Aristotle University of Thessaloniki
Department of Italian Language and Literature
MA in Technology and Language Education

Master Thesis

Language Massive Open Online Courses: Learners’ motivation and background

by
Despoina Karipidi

Supervisor:
Dr. Maria Elena Bárcena Madera

Thessaloniki
2018
Abstract

This paper focuses on the research of the motivation and the educational/personal background of LMOOC learners. The research was conducted using a questionnaire, which was answered by 279 participants from all corners of the world. The questionnaire consists of 16 questions with some demographic questions and then some questions regarding the participants’ motivation and expectations.

The responders have participated in the LMOOC “Basic Spanish 1: Getting Started” by the Polytechnic University of Valencia in the edX MOOC platform. This 7-week Spanish language course is aimed at students who would like to learn conversational Spanish starting with Spanish basics. The course introduces everyday language and includes activities to practice all four language skills: reading comprehension, writing, listening comprehension and speaking (Polytechnic University of Valencia: course instructors).

Keywords: Language MOOC, motivation, educational background, personal background, MOOC technology, Spanish language, CALL
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank my thesis supervisor Dr. Maria Elena Bárcena Madera, associate professor in the Department of Modern Languages at the Spanish National Distance Education University (UNED), for the useful remarks, patient guidance and engagement through the writing process of this master thesis. She allowed this project to be my own work, but steered me in the right direction whenever she thought I needed it.

I would, also, like to thank Dr. Ana Gimeno Sanz and her colleagues in charge of the MOOC initiative at the Polytechnic University of Valencia for accepting to include my questionnaire in their Basic Spanish 1: Getting Started MOOC. I am grateful to the participants who were involved in the survey of this research project and answered my questionnaire. Without their participation and input, the research could not have been successfully conducted.

Finally, I must express my profound gratitude to my family and friends for providing me with unfailing support and continuous encouragement throughout my years of study and through the process of researching and writing this thesis. This accomplishment would not have been possible without them.
# Table of Contents

Abstract ................................................................................................................................................. 3  
Acknowledgements ................................................................................................................................. 4  
1. List of Acronyms ................................................................................................................................... 6  
2. Theoretical Framework ......................................................................................................................... 7  
   2.1 Introduction ....................................................................................................................................... 7  
   2.2 Objectives ......................................................................................................................................... 8  
3. Massive Open Online Courses ............................................................................................................ 9  
   3.1 Types of MOOCs ............................................................................................................................... 11  
      3.1.1 xMOOCs .................................................................................................................................... 11  
      3.1.2 cMOOCs .................................................................................................................................... 11  
      3.1.3 LMOOCs .................................................................................................................................... 12  
   3.2 MOOC Platforms .............................................................................................................................. 13  
      3.2.1 Coursera ..................................................................................................................................... 13  
      3.2.2 EdX ............................................................................................................................................ 14  
      3.2.3 FutureLearn ............................................................................................................................... 14  
4. MOOCs Motivation ............................................................................................................................... 15  
   4.1 Motivation to learn ........................................................................................................................... 15  
   4.2 Drop-Out Rates ............................................................................................................................... 15  
5. Research design .................................................................................................................................... 17  
   5.1 Methodology ..................................................................................................................................... 17  
   5.2 Questionnaire – Data collection ..................................................................................................... 17  
6. Results ................................................................................................................................................... 18  
7. Future research - Limitations .............................................................................................................. 41  
8. Discussion - Conclusions .................................................................................................................... 41  
9. List of References .................................................................................................................................. 43  
10. Appendix ............................................................................................................................................... 48
1. List of Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CALL</td>
<td>Computer Assisted Language Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOOC</td>
<td>Massive Open Online Course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LMOOC</td>
<td>Language Massive Open Online Course</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Introduction

The expanding use of computers has led to changes in the nature of education in the 21st century. All spheres of education have been influenced by this phenomenon and there has been an immense interest in the application of computers in the field of language teaching and learning (Peterson, 2004). Especially the emergence of MOOCs has been a fast-growing trend over the past few years, receiving both high acclaim and criticism with respect to how it will change the education landscape (Kim, 2015).

Despite contradictions and differences of opinion on the role of technology in teaching and learning, it is hard to deny that the MOOC movement has had a major influence on how higher learning is conceptualized. They are referenced as the latest high-tech educational solution and hailed as transformative, revolutionary and innovative (Rhoads, 2015).

The technological updates to the World Wide Web have played a pivotal role in the eventual rise of MOOCs. As Rhoads (2015) points out it was the coming together of new technologies and the emergent notions of shared knowledge that undergirded this rise and furthered the innovative thinking of online education advocates.

MOOCs, however, are more than just massive, open, online courses. They are an educational innovation that combines and extends the capabilities of existing technologies and draws on a range of approaches to e-learning to offer a new educational product in a new way to new markets (Klobas, Mackintosh, & Murphy, 2015). LMOOCs, in particular, in imitating the best practices of language teaching and learning, is an eclectic mix of practices and tools aiming to engage students in the use of the target language in meaningful and authentic ways (Sokolik, 2014).
2.2 Objectives
The central idea of the research is to analyze the background of the participants in MOOCs of Spanish language learning and to research the learners’ motivation for registration on these online courses.

