Do you MOOC? An exploratory view for Romanian academic landscape

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Abstract

In the last years the European higher education is confronting with major challenges – the growth of education quality and correlation of teaching-learning process with ample needs of society and labor market; adaptation to globalization and a significant growth of students’ number in HE institutions in the world, which affect the Europe position as world leader in education; enhancing and broadening the access at higher education through valorization of new technologies and pedagogies like OER (open education resources)/OEP (open education practices), MOOCs (massive open online courses) and flipped classrooms. At the moment, no Romanian university offers a MOOC course. Moreover, young people are not familiar with them; for instance, less than 1% of students at global level are from Romania. In this context, the authors explore the challenges MOOCs can offer for Romanian higher education institutions, to raise the access to education of thousands of students and to stimulate universities to adopt new teaching methods, more innovative and flexible.

Keywords: MOOC, open education, higher education

In the last years the European higher education is confronting with major challenges. In a series of documents about recent strategies [1] [2] [3], European Commission underlined these challenges – the growth of education quality and correlation of teaching-learning process with ample needs of society and labor market; adaptation to globalization and a significant growth of students’ number in higher education institutions in the world, which affect the Europe position as world leader in education; enhancing and broadening the access at higher education through valorization of new technologies like MOOC (Massive Open Online Courses).

Although the MOOC movement became popular in USA and Canada (where also began in 2008), in Europe only in the last two years we’re facing the “MOOC revolution” [4]. Thus in April 2013 was launched at pan-European level the first initiative (OpenupEd) of this kind (http://www.openuped.eu/) with partners from 11 countries and run by the European Association of Distance Teaching Universities – EADTU [5]. On the other hand, the EU portal for quality OERs produced in the EU, indicates that in February 2015 there were over 1500 MOOCs¹, with a very strong interest in Spain, United Kingdom, France and Germany [6].

At the moment, no Romanian university offers a MOOC course. However, in Romania there are several ongoing MOOC initiatives [16]:

a) Developing MOOCs. Examples include:
   - UniCampus (http://unicampus.ro): Started in April 2014 by University Politehnica Timisoara, Unicampus is a project supported by the Ministry of Education and developed by the Association of Technical Universities from Romania (http://rouri.ro) bringing together the country’s main polytechnic institutes. The project will offer MOOCs on a version of Moodle platform based on cMOOCs methodology [11].

¹ See https://ec.europa.eu/epale/en/content/more-1500-courses-new-european-mooc-scoreboard
Figure 1. European MOOCs Scoreboard (source [6], updated Sept. 2015)

- **UniBuc Virtual** (http://www.unibuc-virtual.net): Credis, the Department of Distance Learning from Bucharest University, is developing three MOOCs for Teachers Training on a Google Apps-based platform.
- „VasileGoldis” **University from Arad** will offer MOOCs in partnership with Fédération Européenne des Écoles.
- **Critical Thinking MOOC** was developed and ran in 2014 by Maastricht School of Management Romania on Iversity (http://www.msmromania.org/content/msmrom-produces-first-mooc-eastern-europe).

b) **Integrating MOOCs in blended academic courses.** Such projects can be found at University Politehnica Timisoara, for the Web Programming course and the Instructional Technologies course [12];

c) **Organizing scientific events** related to open education. For example, the Romanian Coalition for OER (http://acces-deschis.ro/ro/oer) organized two national conferences; University Politehnica Timisoara (http://elearning.upt.ro/workshop-opening-up-education/n-32-70-185/d) held workshops during the Open Education Week in March, 2014 and 2015; starting with 2014, the International Conference eLSE has a special section dedicated to OER and MOOCs, co-chaired by the first author (http://elseconference.eu);

d) **Publishing studies** assessing the degree to which students and teachers are familiar with MOOCs [11, 12, 16].

