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MOOCs for Opening Up Education and the OpenupEd initiative



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MOOCs Expansion into a Mishmash

MOOCs have received considerable media coverage since the beginning of 2012. Along with their expansion, confusion has arisen around what a typical MOOC would look like and what could be expected as its main added value. In contrasting two different pedagogics, Siemens (2012) introduced an initial distinction between so-called cMOOCs and xMOOCs.

Meanwhile, the MOOC spectrum has become decidedly broad. Within this huge variety, the 'C' generally stands for a 'Course,' while the second 'O' usually refers to 'Online'. But the first 'O,' which should stand for 'Open,' receives myriad interpretations, justified or questionable. And the 'M,' which is supposed to refer to 'Massive,' can apply to a large-scale operation but, in many cases, this is not the reality.

MOOCs Roots ...

Moreover, as Mulder notes in the Foreword to this volume, we seem to forget and ignore the essential long-term developments in which the recent emergence of the MOOC is to be placed. The first is the development towards 'Open Education,' which goes back to the nineteenth century. Open education received a real boost in the second half of the twentieth century when the model for Open Universities emerged and became embraced worldwide.

The concept of the open university has received an innovative, digital infusion during the past decade or so with the well documented global Open Educational Resources (OER) movement. The other crucial development, towards 'Online Education,' was initiated in the 1950s. It was at that time that new technologies and media were introduced in education, from radio and television to the more recent emergence of personal computers and their wide range of educational applications, varying from basic computer-based training to intelligent tutoring systems and sophisticated simulations. Each of these cycles of technology failed to become mainstream in education. It was not until the 1990s with the entry of the Internet that the power of communication and interaction became widely available for education. Yet, it took more than a decade of hesitant search and experimentation to come to the point of a significant change towards a rich, full, and widespread exploitation of the Internet for educational purposes. And that change marked a new era of considerable impact from educational technology (Allen & Seaman, 2014).

Back in 2007, it was the ICDE (International Council for Open and Distance Education) which emphasized the possible 'golden combination' of open, flexible and distance learning with OER for massive educational opportunities that were much needed in developing countries. Moreover, the ICDE also noted that these new modes of learning and teaching were also relevant for emerging economies as well as for matured knowledge-based societies (Mulder & Rikers, 2008). Importantly, the combined power of the 'classical' Open Universities model and the new 'digital openness' was elaborated in the 2011 EADTU (European Association of Distance Teaching Universities) Conference (Mulder, 2011). These reports and conferences have led to a better understanding of what Open Education is about and what it could offer to learners and societies.

Open(ing up) Education!

OER and MOOCs can be positioned in the broader development of Open Education as described above. The potential of Open Education was strongly marked by the Cape Town Open Education Declaration (Shuttleworth/OSF, 2008). It is quite remarkable, however, that the frequent reference to the concept of Open Education generally is not combined with a clear and solid description of what is meant by it. Only recently, an analytical and practical framework has been proposed as a reference model for Open Education. This so-called 5COE model includes OER as just one out of five components. MOOCs of different kinds can be mapped on to this reference model, but, in all cases, these maps show a rather limited coverage across those five components (Mulder, Foreword, this volume; Mulder & Janssen, 2013).

Reference should be made here to the European Commission's initiative, 'Opening up Education' (European Commission, 2013a). Opening up Education was launched in

September 2013 as a European move to innovate learning and teaching through ICT and to modernize education for the full spectrum of learners in all educational sectors through OER (and MOOCs). The overarching title “Opening up Education” signals that not all education is required to be open in all respects (Mulder, Foreword, this volume). This nuanced approach - of no need or wish to be open in any sense - holds for our overall educational system with its wide variety of philosophies and implementations. Within this spectrum of occurrences and approaches to delivering education, MOOCs offer an exceptional position. Based on the first ‘O’ in the term, one might expect that openness is the ultimate goal. This issue as to what extent MOOCs indeed contribute to opening up education is the carrying question of this chapter. Much of the mainstream MOOCs movement, however, does not seem primarily driven by this mission to open up education.

OpenupEd as a Special MOOCs Flavour

It is within the context described above of building on the roots of MOOCs in the ‘traditional’ world of open learning and education (i.e., the Open Universities), and of embracing the goal to open up education as much as possible, that the OpenupEd initiative emerged. OpenupEd is the first, and, thus far, the only pan-European MOOC initiative. It was launched in April 2013 by EADTU, and communicated in collaboration with the European Commission (European Commission, 2013b). The 11 launch partners are based in eight EU countries (France, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain, and the UK), as well as in three countries outside the EU (Russia, Turkey, and Israel). Almost all OpenupEd partners are EADTU members. Another 10 institutions, again mostly from the EADTU membership, have confirmed that they will also join OpenupEd in the near future.