The main objectives of the present study are the following ones:

- To explore the educational and personal background of the participants.
- To analyze the particular reasons that motivated the students to participate in the courses.
- To examine the completion and drop-out rates for these specific MOOCs.
- To indicate future improvements to the courses, based on the participants’ visions and expectations.

In order to fulfill this research I collaborated with Prof. Ana Gimeno Sanz and her colleagues that run a successful MOOC for Spanish language learning. I was able to distribute my questionnaire and get the results. Throughout this whole process I was an observer, not a member of the team.

The questionnaire was created through SurveyMonkey platform and distributed to the LMOOC participants. It is available in the appendix of the thesis.
3. Massive Open Online Courses

MOOCs are courses offered online at a distance, and open -at no charge- to any participant who wishes to enroll. The underlying technology has the capacity to accommodate many thousands of participants.

The term MOOC was coined in 2008 by David Cormier, an educational activist, while he was discussing an interactive online trainings course by G. Siemens and S. Downes, on “Connectivism and Connective Knowledge”. According to Cornier, a MOOC is open, participatory, distributed, and establishes a foundation for lifelong, networked learning. MOOCs offer a way to connect, collaborate, engage in the learning process, and, most importantly, to connect people who care about a topic (Mai, Poppe, & Greenhow, 2016).

![Figure 1: The defining characteristics of MOOCs (Klobas, Mackintosh, & Murphy, 2015)](image)

- **M** for Massive refers to the capacity of MOOCs to accommodate very large numbers of learners, well beyond the numbers that can be accommodated in classrooms and face-to-face teaching (Klobas, Mackintosh, & Murphy, 2015). Since there are no prerequisites, the number of subscribers may be ranging from a few hundred to over 150,000 students for the best known MOOCs.
- **O** for Open refers to the fact that enrollment is open to all audiences. There is no restriction on professional status, prior learning or qualification, or other source of individual, physical and intellectual difference. Also, usually no charge is made for any aspect of the course or acknowledgement of completion (Klobas, Mackintosh, & Murphy, 2015).
• O for Online defines MOOCs as online courses, meaning that all exercises are organised for delivery on the Internet, regardless of their relationship to classroom-based courses and activities. Most online participation is asynchronous (Klobas, Mackintosh, & Murphy, 2015). Learners choose their own time to access content and follow course activities rather than attend online, live lectures, meaning that a MOOC can be personalized and adapted to the pace desired by the student (Pomerol, Epelboin, & Thoury, 2015).

• C for Course reminds us that the foundation of MOOCs, is still a course, a systematic sequence of learning activities (Klobas, Mackintosh, & Murphy, 2015). MOOCs have the characteristics of a traditional course – they are run during a specific time period, based upon prescribed content and instruction is provided to the student during that time. As with traditional courses, there is also usually an element of assessment (Porter, 2015).

![Figure 2: Four aspects on MOOCs (Klobas, Mackintosh, & Murphy, 2015)](image)

After the launch of the major MOOC platforms (edX, Coursera, FutureLearn etc.), MOOCs rapidly spread across globe. MOOC providers were no longer drawn exclusively from prestigious universities. New course providers appeared from middling colleges and universities, community colleges, high schools, government agencies, nongovernment organizations and business firms (Waks, 2016).

The learners targeted by MOOCs in turn shifted gradually from college students to high school students and retired seniors, working professionals with college degrees and employees seeking firm-specific training. By the end of 2013, MOOCs, had expanded to serve most niches in the education and training space worldwide, and new formats were developed to better serve the range of users (Waks, 2016).
3.1 Types of MOOCs

Beyond the characteristics which are common to all types of MOOCs, we can distinguish two main types: one that guides the students following it, along a clearly defined path. This is an “xMOOC” or “transmissive MOOC”. The other type, called a “connectivist MOOC”, is much less directive. The material is made available to the learners, but it is the learners themselves who construct their own course, manage their progression and construct their own learning. This is known as a “cMOOC” (Pomerol, Epelboin, & Thoury, 2015).

According to Matthieu Cisel (2013) there are five criteria which distinguish an xMOOC from a cMOOC: the objective of the course, the level of prerequisites to enroll, the type of resources used, the type of activities offered and the degree of constraint.

3.1.1. xMOOCs

These MOOCs are more structured and less focused on content. The learning approach in xMOOCs is traditional and teacher-centered. In xMOOCs, learning objectives are fixed by teachers, and communication among participants is limited (Vacanti, et al., 2015).

An xMOOC is close to the classic pedagogical model. This course is supplemented by directed tasks, practical work, orientation toward online documentation, and evaluations.

The primary objective of an xMOOC is the transmission of knowledge. An xMOOC requires a significant amount of individual activity, in spite of the existence of forums and peer correction. Platforms such as Coursera or edX essentially offer xMOOCs (Pomerol, Epelboin, & Thoury, 2015).