Moreover, young people are not familiar with MOOC courses; for instance, less than 1% of students at global level are from Romania. In this context, the proposed paper advocates in favor of a MOOC by a Romanian higher education institution. We consider the research enterprise of MOOCs as a central element of the strategy to raise the access to education of thousands of students and to stimulate schools and universities to adopt new teaching methods, more innovative and flexible.
On the other hand, according to 2014 Eurostat statistics, only 21.8% of the adult population has graduated a form of higher education, which places Romania at the bottom of the list [7]. A favorable reaction would be generating and implementing initiatives and actions which would result in access to and graduation of higher education for a larger segment of the population. With this goal in mind, our paper can be considered a good starting point, to anticipate the specific educational needs for a better response in preparing the labor force with low costs.

Due to the fact that MOOC courses are not entirely certified; having an overcrowded class; low rate of graduation; staying motivated; the absence of real human interaction; a fallible grading system etc. is possible that these type of courses to have a negative / opposite effect and to disrupt the academic life [8].

Despite all these limits MOOCs are heading to become a significant and possibly a standard element of credentialed University education, exploiting new pedagogical models, discovering revenue and lowering costs [9].

Developing and implementing in an innovative approach of a MOOC into the Romanian socio-cultural space is mainly based on the analysis of the training needs of educational actors. Thus, it is imperative to improve the training of teachers by carrying out a MOOC course which integrates open access educational resources (OERs). In order to achieve this one can take the following steps:

- Realization of a qualitative, prospective study regarding the development and implementation of MOOCs towards opening new research directions in the educational field.
- Implementation of a sociological quantitative research adapted to the particularities of the Romanian socio-cultural area.
- Elaboration of recommendations regarding educational policies of MOOCs implementation in the context of higher education institutions from Romania.
- Promoting examples of good practices and making pedagogical design recommendations in the valorization of MOOC resources offered within professional and continuous training.
- Creating an academic network between the Romanian universities, based on mutual knowledge of the realities and problems encountered in developing institutional and regional MOOCs.
- Publishing articles in specialized journals (BDI and/or ISI indexed) upon interpretation of research results.
- Developing teachers’ new abilities and competencies (transversal skills) after participating in at least one MOOC; the course offers the opportunity to keep up with modern applications, technologies, and open educational resources.
- Facilitating access to continuous professional training by means of MOOC especially for socially and economically disadvantaged teachers.

The direction imposed by international researches is the customization of MOOCs to local contexts taking into consideration different aspects such as the liberalization of education. We believe this effect of liberalization and the subsequent opening of education will represent this decade’s true revolution in education.

How could a university from Romania, offering classic courses, compete with the offer that can be rapidly accessed online from Harvard or any other top university? [11] Faced with these new challenges, schools, high schools and universities will have to reconsider their strategies and remain competitive [10]. One solution might be offering own MOOC courses with credits and
MOOCs as part of degree programmes. Also the search for business models – and all the associated sub-issues of scale, sustainability monetization [14], accreditation for MOOC learning and openness. MOOCs are heading to become a significant and possibly a standard element of credentialed University education, exploiting new pedagogical models, discovering revenue and lowering costs [12].

Secondly, we should note the professional mobility, developing competencies specific to the knowledge society, as well as making people aware of the importance of lifelong learning and training, raising self-esteem and belonging to learning and practice communities [13].

Thirdly, specialists are working on a formula of continuous training by using MOOC courses in order to improve educational policies at national level, which we hope will increase the quality of teaching/learning [15].

Thus the results of such recommendations can be used for a broad range of new researches, such as: a) creating opportunities for organizations, teachers and learners to innovate and develop new business and educational models; b) launching large-scale research and policy experiments to test innovative pedagogical approaches, curriculum development and skills assessment; c) exploring how emerging tools for the validation and recognition of skills, such as 'open badges' or nanodegrees, can be tailored to the needs of learners; d) testing digital competence frameworks and self-assessment tools for learners, teachers and organizations; e) supporting teachers in acquiring a high level of digital competences and adopt innovative teaching practices through flexible training, incentive schemes, revised curricula for teachers' initial education and new professional evaluation mechanisms; f) adaptive learning technologies, learning analytics and digital games for learning, creating links with innovative entrepreneurs etc.[16]

References