OpenupEd began with 40 courses in a wide variety of subject areas. Since the start, each partner has offered courses via its own learning platform and in its home language, if not more. Potential learners currently can choose from the 11 languages of the partners, plus Arabic. Meanwhile, the number of courses has increased significantly since the fall of 2013. Courses can either be taken at a scheduled period of time or anytime and at the student's own pace. All courses may lead to recognition; for instance, (1) a certificate of completion, (2) a badge, or, (3) most valuable, a credit certificate provided upon formal examination by the partner operating the course (that typically has to be paid for) and which can count towards a degree.

OpenupEd is an open, non-profit partnership offering MOOCs that contribute to open up education – much to the benefit of individual learners and the wider society. The vision is to reach out to all those learners who are interested to take part in online higher education in a way that meets their needs and accommodates their particular situation. OpenupEd is not using nor advocating one single platform for all the partners, because most of them are operating successfully with their own platforms. Moreover, partners can be involved in other MOOC platforms and portals as well. For example, the Open University has its own MOOC FutureLearn and is partner of OpenupEd. In effect, OpenupEd embraces a decentralized model where the institutions take the lead and make their own decisions regarding, for example, the number of MOOCs and the subjects that they will offer. They also have control over the types of interactive components embedded in their MOOCs, the language(s) used,

and their possible embedding of MOOCs within the curriculum. Indeed, diversity in how institutions approach MOOCs and open education is cherished as an important value in the OpenupEd partnership. Also valued in this partnership is equity and quality. Importantly, the partnership is open to any institution as long as it will embrace the OpenupEd common features and will acquire and keep up with the OpenupEd quality label for MOOCs.

OpenupEd's Common Features

Although there is diversity of institutional approaches, the partnership has agreed on the following framework of eight common features for its MOOCs:

1. Openness to learners
2. Digital openness
3. Learner-centred approach
4. Independent learning
5. Media-supported interaction
6. Recognition options
7. Quality focus
8. Spectrum of diversity

This framework is not meant to be a straitjacket but rather to give guidance on the principles to which we aspire. Therefore, all OpenupEd courses need to conform to these eight features to the degree that the partner considers appropriate and feasible. Given that flexibility, some institutions will conform more than others. Partner institutions, however, should be serious in executing a development plan regarding those features. They need to outline the process they are using towards a fuller perspective with respect to opening up education.

The section below summarizes a series of specific OpenupEd highlights that may serve to help the reader better understand OpenupEd's practice.

Some OpenupEd Highlights

This section focuses on how a decentralized model of MOOC collaboration with modest or light centralised coordination efforts might work while respecting the diversity in (institutional) approaches.

As indicated, OpenupEd aims to be a distinct quality brand embracing a wide diversity of (institutional) approaches to open up education via the use of MOOCs, rather than restricting to one platform, model, or approach as is common of most MOOC providers. As a consequence, OpenupEd partners agreed that the quality process should be one that is tailored to both e-learning and open education. The OpenupEd quality label for MOOCs (Rosewell & Jansen, 2014) is based on the more general E-xcellence label that EADTU has established during the past few years (Williams, Kear, & Rosewell, 2012). The associated institutional benchmarking within OpenupEd is primarily meant to be applied as an

improvement tool, comparing institutional performances with current best practices and leading to measures to raise the quality of its MOOCs and their operation. This process is designed to complement both an institutional course approval process, and ongoing evaluation and monitoring of courses in presentation.

There is considerable diversity in institutional approaches in opening up education through the use of MOOCs which the OpenupEd label fully embraces. As part of this process, OpenupEd partners are integrating the OpenupEd label into their own quality process. Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED) in Madrid, Spain was one of the first OpenupEd partners to provide MOOCs. UNED already had its internal QA process in place but adjusted that to the OpenupEd label. To this end, the proposed set of benchmarks of the OpenupEd label was tested on over 20 different UNED COMA courses in an initial self-evaluation process (Rodrigo, Read, Santamaria, & Sánchez-Elvira, 2014). The research from UNED illustrated that the quality label could be a versatile tool that considers the overall structure and function of each course in terms of a variable set of characteristics. Moreover, they indicated that some additional indicators were found that could improve the benchmarking.

