOOCs were seen as a form of providing better education for all, offering the opportunity to study with the best teachers for free and promoting the development and management of specific learning communities for people with less access to education. However, different studies show that people who enrol and participate in a MOOC generally have higher education qualifications. However, MOOCs have been receiving criticism for their high rate of attrition. Even if this is justifiable in view of the millions of participants that can be enrolled in the same course, each of them with its own different learning needs and motivations.

But studies about this issue have not considered the analysis of the learning experience designed. This is basically an expression of the prevalence of an old and inadequate traditional academic model that ignores the potential of open education in general, and MOOCs in particular, for example the social collaboration aspects. Given these concerns, the Galileo University in Guatemala and the Open University of Portugal initiated a research collaboration on issues of design and development of an educational model based on the use of learning artifacts, resorting to cloud based tools to improve the learning experience and achieve better results. In this paper we depict the first stages of this comparative study.

The MOOCs experiences from both the Open University of Portugal and the Galileo University prove, independently of the basic pedagogical approach used, learner satisfaction and, most importantly, the success of the learning experience cannot be measured by completion rates. This cannot be a quality indicator for non formal open forms of education delivery. In fact, participants in MOOCs are typically non

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homogeneous groups of learners with quite different backgrounds and expectations and, ultimately, aiming at different learning outcomes.

As the experiences presented also demonstrate, the improvement in the quality of MOOC offering depends on how much more flexible and adjustable to different contexts and needs the learning opportunities provided can become. According to the results of the institutional experiences shown, the real success factor in a MOOC is the level of engagement obtained from course participants and this can be highly improved by the use of learning artifacts based on cloud based tools.