3.1.2 cMOOCs

cMOOCs stands for connectivist MOOCs, associated to the theory of Connectivism which was developed by George Siemens. cMOOCs allow learners to share their knowledge, while building their own networks. This type of MOOCs depends on the contribution of individuals, it is less structured and relies more on learners’ self-organisation and participation (Vacanti, et al., 2015).
A cMOOC is based on a participative approach whereby each student carries out his or her own search, conducts exchanges with his or her peers and publishes the conclusions. The pedagogical model is innovative, the knowledge is distributed, and the coherence and progression of the course is constructed by the learner.

As Pomerol et al. (2015) point out the participants can enrich the MOOC, and the community helps to construct and distribute the content. A cMOOC is similar to the vision of free software, with a very prevalent sense of community. The teacher’s job is not to transmit knowledge to the students, but rather facilitate exchanges between the participants about a topic.

Table 1: The attributes of xMOOCs and cMOOCs (Yuan, Powell, & Olivier, 2014)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>xMOOCs</th>
<th>cMOOCs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scalability of provision</td>
<td>Massive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Community and connections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open access - Restricted license</td>
<td>Open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Open access &amp; licence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual learning in single platform</td>
<td>Online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Networked learning across multiple platforms and services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquire a curriculum of knowledge &amp; skills</td>
<td>Course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Develop shared practices, knowledge and understanding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table analyses and gives an overview of the different forms of MOOCs in terms of massive, open, online and course. The different interpretations placed upon the title words have significant implications for developing business models, pedagogical opportunities and technology options for each type of MOOC.

### 3.1.3 LMOOCs

Language MOOCs are web-based freely accessible for a limited period of time, designed to facilitate the development of communicative language competences in potentially massive and highly heterogeneous groups, whose main shared interest is to learn a foreign language (Martín-Monje & Barcena, 2014).

It seems that LMOOCs are an intriguing phenomenon with promising theoretical affordances ranging from offering free language education to challenged learners worldwide, over offering specialized courses tailored to the learners’ needs, to provide course designers with huge collections of building blocks (Colpaert, 2014).
According to (Martín-Monje, Barcena, & Read, 2013) and (Read, 2014) some of the problems that LMOOCs face are the new role of the teacher, how to provide effective feedback, and the management of this heterogeneous student group of people distributed all over the world, with different levels of language communicative competences and goals.

3.2 MOOC Platforms
The current main MOOC providers are Coursera, edX and FutureLearn. These platforms have very quickly connected with academic institutions around the world. There is now a substantial number of partners across the world and MOOCs are being offered by many different providers in multiple languages (Porter, 2015).

3.2.1 Coursera

Coursera emerged from the Department of Computer Science at Stanford University, where N. Koller and A. were experimenting with using online technologies to enhance traditional teaching and became interested in the potential to use the tools that they were developing to reach a much larger audience (Koller, 2012). As of June 2018, Coursera has more than 33 million registered users and offers more than 2,400 courses (CNBC Channel, 2018).

Of the MOOC platforms, Coursera has achieved the most publicity and grown most quickly. Although it has emerged from an academic institution, it has quickly established itself as a successful “start-up” with the characteristics that go along with that: clear and ambitious growth strategies, fast recruitment of team members and significant investment that supports fast growth (Porter, 2015).

Coursera currently (2018) offers the following LMOOCs for Spanish language learning:

I. Learn Spanish: Basic Spanish Vocabulary (University of California, Davis):
   Cultural Experience, Careers and Social Events, Sports, Travel, and the Home

II. Spanish for Successful Communication in Healthcare Settings (Rice University)

III. Corrección, estilo y variaciones de la lengua Española (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona)
3.2.2 EdX

EdX has a different lineage to Coursera. Like them, it has emerged from elite university sector in the United States, but unlike the other platforms, it has been established from the start as a not-for-profit venture and its initial investment has come from commitment by its two sponsoring institutions, MIT and Harvard (Porter, 2015).

EdX has grown quickly in both numbers of courses offered and also in student numbers registered. More than 130 academic institutions, nonprofit organizations, and corporations offer courses on the edX website. As of 29 December 2017, edX has around 14 million students taking more than 1,800 courses online (Shah, 2018).

EdX currently (2018) offers the following LMOOCs for Spanish language learning:

I. Basic Spanish 1: Getting Started (Universitat Politècnica de València)
II. Basic Spanish 2: One Step Further (Universitat Politècnica de València)
III. Learning Spanish in Paradise (Pontificia Universidad Javeriana)
IV. AP® Spanish Language and Culture (St. Margaret’s Episcopal School)
V. AP® Spanish Language and Culture (Boston University)

3.2.3 FutureLearn

The UK’s Open University, established the first significant European MOOC venture by announcing the establishment of FutureLearn (Open University, 2012). This is a for-profit company that is wholly owned by the Open University and which was established as a European alternative to the MOOC market dominated by North American institutions.

FutureLearn set out a very clear strategy of focusing upon the top tier institutions as its initial partners. The company has 140 partners from around the world. These include many of the best UK and international universities, as well as institutions with a huge archive of cultural and educational material, such as the British Council, and a range of internationally renowned organizations. FutureLearn launched its first courses in September 2013 and since then 8,246,082 people have joined (FutureLearn, 2018).