Preliminary results on the OpenupEd quality label stress the importance of research on how MOOCs in different institutional and cultural settings can help with the opening up of education. To this end, OpenupEd partners are collaborating on research and evaluation as well. In terms of quality assurance, the partners felt an urgent need to focus research on the learner perspective. In a funded project termed MOOCKnowledge (Open Education (OpenEdu), 2014), questionnaires have been developed on the motivation, intentions, social context, lifelong learning profile, and the impact on study success and career development of MOOC participants. As with the highly flexible and open partnerships of OpenupEd, MOOCKnowledge is intended to be open for use by all MOOC providers and will hopefully lead to many cross-provider and large-scale data collections. At the present moment, OpenupEd partners are translating the questionnaires into their own languages while complementing them with contextualised dimensions of local importance. Once again, this partnership embraces a diversity of approaches within a common (research) framework.

This diversity is also an essential reason why partners of OpenupEd are involved in MOOCs. In essence, the institutional business models range from using MOOCs for reputation and visibility (e.g., student recruitment, increase marketing potential, and reaching new students) to MOOCs as an innovation area (e.g., transition to more flexible and online education, improve teaching, provide viable income through online courses, improve quality of regular offerings, etc.). Moreover, some OpenupEd partners are explicitly focussing on the demands of learners and societies. As such, these partners are strongly dependent on public funding.

Other institutions were experimenting with the unbundling of their education services. One example is that of Università Telematica Internazionale UNINETTUNO in Italy who decided to redesign their regular courses (offered as part of curricula) such that the complete course is offered for free but that MOOC participants have the option to pay for additional services such as tutoring or a formal exam for a credit certificate that may count towards a degree. UNINETTUNO first experimented with this model in early 2013 with only a

few MOOCs, but quickly realized that this business model was more profitable than the old one (although the price per course including these services for a student decreased). At the present time, they are offering almost 100 MOOCs based on that model.

Other OpenupEd partners experienced some difficulties regarding governmental legislation. Moscow State University of Economics, Statistics and Informatics (MESI) only recently could start to offer online courses after a change in Russian legislation in early 2014. Worse, Anadolu University in Turkey with more than 1.3 million students can still not offer formal credits for complete online courses. As a result, it has experienced some difficulties in providing MOOC participants a pathway to formal higher education. Nevertheless, they will offer an additional 100 MOOCs by early 2015; however, these will not yet be available with the option for participants to obtain formal credit. In response, OpenupEd partners are jointly working to improve governmental legislation, for example, by benchmarking institutional and governmental strategies on MOOCs.

For further information regarding the OpenupEd initiative, please refer to the portal: www.openuped.eu. This website also functions as a referatory to the OpenupEd MOOCs offered by partner institutions.

Leading Question

Having introduced the roots of MOOCs, the Open Education model, the associated concept of opening up education, and the OpenupEd MOOCs initiative, we will now discuss the leading question of this chapter: *'Are MOOCs instrumental to open up education?'*

For an answer to this question, it is vital to know the requirements for, in fact, opening up education. As noted below, there are two major ones that should be met in order to truly open up education:

1. All unnecessary barriers to learning should be removed, both at the entry into learning and along the learning path.
2. Learners should be facilitated with appropriate incentives to make progress and to succeed in their learning efforts.

We will consider MOOCs to be “online courses designed for large numbers of participants, that can be accessed by anyone anywhere as long as they have an internet connection, are open to everyone without entry qualifications, and offer a full/complete course experience online for free” (ECO, 2014).

In Table 1, we have identified and briefly described a series of barriers that MOOCs could remove as well as a set of incentives for progress and success that MOOCs could offer. We also provide our indication of how OpenupEd is performing. Rather than presenting a continuous narrative, we have decided to structure our text into a table in order to maintain an overview. As a result, we suggest using this as a table-to-read as opposed to a table-to-check.

Table 1 *Opening up education: Barriers to be removed and incentives to be offered by MOOCs, and a ‘score’ for OpenupEd (first the barriers and then the incentives).*

