Chapter 69

Challenges about MOOCs in Teacher Training:
Differences between On–Site and Open University Students

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ABSTRACT

MOOCs seem to be a good way to deliver training to a large number of teachers and to facilitate their professional development in those areas whose skills are scarce, requires an update or needs further deepening. In this chapter a test is carried out to make an approach to the current state of affairs, taking sample students from an on-site university and an open university. This study also allows investigating if there may be differences between both groups. Using case studies, a questionnaire was administered to 37 pre-service teachers, showing a relative great knowledge about MOOCs by participants. In conclusion, the studied universities must design, develop and divulgate these courses as a pedagogical resource for initial and continuous teacher training. This chapter completes the book section with discussion on research involving 'RIA and education practice of MOOCs', as such it provides a fitting commentary for the topic of 'educational training design'.

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades there has been a change as radical as what was once the industrial revolution. The information and communications technology (ICT) have stormed heavily in our lives and modi-fied our society, our education, our customs... To the point that now we cannot imagine our world without them. For this reason it is essential that classrooms keep coherence with their surrounding environment, walking in parallel with the social and technological advances occurring. It cannot be

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allowed that classrooms remain delayed and teach about knowledge and skills that are not currently needed. Contrary, they should get ahead of their time and prepare children for the future. But the academic results obtained and high school dropout rates presented by the Spanish education system do not seem to come to terms with what is expected.

In this context, teacher training seems to be a key issue to improve the teaching that takes place in schools. Indeed, perhaps the only way to advance results is to improve instruction (Barber & Mourshed, 2008). Therefore, a goal marked by many countries in their educational systems is precisely to improve the training that their teachers receive. Based on this idea, and under the newly established European Higher Education Area (EHEA), in Spain began to take shape several changes. For example, lifelong learning began to gain greater importance, being a role currently assumed by many of the higher education institutions. Specifically in the educational field, three-year education degrees became four-year degrees, expanding the training that they offered, and, in terms of teacher training, Pedagogical Aptitude Certification becomes Master in Teacher Training of Secondary Education.

Despite this, the skills acquired through the basic teacher training do not usually meet the real needs of the students. Many gaps are detected when teachers arrive at the classrooms and find that they do not have a series of basic tools for their work. Complete their training then is left to their own will, availability and budget. The opportunities provided by the Administration do not always meet the individual needs of teachers, and sometimes lifelong learning is expensive and not everyone can afford it. Moreover, teachers who are already exercising often do not find enough free time to travel to the places where the training courses that they are interest in are given. Thus, there is a common concern about how to provide teachers such educational and intellectual training opportunities that are often wasted due to various reasons.

In this sense, ICTs open a whole new range of possibilities, between which massive open online courses (MOOCs) arise as a ubiquitous, free and powerful source of knowledge. These courses might be one of the most versatile ways that we actually have to offer access to education across the world (Daradoumis, Bassi, Xhafa & Caballé, 2013). Some of the main characteristics of MOOCs, such as their openness, gratuitousness and ubiquity (Kennedy, 2014), make these courses a good alternative to consider to provide continuous training to teachers. Thanks to it, teachers do not have to waste their time and money to attend a training course that may not conform to what they expected to learn. With MOOCs teachers can easily access from anywhere to a wide range of courses about the subject that they are interested in, just with a simple click.

However, these types of courses are not yet sufficiently studied, so they would need an important improvement in this regard (Liyanagunawardena, Adams & Williams, 2013). Also, it is unknown if teachers know what these resources constitute and the opportunities that might offer towards their training. Therefore, the main goal of this study is to make an approach about the knowledge that the university students of the Master of Teacher Training in Secondary Schools have about the MOOCs, and if they think that it could add value to their training.

BACKGROUND

The recent spread of MOOCs demonstrates that technology continues to transform education in both traditional and online settings, and their introduction seems to have expanded its space for possible blended or hybrid course designs and experiences, especially in Higher Education (Bruff, Fisher, McEwen & Smith, 2013).

The first MOOC was launched about six years ago, but it was not until 2012 when several universities began to implement such courses and the

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