

EDEN 2015 ANNUAL Conference

Expanding Learning Scenarios

Opening Out the Educational Landscape

EDEN 2015 Annual Conference

Barcelona, Spain

9-12 June 2015

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

Including the Collection of "Synergy" Synopses

Edited by

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on behalf of the European Distance and E-Learning Network

European Distance and E-Learning Network, 2015

THE BOOT CAMP MODULE IN MASSIVE OPEN ONLINE COURSES: EXPERIENCES IN TWO EUROPEAN INITIATIVES

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Introduction

In recent years, the European Commission increased efforts in Open Education, Open Educational Resources (OERs) and Information, and Communication Technologies (ICT) in Education in Europe. The gateway of the European Innovative Learning offers access to institutions, resources, courses and MOOCs.

The Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) imply, for the educational institutions and the target public, i.e. the participants, the formulation of new goals and addressing unique challenges. In this sense, this paper intends to reach out for the meaning and importance, as a differentiator in the participants' perspective, of a familiarization module (Boot Camp Module) within a MOOC.

The European projects “EMMA” and “ECO”

The project “European Multiple MOOC Aggregator” (EMMA), is a 30 month pilot action that will offer open, massive, online courses in multiple languages from different European providers, promoting promote cross-cultural and multilingual learning. The main goal is to work as a central aggregator and host system of all the courses produced by the partners but also as a system that enables learners to construct their own learning paths using units from MOOCs as building blocks.

The European funded project “Elearning, Communication and Open-data: Massive Mobile, Ubiquitous and Open Learning” (ECO) aims to broaden the education and, on the other hand, to improve the cost-effectiveness of teaching and learning by designing and implementing MOOCs as a way to use OERs. Furthermore, it intends to expand successful experiences with MOOCs in Europe into a pan-European scale, contributing to the awareness of the advantages of open education in Europe.

The Study of the Boot Camp

In this paper we focus on the importance of a preliminary familiarization module (“Boot Camp”) in context of a MOOC. This module was designed in conformity with a virtual pedagogical model and using a platform resulting from the integration of the Learning Management System (Moodle) and a social networking system (ELGG), giving the opportunity to acquire, develop and/or consolidate 21st-century skills such as collaboration, knowledge sharing and critical thinking.

The primary goal of the case study consists in the measurement of the importance of the familiarization module and the role of the facilitators' team, in the learning experience of MOOC participants, during this period of time. The messages posts in different spaces (The Wire, Blogs, and Forum) were collected and analysed, resulting in a clear indication as for the importance of this module for the early setting of sense of group and a learning community.

Conclusions and further research

The integration of a social media system (ELGG) with a learning management system (Moodle) seems to be a suitable environment to offer MOOCs. The use of these integrated systems enables the familiarization module used in this iMOOC, with a strong interaction element, which proved to be an essential component in participants learning success. In a future work it is worth investigating the impact of the Familiarization Module in the success of a MOOC by adding an initial questionnaire and interviewing a representative number of participants.