Barrier	Could MOOCs remove the barrier?	How about OpenupEd?
Economic	YES , all MOOCs offer a course experience without any cost to participants.	YES.
Entry Requirements	YES (formally), since generally anybody can enter the course. This does NOT necessarily imply that the course can be taken without any learnt competencies or experience. Advanced pedagogics and remedial courses can be supportive here.	YES. Additional support increasingly offered.
Location	YES , the online provision guarantees the freedom of place, learners can be anywhere. This does generally NOT apply to formal examinations.	YES. Experimenting with online examination.
Scheduling	NO (general practice), since most MOOCs have a fixed starting moment and a fixed scheme in time. But in principle it can be a YES if participants can start any time and can choose their own scheme (freedom of time and pace).	Scheduled courses (part of the provision). Self-paced courses (the other part of the provision).
Network Connectivity	NOT AT ALL , weak or no connectivity is an external and prohibitive barrier for all MOOCs. This applies in particular to countries in the Global South, but is expected to improve significantly in the forthcoming years.	NOT really in position to remove this serious external barrier when it occurs (applies to all MOOCs initiatives).
Digital literacy	YES , digital skills are a condition to participate in a MOOC. And it is quite natural to take away a possible barrier in this respect by offering MOOCs on digital skills; which is increasingly happening.	Increasingly YES.
Accessibility Over Time	PROBLEMATIC if the course content is only accessible between start and end date for a scheduled course, which frequently is the case. It would be easy, however, to make it a YES by providing any-time access.	Mostly and increasingly YES.

Barrier	Could MOOCs remove the barrier?	How about OpenupEd?
Accessibility to All	<p>PROBLEMATIC if courses are provided primarily in English. This is the current situation for most MOOCs, although there are providers operating in other languages (e.g., Spanish) and translation of MOOC content and courses is starting to expand.</p> <p>PROBLEMATIC if courses exclude participants from sanctioned countries or if there is an age limit. Occasionally this is the practice.</p>	<p>Essentially YES within the language spectrum of the partners.</p> <p>YES.</p>
Cultural	<p>PROBLEMATIC if courses are mainly developed in one dominant ('Western') cultural perspective, which typically is the case. This practice affects both the subject matter and the educational method.</p> <p>It could become a YES in collaboration with partners from other cultures.</p>	<p>Essentially YES with the partners from different cultures leading their own initiatives (with the current focus on Europe).</p>
Legal	<p>YES, but only if the course materials are openly licensed (or, in other words, if they are OER). And there are still too many major providers NOT having adopted an open licensing policy.</p> <p>Open licensing is directly important for the teaching staff who wish to retain, reuse, revise, remix, and redistribute content (Wiley, 2007, 2014). But indirectly it is also significant for the learners who will benefit more from a richer learning materials space if there are no legal barriers.</p> <p>The OER approach (for learning materials) has similarity with the notions of open access (for scientific output) and open source (for software).</p>	<p>Mostly and increasingly YES with OpenupEd endorsing OER and an open licensing policy.</p> <p>Open source is also preferred for the MOOCs platforms, although it is NOT a general rule.</p>
Quality	<p>YES (to a certain extent), since MOOCs can contribute to better quality education, which is what learners deserve. With an open licensing policy, chances of raising quality are even better.</p> <p>Generally there is NOT a systems guarantee, however, since the QA and accreditation schemes are not yet equipped for MOOCs and OER.</p>	<p>YES, since all partners apply their internal QA system to their MOOCs, and are subject to the OpenupEd quality label for MOOCs.</p>

<i>Incentive</i>	<i>Could MOOCs offer the incentive?</i>	<i>How about OpenupEd?</i>
Learner Satisfaction	<p>YES, but it's a constant challenge to incorporate in the courses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > ingredients to motivate, to entice, to provoke, to raise curiosity, and incite to discovery. > an attractive lay-out varying between text and graphics and including video and animations. > an effective and pleasant ICT-based learning environment. > appropriate and non-obtrusive interaction between learners (and teachers), partly through social media. 	More or less YES but requires more attention and dedication for further improvement.
Completion	<p>YES, but more so if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > dedicated and proven modern online learning pedagogics are used (rather than sticking to classroom-based didactics). > independent learning is the paradigm, with a learner-centred approach. > context sensitivity is being adopted. > the learning can take place step-by-step along chunks and units to be finished. 	Essentially YES with the partners having a mission and long-standing experience in the areas mentioned.
Recognition	<p>YES, MOOCs do offer various recognition options: certificates of participation, badges for specific activities, overall credentials based on a final online test, and full formal credit certificates based on a proctored exam.</p> <p>The last option is the most rewarding and significant, however, is NOT at all mainstream.</p> <p>The utmost arrangement is recognition of the formal credit as a component in a full curriculum (e.g., a bachelor program), with an ultimate perspective of credit transfer between institutions. We are still FAR AWAY from the latter situation.</p>	<p>YES</p> <p>Increasingly YES with a fair share of courses offering the formal credit option, mostly combined with the opportunity of inclusion in a full curriculum.</p>

From our observations and perceptions detailed in Table 1, we can conclude that the answer to the question: ‘Are MOOCs instrumental to open up education?’ is a ‘Well, that really depends’

Out of the eleven barriers detailed in Table 1, several (i.e., Network connectivity, Accessibility to all, and Cultural) will not or probably cannot be removed easily by MOOCs and their providers. For four others (i.e., Scheduling, Accessibility over time, Legal, and Quality), it is more or less a matter of goodwill. And the remaining four (i.e., Economic, Entry requirements, Location, and Digital literacy) can be taken away by MOOCs and their providers. The three incentives (i.e., Learner satisfaction, Completion, and Recognition) could all be provided through MOOCs and their providers, although this is certainly not straightforward and requires significant targeted effort. And such effort, in the end, is basically a matter of priority.

