Understanding How Learners Use Massive Open Online Courses and Why They Drop Out: Thematic Analysis of an Interview Study in a Developing Country

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Abstract

This paper presents a qualitative study on Massive Open Online Courses use in a developing world context. Data was collected from 52 undergraduate and postgraduate learners via semi structured interviews. Learners were encouraged to select from various platforms according to their preference, and to actually register to the course as part of a self-learning activity. Interviewing sessions were conducted eight weeks after the participants' registration, thematic analysis technique was used aiming to reveal their authentic learning experience concerning dropout. The findings support the applicability of a number of suggested factors from previous studies on retention for E-learning in general and for Massive Open Online Courses specifically, such Course Design, Technology Employment, Interactivity and Rapidity. However, results of this research uncover the importance of additional factors such as: Learner Control, where users can design their own long term learning track from various course modules. Novel design factors were also uncovered in this research such as: Integrative Design to comprise learners' own accounts on web2.0 and social media; as well as, Independent Design, where course's modules can be taught separately and learners need not to complete an overall course, rather pick modules from various courses. Mobility and Language are identified as important decisive factor for users to dropout/ completion on Massive Open Online Courses. This research also highlights the importance of Diversity and Novelty for this type of E-learning application. The research reveals the Multitasking Behavior of users, leading to the need of Easy to Scan contents. The findings provide a basis for improving the understanding towards reasons for Massive Open Online Courses drop out and suggest a number of practical design recommendations for designers and providers.