FutureLearn currently (2018) offers the following LMOOCs for Spanish language learning:
I. Spanish Across the Americas: Beginners (Universidad Nacional de Córdoba)
II. Spanish for Beginners (The Open University): Meeting and Greeting, People and Places, My Life, Leisure Time, Getting Things Done, Out and About

4. MOOCs Motivation

4.1 Motivation to learn

Motivation is perceived as a reason or a goal a person has for behaving in a given manner in a given situation. It is part of a person’s objectives and beliefs of what is important or not (Ames, 1992). In the context of learning, motivation is conceptualized as an internal source, which enhances and maintains cognitive development (Brophy, 2004) (Slavin, 1987).

There are several components that influence learning. One of them is personal relevance that indicates the significance of learning to the learner’s goals (Duda & Nicholls, 1992). Moreover, self-efficacy refers to learner’s confidence that they can achieve high outcomes (Bandura, 2006).

4.2 Drop-Out Rates

One of the biggest accusations directed at MOOCs has to do with their seemingly huge attrition rates. The online nature of MOOCs increases the likelihood that someone will hit an enroll button before making a commitment to take the course. The fact that MOOCs offer a college course for free with no consequences for nonparticipation creates even more motivation to sign up (Haber, 2014).

Students have different goals and intentions that interact and change over time, and because of the low cost of entry and exit for MOOCs, the decision to leave can easily be triggered by any number of factors.

Focusing on internal factors, ability is perhaps the most obvious internal predictor of student performance and persistence. Across a wide range of academic settings, low-performing students tend to drop out more frequently than high-performing ones (Hoskins & Van Hooff, 2005).
Students also vary widely in their ability to self-regulate their own learning, a skill set that is particularly important in learning environments like MOOCs.

Other factors affecting dropout include students’ level of interest in the material that they are learning. Lack of interest can cause students to dedicate less time to the course, leading them to skip pieces of content, disengage from assessments, or simply proceed through the content at a slow pace (Halawa, Greene, & Mitchell, 2014).
5. Research design

5.1 Methodology

The best way to conduct the present research was the mixed approach. Mixed methods research includes collecting, analyzing and interpreting data using both quantitative and qualitative methods in a single study in order to investigate a phenomenon or attempt to answer a research question. This will result in a comprehensive look at the research problem from many perspectives and will offer a more complete picture when analyzing results (Creswell).

5.2 Questionnaire – Data collection

The questionnaire that was distributed to the participants consists of 16 questions and the responses were confidential, compiled together and analyzed as a group. The survey was anonymous and the participation voluntary. The questionnaire was created through the SurveyMonkey website.

Most of the questions had multiple choice. This questions are versatile, intuitive, and they yield clean data that is easy to analyze. Since they provide a fixed list of answer options, they give structured survey responses and make it easier for the respondents to complete the questionnaire (SurveyMonkey, 2018).

The research was conducted during September 2018 through the edX platform. 279 questionnaires were gathered.

I. The 1st part of the questionnaire has demographical information about the participant. It focuses not only on the personal background of the students but also on the educational one. Thus, as result of the analysis of the first part we have gender, age, educational level and professional background.

II. The 2nd part examines whether the participants have prior experience with MOOCs, how many hours they spent on the platform and which is their motivation for participating.

6 The 3rd and final part emphasizes on the learners’ expectations and visions regarding their engagement with Massive Open Online Courses.
6. Results

The main purpose of this chapter is to present data that has been collected for the purpose of the present research. In total, 279 people have answered the online questionnaire.

Q1: What is your gender?

Answered: 279   Skipped: 0

According to the results 178 of the participants were female and 97 were male. 2 responders preferred not to reveal their gender and 2 have chosen the answer “other”. This points out that women have shown a greater interest (2/3 of the responders) for the learning of Spanish language.
Q2: What is your age?
Answered: 279 Skipped: 0

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANSWER CHOICES</th>
<th>RESPONSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 18</td>
<td>4.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 to 24</td>
<td>32.26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 to 44</td>
<td>45.52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 to 64</td>
<td>14.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65+</td>
<td>2.87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As we can see in the above chart almost half of the responders belong to the 25-44 age group. Furthermore, 90 people are 18 to 24 years old. The third group includes the participants that are 45 to 64 years old, whereas the rest belong to the under 18 age group and the 65+ age group, 13 and 8 people accordingly.
Q3: Which country do you come from?

