Participation and non-participation in open online courses – what motivates and supports engagement in online learning?

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Focus in the research

- What motivates participants to attend online education?
  - What supports positive experiences with online education that may make participants choose this format again in the future?
  - Why did some of the participants not engage in the course?
- How may the open online course connect to the participants’ work and/or study life?
- What factors in the course design support (or not) this connection for the participants?
Context for this study

- Pilot project initiated by the Danish University Colleges - the policy-making body for the University College sector in Denmark

- Project aims:
  - To explore options for establishing a nationwide partnership for the production and delivery of MOOCs in Denmark
  - To design, develop and test a new format for further education aimed at teaching staff in pre-school and primary school
  - Free MOOC targeted teachers about ”The Open School”
    - 10 weeks course - 4 modules with assignments and badges
  - Two iterations of the MOOC was completed in 2017
    - Design – test – re-design – test
Survey data

- Pre-course survey and post-course survey distributed to all registered participants in the two iterations
- Population is 554 participants
- Pre-course survey questions in 2 categories:
  - Demographics and background
  - Interest and expectations about the MOOC
  - Response rate is 25% (138 respondents)
- Post-course survey questions in 3 categories:
  - Demographics and background
  - Experiences and satisfaction with the MOOC
  - Suggestions for improvements
  - Response rate is 23% (127 respondents)
Participant demographics (pre-course survey)

- Gender
- Age (years)

(N=138)
Online course experience (pre-course survey)

- Previous participation
- Type of online course

(N=138)
Motivation (pre-course survey)

- What is your motivation for participating in the MOOC?
- Responses fall in three main categories:
  - Interest and motivation in relation to
    - Work and profession
    - Volunteer work (sports, scouts, church, etc.)
    - Learning design (Mooc experience)
Participation (post course survey)

(N=127)
Participation patterns (post-course survey)

- Hours spent on the MOOC
- Number of times logged-in

NB! One time per week

(N=66)
Participation patterns (post course survey)

- Two approaches to participation:
  1. Participants **throw themselves into the flow of the course** without considering whether it is practically possible for them to participate as required
  2. Participants **carefully consider the course design in advance and articulate specific expectations** – this is reflected in their equally specific critique of the experience post-course
Online learning (post course survey)

- How can the course be improved?
  - Stronger connection / contact between tutor and participants
  - Higher degree of freedom in the topics you choose (and not choose) to study
  - A more uniform design line – the modules were too different

- Would you be interested in signing up for a similar kind of course in the future?

(N=127)
Learning outcomes (post course survey)

- Descriptions of participants’ learning outcome fall into four main categories:
  - General inspiration and insight into the subject
  - Specific parts or elements are highlighted (many different ones)
  - No outcome due to low degree of participation
  - No learning outcome or the outcome is not useful to the respondent
Reasons for not completing

What should have been different for you to participate?

- Comments fall in three categories (roughly):
  - Suggestions for redesign (learning design)
  - Suggestions for additional use of technology/communication
  - Reference to personal situations, mostly time-issues
Reasons for non-participation

What prevented you from participating?

- Not enough time: 72 %
- Couldn't find time during working hours: 18 %
- I lost interest after signing up: 16 %
- I never intended to participate, but was curious to see the course and the materials: 9 %

\[N=61\]

How could your participation be supported?

- Platform should be easier to navigate
- Course should be at a less busy time
- More contact with tutors and other participants
- No suggestions – participants place responsibility with themselves
Reflection points

- Communication about and description of the type of MOOC design is important.
- Clear communication to participants about expectations has an impact on satisfaction along the way and afterwards.
- Team-based vs. an individualist 'thinking' in the design: Many teachers (in a Danish context) have an understanding of teaching as a collective activity, and this is reflected in the design.
- The participants' expectations focus on flexibility, opportunity for individual planning, etc. (no team-orientation)
Next steps

- Move beyond the descriptive level of survey data
- Identify patterns in participation and connect these to types of participants
- More explanatory data needed (e.g. interviews)
Thank you for your attention

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The ‘Aaben skole MOOC’

- Free, open online course
- Topic: ”Open school”
- Target group: teaching professionals and volunteers
- The course:
  - 3 common modules (1. The Open School, 3. Design of a learning design in Open School and 4. Networking and collaboration)
  - 3 specialisation modules (2a. Cultural sector, 2b. Vocational sector and 2c. Associational sector)
- 10 weeks course with assignments and badges in all 4 modules
- Materials: texts, videos and websites
- Participant activity:
  - Self-study and collaboration
  - Lightly moderation by different tutors in each module