

Professional Learning in Massive Open Online Courses

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Background

This study explored the role of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) in supporting and enabling professional learning, or learning for work. The study was contextualised within 'Fundamentals of clinical trials', a MOOC for health professionals offered by edX.

Findings

The study commenced with a review of the literature on self-regulated learning (SRL) in online contexts. In MOOCs, the learner is required to take greater responsibility for managing and self-regulating their learning. Our review highlights a number of studies that provide insight into the design of online experiences that promote or support SRL, many of which would be applicable in MOOC design. The findings of the literature review were used to inform the development of the **Design Team Questions** Tool, an audit instrument to explore the design decisions underlying MOOC environment and learning design. The audit tool was used to collect data for the current study, and the current version of the instrument is available online for others to use and refine. The main data collection phase of the study involved the use of a quantitative instrument followed by a set of semi-structured interviews. The quantitative instrument (413 respondents) was used to identify high and low SRL learners for the interview phase. It was also used to collect views on motivations, expectations, interaction within the MOOC. A range of motivations and expectations were observed. Data analysis is ongoing, although initial results suggest that high SRL learners were able to articulate more specific motivations and expectations than group low SRL irrespective of motivation/expectations. Descriptive data summaries for the quantitative data set are available from <http://tinyurl.com/PL-MOOC-DataSummary>

(PDF). 35 interviews exploring learning behavior in the MOOC were conducted. The interviews highlight a mismatch between expectations and motivations, which are largely focused on professional needs, and goals articulated, which centre on participation and completion. We interpret this finding as evidence of mismatch of course design to learner needs, with the course design and format causing the learners to adopt a more passive approach to learning. Recommendations from the study can be accessed at: <http://tinyurl.com/PL-MOOC-Recommendations-draft> (PDF).

Summary of Recommendations

The design of MOOCs that seek to support professional learning should (where possible):

1. **Enable** professional learners to link theory learned in the MOOC with their work practice by setting personal goals, or personalizing course goals. The integration of expertise developed through the MOOC with expertise through professional practice could lead to improved learning.
2. **Help** professional learners to reflect on the knowledge gained from the course and how it may be embedded into their work practice before the end of the course.
3. **Support** professional learners to continually monitor their learning to determine its ultimate value beyond their immediate learning experience.
4. **Capitalize** on the diversity of motivation, expectation, and prior knowledge and experience that is an inherent within all MOOC cohorts.
5. **Encourage** professional learners to discuss ideas from the course with co-workers in their external professional network as well as with other learners on the course.
6. **Utilize** the existing knowledge and experience that professional learners bring to the learning context.

Research team

Dr Colin Milligan, Research Fellow
Professor Allison Littlejohn, Director

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Website: <http://www.gcu.ac.uk/academy/pl-mooc/>