Answered: 279    Skipped: 0

According to the results, the participants originate from the following 59 countries:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AE - United Arab Emirates</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AL - Albania</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM - Armenia</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AU – Australia</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BB – Barbados</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BD – Bangladesh</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BE – Belgium</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BR – Brazil</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA – Canada</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CH - Switzerland</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CN – China</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country Code</td>
<td>Country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DE</td>
<td>Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DK</td>
<td>Denmark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DZ</td>
<td>Algeria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EG</td>
<td>Egypt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ER</td>
<td>Eritrea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FR</td>
<td>France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FX</td>
<td>France, Metropolitan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GE</td>
<td>Georgia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GR</td>
<td>Greece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GY</td>
<td>Guyana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HK</td>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HR</td>
<td>Croatia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HU</td>
<td>Hungary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ID</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IN</td>
<td>India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT</td>
<td>Italy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JM</td>
<td>Jamaica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JP</td>
<td>Japan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KR</td>
<td>Korea, South</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LB</td>
<td>Lebanon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA</td>
<td>Morocco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MG</td>
<td>Madagascar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MV</td>
<td>Maldives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MX</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MY</td>
<td>Malaysia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NG</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NL</td>
<td>Netherlands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NP</td>
<td>Nepal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NZ</td>
<td>New Zealand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PH</td>
<td>Philippines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PK</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PL</td>
<td>Poland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PT</td>
<td>Portugal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As expected the biggest group in our figure are the Americans, more specifically 88 out of 279 people (31.79%). Spanish is the second most spoken language in the USA and is the most studied foreign language in the country.

Participants from India constitute the second most populous group, with 27 responders, whereas Brazil (12 responders) and the UK (11 responders) come third and fourth accordingly. Brazil’s official language is Portuguese, but the Spanish language must be extremely useful taking into account the country’s geographic vicinity to most of the Spanish-speaking countries in Latin America, but also the similarities the two languages share.

The rest of the countries that are represented in the above chart have less than 10 participants each.
Q4: What is the highest level of education you have completed?

Answered: 279  Skipped: 0

When it comes to the participants’ educational level, we can see that almost 39.43% of them (110 responders) hold a Bachelor degree. 79 responders have concluded their Master studies, whereas only 7 out of 279 people hold a PhD degree.

The third biggest group consists of the high/secondary school graduates (21.15%), followed by 14 people that had a technical/vocational training. Finally, 10 participants haven’t finished primary/secondary education.

We tend to think that not highly qualified people have the motivation to take this kind of online courses in order to improve their skills. However, the research proves that most of the participants are highly educated.
Q5: Which of the following categories best describes your employment status?

Answered: 279    Skipped: 0

Regarding the participants’ employment status, the vast majority (139 responders) works on a full-time basis, whereas 22 out of 279 are employed on part-time jobs. 70 responders are students and only 7 of them are retired.

24 people are unemployed and are looking for a job, while 9 responders are not searching for a job at all. Last but not least, 8 participants are not pursuing a career and have chosen to stay at home.
Q6: Which is your language level in Spanish? CEFR levels (Self-assessment grid)
Answered: 279    Skipped: 0

As we can see, 1/3 of the participants (35.84%) knows the language on a basic level, whereas 62.01% or 173 of them have no prior knowledge. Finally, only 5 responders answered that they are independent users of the Spanish language and as expected only 1 person stated that he/she is a proficient user.

The course mostly aimed at people with no prior or just basic knowledge of the language and introduces the learners to the A1 proficiency level of Spanish.
In that question, the participants were encouraged to use the self-assessment grid, which illustrates the levels of proficiency described in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and is an essential component of the European Language Portfolio (ELP). They could use this table to assess their level of Spanish language.

Q7: How many languages do you speak?

Answered: 279    Skipped: 0

According to the graph 34.41% or 96 of the participants stated that they are monolinguals, whereas 10.39% of them (29 responders) said they are bilinguals. An impressive percent of the responders speak 2 or 3 languages, 26.88% and 21.51% accordingly. As expected only 19 out of 279 participants speak 4 or more languages.
Probably the monolingual participants are those originating from English-speaking countries. Furthermore, it is very interesting and truly encouraging that even though half of the participants already speak 2 or 3 languages, they still have the motivation to learn new languages and broaden their knowledge.

**Q8: What is your level of digital competence? Digital competences (Self-assessment grid)**

Answered: 279   Skipped: 0

![Bar chart showing digital competence levels](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANSWER CHOICES</th>
<th>RESPONSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basic user</td>
<td>24.73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent user</td>
<td>35.84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proficient user</td>
<td>39.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As we can see in the table 110 out of 279 participants answered that they are proficient users of a computer. 100 responders or 35.84% consider themselves as independent users, where the third option of a “basic user” gathered 69 answers.

The fact that even users with basic digital competences take the online courses, shows how accessible and easy to navigate the MOOC platform is.
Q9: Why did you decide to participate in this MOOC? I want to... (You can select multiple answers)

Answered: 279  Skipped: 0
The reasons why the responders decided to participate in the MOOC of Spanish language vary. The participants had the option to choose multiple answers. Most of the participants (83.15%) said that the learning of a new language was what really motivated them.

According to the table, a significant proportion of responders stated that their interest in the Spanish language/culture (56.27%) and travelling to/visiting Spanish speaking countries (44.44%) motivated them to learn the basics.

Furthermore, almost half of them (43.01%) focused on the improvement their current language skills, followed by 114 participants (40.86%) stating that their motivation was the improvement of their job opportunities/career prospects.

Another significant incentive for taking the course was the interaction with other learners (30.47%) and the improvement of their educational profile (27.96%). Many responders (19.71%) have Spanish-speaking friends or relatives, so they decided to start the course, whereas 20.79% of the participants decided to start this MOOC in order to help them live/move to another country.
Q10: How familiar are you with the use of technology in the language learning process?

