



Learning Design Preferences in LMOOCs: An International Comparative Study

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ABSTRACT

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) have come to stay supported by the development of educational technologies, and within them, Language MOOCs (LMOOCs) are a phenomenon that has risen in expectations but also shown their limitations. This study aims at comparing students' preferences from two universities (UCO, Spain, and ULS, Poland) regarding the learning design preferences of LMOOCs and analyzing whether there are differences based on sociocultural context, gender, and educational stage. The respondents ($n = 260$) stated to be in favor of a balance between the constructivist and instructionist educational practices in online language courses. The findings reveal significant differences regarding LMOOCs learning and feedback design in terms of gender and sociocultural context, while no significant differences were found between undergraduate and postgraduate students. These results may be used to plan innovative and effective learning situations that suit learners' needs and preferences, which should lead to higher quality of learning and higher learner engagement and satisfaction.

KEYWORDS

CALL, International Comparative Study, Language Learning Preferences, Language Learning, Language Massive Open Online Courses, Mall Learning Design, Massive Open Online Courses, Quantitative Study

INTRODUCTION

There has been a rapid growth in the use of online learning tools at universities, which changes the way individuals teach and learn. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused distance education and open learning to become the norm. This situation showed the strengths and weaknesses of the online courses delivered by colleges and universities. Student learning needs and preferences are changing, and they need to be reflected in the design and the delivery of the courses. It is vital to recognize the role of learner in influencing the quality of learning via MOOCs (Liu, et al., 2014).

The aim of the study is to compare university students' preferences for the learning design of LMOOCs and analyze whether there are differences considering three variables: sociocultural context, gender and educational stage. For this purpose, Reinders and Pegrum (2017) evaluation criteria for the learning design of Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) resources is considered as the starting point. Based on these considerations, four hypotheses were postulated:

- Hypothesis 1 (H1): FL students' preferences regarding LMOOCs can inform their future design to improve their quality.
- Hypothesis 2 (H2): FL students' preferences regarding LMOOC design are different depending on their sociocultural context.
- Hypothesis 3 (H3): FL students' preferences regarding LMOOC design are different depending on their gender.
- Hypothesis 4 (H4): FL students' preferences regarding LMOOCs design are different depending on their educational stage.

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), term coined in 2008 by Cormier and Alexander (Siemens, 2012), have come to stay supported by the development of educational technologies. The idea of MOOCs is not new - they are the natural evolution of Open Educational Resources (OERs) and movements such as the Open Course Ware (Fernández, & Webster, 2014). Although MOOCs have continued to evolve, their fundamental characteristics of being open, participatory and distributed usually at no charge (except for issuing certificates), have remained consistent (Bogdan, 2017). Learning is enhanced by participation, which is voluntary, and knowledge is distributed across a network of participants. MOOCs are available to any number of people worldwide, and their participation depends on their needs and interests as well as on the ability to connect to the Internet (Babori, et al., 2019).

Nonetheless, the difficulty that may arise when there are so many users on a course at the same time, as the diversity of learners requires methods for adaptation as there is no one-size-fits-all learning environment (Rüdian, et al., 2019). Criticism of MOOCs include (i) lack of pedagogical rigor and theoretical foundation (Colpaert, 2018; Mehta, 2017); (ii) low completion rates (Vickers, 2017; Poy, & Gonzales-Aguilar, 2014); the fact that even though MOOCs are designed for everyone and are to connect participants across continents and cultures, they are developed mostly by a white, male, English voice (Denek, & Hertzfeld, 2019); (iii) a hidden business model based on payments (Shah, 2017).

Despite their flaws, MOOCs continue to be popular among students and have the potential to transform university education. Recent reports by Shah (2019a, 2019b) show that the decline in the use of MOOCs might be exaggerated.

Languages have also found their place within MOOCs. There are still, however, relatively few studies available to confirm the effectiveness of Language MOOCs or LMOOCs, especially when it comes to fundamental aspects such as educational theory (Sallam et al., 2020; Gimeno-Sanz, et al., 2018; Palacios-Hidalgo, & Huertas-Abril, 2016), as language learning is not only knowledge but also skills based. Nonetheless, the majority of existing LMOOCs follow an instructivist approach which does not promote collaboration (Proudfoot, 2017). As a consequence, additional functionalities on the courses are required such as scheduled instructor-led Google Hangouts sessions to support synchronous oral interaction, or organizing learner-driven speaking practice sessions (Gimeno-Sanz, et al., 2018).

As shown above, there are number of issues that still need to be addressed in terms of LMOOCs design, including whether LMOOCs offer enough linguistic-didactic functionalities and range of learning paths for students., Most certainly, a better understanding of the students' possible intentions or expectations could help to improve the future design of courses and lead to the adoption of curricular decisions that would enable responding to them (Fernández-Díaz et al., 2019).

BACKGROUND

Nowadays there is a move from teacher-centered education models to a student-centered approach focusing mainly on competency-based learning (Duignan, 2020). In accordance with this view, the new teacher's role is to create pedagogically informed learning experiences that would enable students to build their knowledge and become self-directed learners (Karga, & Satratzemi, 2019). In

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