From the table, it appears that the ‘score’ for OpenupEd on the eleven barriers is better or at least equal to what is shown as indicative for the wide variety of MOOC initiatives. Likewise, for the three incentives, OpenupEd seems to be in a slightly better position than many of the other MOOC ventures and initiatives, but yet requiring sustained additional effort. We have decided not to present our perspectives on the performance of other MOOC initiatives like Coursera, edX, Udacity, FutureLearn, MiríadaX, iversity, FUN, and Open2Study, not wanting to take the risk of bias and limited insight.

More Work to be Done to Open Up Education for All ...

The previous section may induce an agenda for MOOC providers, but only if they are serious about opening up education. Such an agenda can be derived from the barriers and incentives that need more attention and improvement, according to their own analyses. Speaking for ourselves, OpenupEd intends to continue to strengthen its commitment to the mission of opening up education, in particular, by improving on the weaker ingredients as they appear in Table 1 while maintaining the already strong assets.

As part of these efforts, in the section below, we highlight four of the eight common features of the OpenupEd framework, mentioned earlier; in effect, priority is set at four features where the partnership could or should make further progress: (1) digital openness, (2) recognition options, (3) quality focus, and (4) spectrum of diversity.

Digital Openness

- The endorsement of an open licensing policy in the partnership must lead to a larger share of openly licensed courses to ultimately reach 100% (Note: this is related to the barrier *Legal* detailed in Table 1).
- Courses on digital skills should become available in all 12 languages in the partnership (Note: such an approach directly addresses the barrier *Digital literacy* explained in Table 1).

Recognition Options

- The partnership will intensify its ongoing arrangements towards mainstreaming recognition through formal credit course certificates where the credit value can count for a larger educational program (e.g., a bachelor degree). This movement is facilitated (at a fee) by the university hosting the OpenupEd MOOC (Note: this relates to the incentive *Recognition* considered in Table 1).
- Credit transfer among (and possibly beyond) the partnership is an additional (but not so easy) target, where we can build on earlier initiatives and experiences within EADTU (Note: this is linked to the incentive *Recognition* discussed in Table 1).

Quality Focus

- The OpenupEd quality label for MOOCs (Rosewell & Jansen, 2014) is the first such recognition of its kind to become operational and is intended to encourage quality enhancement for MOOCs and their providers. There is a considerable array of institutional approaches related to opening up education via the use of MOOCs. As indicated, the OpenupEd label accommodates many such MOOC choices. Now, with the availability of the OpenupEd quality label, we expect new partners and possibly other providers to get to apply it, generating experience for further refinement (Note: this is our response to the barrier related to *Quality* outlined in Table 1).
- The partnership will facilitate the required collaboration in order to harmonize the research and evaluation efforts among the partners, thereby monitoring and analysing their operations heading to enhanced performance. Different from the centralized MOOC providers where, for example, learning analytics can smoothly be applied, the more decentralized OpenupEd has to explicitly make specific arrangements in this respect among the partners.

Spectrum of Diversity

- While OpenupEd emerged in Europe, its mission could have global relevance and scope, thereby widening the spectrum of diversity. Recently, we have begun to explore the creation of similar initiatives ('OpenupEd alike') in other regions around the world. They could show basic similarity in intention and approach but with a flavour and profile that is specific to their region. And they could be interlinked in order to maximize benefits like common branding, sharing expertise and content ('localized'), and facilitating global learners. This discovery tour is a joint effort with UNESCO wherein we are collaborating with our sister organizations in Africa and in Asia (such a collaboration addresses the core of the barrier *Cultural* detailed in Table 1).

Finally, in line with what has been noted earlier with the incentive *Learner satisfaction*, it is crucial to underscore the need of more dedication within the various ingredients contributing to the satisfaction of learners.

To Conclude...

OpenupEd has explicitly chosen to open up education as the mission of its MOOCs. As we have argued in this chapter, it is a purposeful choice that can generate extensive benefits for learners and the broader society. Will this soon be a stance or perspective of other MOOC providers as well? That, of course, is within their discretion...

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