Answered: 279  Skipped: 0

As stated in the graph 1/3 of the participants think that they are somewhat familiar with the use of technology in language learning, followed by a 23.66% that feel very familiar with that.

Moreover 64 responders answered that they are not very familiar with the use of technology for that specific goal, whereas 10 responders (3.58%) are not familiar at all. On the contrary 46 participants stated that they are extremely familiar with the use of technology in the language learning context.

In a world truly connected and full of technological innovations it is not surprising that most of the responders are quite familiar with the use of technology in that context.
Q11: On a typical week, how many hours do you spend on the online learning platform (edX, Coursera, FutureLearn etc.)?

Answered: 279    Skipped: 0

When it comes to the hours spent on the platform, 41.94% spends about an hour on a weekly basis, followed by a 35.12% (25 people) that spends 2-3 hours connected to the online platform. 43 responders (15.41%) stated that they spend 4-5 per week studying Spanish through the platform, whereas the rest of the 279 people dedicate 6-7 hours or even more on the MOOC for language learning, 2.51% and 5.02% accordingly.
Q12: How interested (motivated) are you in this online course?

Answered: 279    Skipped: 0

As we can see in the graph almost half of the responders (49.82%) show a great interest for this course. 61 participants (21.86%) replied that they feel somewhat interested in the MOOC, in comparison to the 27.96% of them that are extremely interested in taking the course. As expected only 1 person stated that he/she is not so interested for this online Spanish course.
Q13: Do you plan on getting a certificate of achievement?

Answered: 279  Skipped: 0

That question focuses on whether the participants intend to get a certificate of achievement after finishing the course. According to the table 40.14% have already decided not to get one, whereas 124 out of 279 participants (44.44%) are not sure yet. On the contrary only a 15.41% (43 responders) stated that they plan to get the certificate.
Q14: Have you already taken part in other MOOCs?

Answered: 279    Skipped: 0

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANSWER CHOICES</th>
<th>RESPONSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>44.44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>55.56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When it comes to prior experience with MOOCs 44.44% or 124 responders replied that they have already taken other online courses, whereas 155 of them (55.56%) have no prior experience with this type of online learning.

The fact that half of the participants have already taken other MOOCs, and continue to do so, shows that they are probably satisfied with this type of online learning and that MOOCs fulfill their expectations in general.
Q15: If yes, did you complete the online course(s)?

Answered: 190  Skipped: 89

That question is directly linked to the previous one. It focuses on the drop-out rates of MOOCs. As we can see in the table only 35.79% (68 responders) of those with prior MOOC experience have completed the previous courses taken, whereas 37.89% of them (72 participants) have completed only some of them. The drop-out rate is at 26.32%, which means that 1 in 4 responders have quit a MOOC at least once.

High drop-out rates are still a challenge for the MOOC designers and people involved in Computer Assisted Language Learning in general.
Q16 Have your expectations on this MOOC been fulfilled? Please include your visions on MOOCs.

Answered: 106 Skipped: 173

It is very interesting to see what the participants think and feel about this online learning process. Let’s take a look at some of the answers:

