Why Undergraduates Enroll in MOOCs?

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Abstract. Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) offer a great opportunity for learners to enjoy learning despite their location or timing. Nevertheless, motives vary between each student and another. In this workshop paper, we are delighted to open discussions on why undergraduates may enroll in their university's MOOCs? Are they looking for ECTS points? Or do they want to build a stronger background in their classes? We support answers to these questions using the Cryer scheme of Elton. Expected debates will summarize student motives in blended learning.

Keywords: blended learning, Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), online learning.

1   Introduction

In the last two decades, educational technology has been changing in a way that the Internet turns into a core part of the teaching and learning process. Moving ahead from using computers to mobile phones and later on to holographic devices, learning becomes more interesting and cataleptic to students. In fact, the use of such services and devices has driven a quantum leap in virtual educational platforms as well. Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are learning platforms that changed the online learning concept. MOOCs can leverage student accessibility in education as well as reduce institution operating costs. For instance, if an institution plans to host 1,000 students in one class, we can imagine how much time, preparation and outlay it can cost. On the other hand, MOOCs are virtual environments that can absorb tens and hundreds of thousands of students in one single course. For example, edX[1] and Coursera[2] platforms recorded over 10 million registrations in 2015 (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/EdX; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coursera, last accessed: March 2017).

Although MOOCs bring great benefits and improvements to online learning, they encounter a lot of attrition and disengagement. The flipped classroom or what is so-called blended learning offers sensible interaction with students that engage them in

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[1] http://www.edx.org
[2] http://www.coursera.org

the real world and get them out of the virtual atmosphere. The literature that compiles MOOCs with traditional learning has not been researched enough. Yet, there exist some themes where hybrid approaches have been introduced by merging online learning (i.e. MOOCs) with the traditional settings (i.e. classes) [3]. Pérez-Sanagustín et al. considered MOOCs in this case to be either a real driver in the learning process or as just an extra service that supports learning.

2   Case Study: Students Surpass MOOCs

Since educationalists believe that blended learning can create a balance between online and traditional learning, practitioners may see the picture from a different angle. Khalil et al. [2] have experienced an interesting case study where students could pass a MOOC without watching the learning videos. The authors split the examined group in two categories, the first category were undergraduates who need to enroll in the MOOC so that they can get 3 European Credit Transfer and Accumulation (ECTS) points in their records. The other category was the external students who were from the public. Khalil et al. [2] reported that around 45% of the undergraduates could pass the MOOC by *gaming the MOOC system* (the MOOC system offered multiple attempts for each weekly quiz). On the other hand, they recorded only 11% of the other category who could pass the MOOC without watching the MOOC videos. Such results could show that MOOCs were used as a tool to bypass a difficult stage in the traditional class.

A similar case was cataloged in the edX platform by Zhao et al. [4]. Although their study was not focused on blended learning, Zhao et al. found that some courses have certified students of up to 20% of the total enrollees without watching videos. Explanations were related to that students could have a knowledge beforehand or they might have downloaded the videos from YouTube directly.

3   Cryer Scheme of Elton Concept

In this part of the article, we briefly talk about the concept of Cryer Scheme of Elton [1] in relation to blended learning with MOOCs and the described case study in section 2. Fig. 1 depicts a two-dimensional scheme where the author tried to connect the intrinsic motivations with the extrinsic ones from the student point of view. The y-axis depicts the extrinsic factors by which they can be badges, certificates, rewards, or any other sort of recognition. The x-axis depicts the intrinsic factors for students such as their inner motivation '*to learn*'.

We can see from the figure that the Cryer scheme of Elton delivered the relation between the intrinsic and extrinsic factors in six kinds of representation. If students have the enough intrinsic motivation with the support of extrinsic factors, they will be highly committed students. While students can drop out of the system (despair) if their extrinsic as well as the intrinsic motivation are at the lowest level. On the other hand, a compelling group of students are those who play with the system. This cluster of students has low intrinsic factors but with high extrinsic ones. If we consider that

students in MOOCs are doing quizzes without watching the core material of the lectures (i.e. videos), then their main driver is achieving an extrinsic goal. In fact, this type of student profiles in blended learning themes can be spotted more than those of pure online learning settings. The research studies by Khalil et al. and Zhao et al. [2; 4] support this conceptual thesis. Nevertheless, an extended research in the future will be able to provide extra profound explanations.
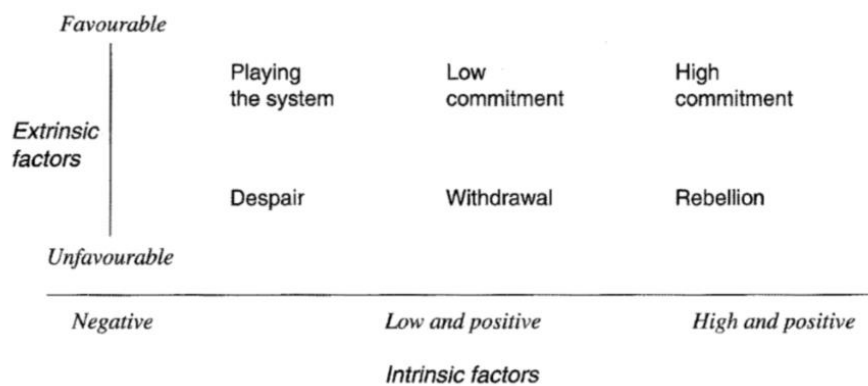

Fig. 1. Cryer Scheme of Elton, from Strategies to Enhance Student Motivation [1].

At the end of this workshop paper, I propose the following open-ended questions:

1. How can we improve students' intrinsic motivation in blended learning?
2. What are other possible explanations for those undergratudes who skip watching video lectures but look for rewards?
3. What type of interventions can support a fruitful blended learning between MOOCs and traditional learning?

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