

Chapter 5

Exploring Factors Influencing the Structure of Micro–Credentials in Distance Learning From Multiple Stakeholders’ Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

Distance learning has become more popular during the COVID-19 years and the micro-credentials (MCs) has been accepted widespread as an alternative to traditional degree programs. Higher Education Institutions play a critical role in the creation of MCs, taking into account the needs of learners and industry requirements. Hence, it is important to understand and develop this field due to the complexity and diversity of factors that influence the structuring of MCs in distance learning. Moreover, different stakeholders have various influences and priorities on the design, implementation, and adoption of MCs. Therefore, this chapter aims to explore the factors influencing the structuring of MCs in distance learning, considering multiple stakeholders’ perspectives. Using the MICMAC method, factors are categorized into influential, key, dependent, and autonomous groups, offering a comprehensive

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factor map. The chapter concludes with recommendations for effectively structuring MCs in distance learning, addressing both challenges and opportunities to enhance their impact and integration.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, distance learning has become a popular way of satisfying the learning needs of a growing number of people. In this context, the role of micro-credentials (MCs) is becoming increasingly important as they offer flexible and specialized pathways for skills acquisition and career progression. The MCs, according to the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), are defined as a certification of assessed learning that is additional, alternative, complementary, or part of a formal qualification (Oliver, 2019). In the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) report, the term MCs are defined as a term covering a variety of competencies, including nano-degrees, micro-master competence, certificates, badges, licenses, and approvals (UNESCO, 2018). It can be concluded that MCs are detailed certificates, earned through the completion of short and purposeful skills-based learning experiences and when earned it shows that the person has specialized in the skills or competencies desired and targeted.

The acceptance of MCs as an alternative to traditional degree programs and MCs that offer sector-oriented and competency-based learning are gaining a reputation daily. Providing focused, skills-based learning experiences, MCs have become an important tool in meeting the evolving needs of learners and industry too (Fisher & Leder, 2022). They have started to be a permanent part of HEIs. HEIs play an important role in structuring MCs and designing MCs by identifying the needs of learners and taking into account the requirements of the industry. HEIs are also responsible for ensuring the alignment of MCs with academic standards and aim to maximize the benefits of these programs for learners. However, given the complexity and variety of factors influencing the design of MCs in distance learning, understanding and developing this field is essential (Yilmaz et al., 2024; Yilmaz et al., 2022; Yilmaz & Yanik, 2022).

Understanding the factors influencing the design of MCs in distance learning is important for a variety of reasons. First, by ensuring that MCs are responsive to learners' changing needs and expectations, they provide relevant and valuable learning experiences. This facilitates access to customized educational opportunities in alignment with learners' career goals and supports continuing lifelong learning. Particularly in a dynamic workplace environment, this flexibility and adaptability can enhance an individual's competitive advantage. Secondly, it enables higher educational institutions (HEIs) to effectively design and provide MCs that meet

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