- Yes. I think learning from the comfort of your own home and based on your own schedule is very convenient and encouraging.
- Yes, I enjoy online learning.
- I want to talk learning with more friends.
- I am still at the beginning but I feel confident that my expectations will be fulfilled.
- It would be beneficial to new learners!
- I do not know what to expect.
- I would like to see more interactive exercises using artificial intelligence. It could be for example "live" discussions with a chatbox or simulations of real situations like booking a room or ordering a meal in a restaurant.
- I believe it will add more achievement in my career building by completing this MOOC. MOOC is the platform where I can work so conveniently because I can adjust the schedule and I don't need to go out to pursue the course.
- I want to be proficient in reading Spanish as well as conversational Spanish.
- I'm not able to answer that question as of yet.
- Yes. I found it very useful and easy to be used.
- I am repeating the course. I found it extremely useful first time around but I have forgotten much of the stuff.
- Yes, they have been. I hope to achieve continuing education in the learning of Spanish.
- I think MOOCs are a fantastic opportunity for people to develop their skills in a wide range of fields. They allow users to be creative with their time. My expectations for this MOOC have been fulfilled, as far as I can tell!
- To a certain extent yes.
- I believe this is an amazing opportunity to learn new things online for free.
• I have started the current course, however, the previous courses have fulfilled my expectation regarding it.
• I am a newcomer and don't yet know the details of this whole learning platform. I wish to be a fluent speaker of Spanish through MOOC.
• I am brand new. I started five minutes ago. I hope to learn the basics so I can start an actual college course at level 2.
• Yes, very good experience.
• Yes, I still think that acknowledgment should be totally free for people. Because of the simple reason, not everyone will spend time, force yourself, improving self-control to get them perfect, but that amount who would they could gain whatever they need to gain and show results.
• My expectation MOOC present in easy way to understand in that participants from variety background, every lesson in English/ multi languages, many courses for improve skills. My vision to MOOC is become the best solution for taking course via virtual. Thank you.
• I haven't had a chance to judge yet but I'm looking forward to getting started.
• This is the first time I am doing something like this. I expect that when I am through that I would have had a better grasp of the language and if I am successful I will look to do other courses here.
• I believe this is a great tool for all people.
• I hope to fully understand everything I need to know.
• Yes, it is easy to start, good for beginner.
• Yes. In general, MOOCs are a great resource for all types of learners.
• It's my first experience to study in a MOOC, and by the way I've just started to learn Spanish, but I do believe that MOOC would be very helpful to all its users because you can learn whenever and wherever you are, it means that you're not pressed at all so you must be comfortable at your learning which is very beneficial for your learning.
• Yes, they have, I think they enriched me a lot regarding my level on education of various topics and later on, I have used all of those knowledge in school, even though not in such an advanced way as on MOOC.
• Hope to have my expectations fulfilled. I would like to learn new skills in the most convenient way online.
• I supposed to grid a basic knowledge from this program and go further learning from other lecture.
• I like mooc courses.
• I have not completed much of this current course so far, but other MOOCs I have been in have been outlined well and I found them useful. For me, I need practice exercises to enforce what I learn and help me retain information better. If a MOOC does not offer that, I do not find it very helpful.
• Yes. I guess MOOCs are a very useful way to take courses, because I can schedule my own time.
• Yes, making education free makes it easier for people like me to access. I dropped out of college and was left in debt, but with MOOCs, I can get the most out of education without penalty or time restraints.
• Just started. Usually they are to slow-paced in the early lessons to keep my interest. Food Service and govt regulatory courses online tend to be more interesting actually, even though the content itself is bland.
• I think this is a good way to learn new things that one is interested in.
• Yes, to some extent it has been met. I needed some concrete material and systematic method to start off, which this platform has provided. However, the system is not quite user friendly and needs to be upgraded.
• In the past yes, my expectations have been met. I hope employers and institutions begin to regard MOOC certifications more.
• Just starting so I cannot say but based on previous MOOCs, my expectations were met to my satisfaction.
• Yes, I think it is a great platform to learn new things and have a variety of courses which can be very helpful in the future.
• So far, everything is understandable. I'm looking forward to learning new languages and improving my communication skills.
• To be proficient in the language.
• This is my first edX course. I have completed courses on Coursera.
• Have a basic knowledge of Spanish language and try to communicate with my business partners.
• To complete this online course and be able to continue higher levels.
• A great way to prove myself in many subjects.
• Yes. With this course I was able to review and take some doubts I had about Spanish.
• I would like to see longer videos. In many cases my best opportunity is to listen in the car so navigating many short videos is difficult.
• Have a basic conversational competence.
• The MOOC’s I took part in were a great challenge. Up to now they both added value to my resume.
• Yes. Also taking course for brain stimulation.
• I want to be fluent in the Spanish language for school.
• Learn enough Spanish for survival situations.
• I would like to learn a new language, so I expect this course will help me with that.
• Yes, so far. My visions are to be able to learn, fluently speak and interpret Spanish. In addition, I would like to learn more about Spanish culture & traditions.
• Partially, MOOCs courses are very interesting but still, there are some difficulties: how to be self-organized and achieve the courses, the real interaction with other peers and teachers. But it is a great way to get involved to new subjects and know more about other fields.
• Yes. I hope to keep learning and educating myself through this site.
• Yes, although it should be promoting alerts and email reminders as to your class and to keep you on track.
• I expect this to be a great learning opportunity in order for me to improve my linguistic abilities as well as broaden my intellectual capacity.
• This is the first time to use online course by English, I am not sure how it works, but I have confidence both in myself and MOOC.
• Not yet, I am a fresher to this, still working through it. It seems very interesting and be very useful.
Most of the participants think of MOOCs as a great opportunity for self-regulated online learning. They are interested in improving their language skills and their educational profile in general.

Some of them just want to gain basic knowledge for conversational reasons, whereas some others want to take it one step further and use the Spanish language in a professional context.

Moreover, most of the responders feel satisfied by the videos and exercises that comprise the MOOC. Also, they see these online courses as a great boost to their CV and professional skills.

The fact that everyone can take these courses on their one pace, without time and space constraints, makes it an even more innovative experience. It allows people around the world to be part of an international educational community.

Finally, many learners made some useful comments regarding further improvements of the material, the videos and the course structure in general. All these suggestions could be used as a motivation for MOOC designers, instructors and university institutions.
7. Future research - Limitations

The limitations of this study include the relatively small, voluntary sample of research participants (279 questionnaires), which might hinder the generalization of the results. Another limitation is the short duration of the study. Although methodologically challenging, it would be very useful to conduct some longer-term studies on the same subject.

There are a number of gaps in our knowledge around motivation in LMOOCs that follow our findings, and would benefit from further research. Future studies could address the same research problem in different settings and context (language, MOOC platform etc.).

8. Discussion - Conclusions

According to Motzo and Proudfoot (Motzo & Proudfoot, 2017) MOOCs can potentially play an important role in bridging the gap between formal and informal learning. They fulfil the brief of making educational resources freely available to a wider audience, and they foster innovation in pedagogic approaches, allowing universities to test new ways of delivering courses.

Language MOOCs (LMOOCs) have recently been added to the ever-growing list of open courses offered by various providers. For learners, LMOOCs offer an innovative and inexpensive alternative to formal and traditional learning. For course designers and developers, this emerging language learning model raises important issues concerning the affordances of the new learning environment and the rationale for adopting a particular pedagogical approach to sustain the learning experience (Motzo & Proudfoot, 2017).

So the aim of this dissertation was to provide an insight into the motivation, the reasons why learners undertake and progress in a MOOC. Also, the research focused on their background, the educational and personal one.

In other words, the study aimed to demystify the learner experience in MOOCs, thus creating a deeper understanding of MOOC participants. The result was a richer
understanding of learners’ motivations and perceptions of completion. The research provides a small step toward describing the diversity and complexity of learners’ MOOC learning paths (Loizzo, Ertmer, Watson, & Watson, 2017).

Quantitative data have demonstrated MOOC learners are typically well-educated adults who often do not complete courses as defined by instructor and institution parameters. The results showed that there is a large degree of geographic variability, indicating participation from students around the world. The survey had strong representation across all ages, from teenagers to middle-aged adults. Additionally, students performed at different levels, spent varying amounts of time on the site and are interested in MOOCs for both personal and professional reasons.

As Barak, Watted & Haick (2016) point out understanding the types of MOOC completers according to their motivation and background is important for both learners and developers. MOOC learners can better understand what motivates them to learn, and thus, take effective actions to pursue their goals. Whilst MOOC developers can design unique learning environments and assignments that help the learners accomplish their goals.
9. List of References (Status 2018)


Croft, N., Dalton, A., & Grant, M. (2010). Overcoming Isolation in Distance Learning: Building a learning community through time and space. *Journal for Education in the Built Environment*(5(1)).


Open University. (2012, December 13). UK universities embrace the free, open, online future of higher education powered by The Open University. Retrieved from The Open University: https://www3.open.ac.uk/media/fullstory.aspx?id=24794

Language MOOCs: Learners’ motivation and background


Figure 1: CEFR Levels (Self-assessment grid) (Council of Europe)

Figure 2: Digital competences (Self-assessment grid) (European Commission, 2013)
Questionnaire: Language MOOCs

Learners’ motivation and background

Thessaloniki, August-September 2018

Dear participants:

I am an MA student at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece. For my master thesis, I would like to research your opinion about motivation in MOOCs and find out more about your educational/personal background. The following questionnaire should take about 5 minutes of your time. Your responses will be strictly confidential, compiled together and analyzed as a group. If you choose to participate in this project, please answer all questions as accurately and honestly as possible. Your participation is voluntary and you may discontinue at any time.

Thank you for assisting me in my educational endeavors!

* 1. What is your gender?
   - Female
   - Male
   - Other
   - Prefer not to answer

* 2. What is your age?
   - Under 18
   - 18 to 24
   - 25 to 44
   - 45 to 64
   - 65+

Figure 3: Questionnaire (part 1)
* 3. Which country do you come from?

* 4. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
  - No schooling completed
  - Bachelor's degree (undergraduate studies)
  - High/secondary school graduate
  - Master's degree (postgraduate studies)
  - Technical/vocational training
  - Doctorate degree (PhD)

* 5. Which of the following categories best describes your employment status?
  - Employed, working full-time
  - Employed, working part-time
  - Not employed, looking for work
  - Not employed, NOT looking for work
  - Retired
  - Housewife/househusband
  - Student

* 6. Which is your language level in Spanish? CEFR levels (Self-assessment grid)
  - None
  - Basic user (A1-A2 level)
  - Independent user (B1-B2 level)
  - Proficient user (C1-C2 level)

* 7. Which languages do you speak?

* 8. How many languages do you speak?
  - Monolingual (mother language)
  - Bilingual (two mother languages)
  - 3 languages
  - 4 or more languages
  - 2 languages

* 9. What is your level of digital competence? Digital competences (Self-assessment grid)
  - Basic user
  - Independent user
  - Proficient user

Figure 4: Questionnaire (part 2)
| Q. 10. Why did you decide to participate in this MOOC? I want to...
| (You can select multiple answers) |
| Learn a new language |
| Have a free time activity |
| Interact with other people |
| Improve my current language skills |
| Improve my job opportunities/career prospects |
| Improve my digital skills |
| Improve my educational profile |
| Live abroad/move to another country |
| Travel to/visit a Spanish speaking country |
| Have relatives/friends that speak Spanish |
| I am interested in the Spanish language/culture |

| Q. 11. How familiar are you with the use of technology in the language learning process? |
| Extremely familiar |
| Very familiar |
| Somewhat familiar |
| Not so familiar |
| Not at all familiar |

| Q. 12. On a typical week, how many hours do you spend on the online learning platform (edX, Coursera, FutureLearn etc.)? |
| 0-1 |
| 2-3 |
| 4-5 |
| 6-7 |
| More than 7 |

| Q. 13. How interested (motivated) are you in this online course? |
| Extremely interested |
| Very interested |
| Somewhat interested |
| Not so interested |
| Not at all interested |

Figure 5: Questionnaire (part 3)
Figure 6: Questionnaire (part 4)