The implementation of MeaeX the Greek MOOC platform from Hellenic Open University

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Abstract

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) constitute the latest trend in education, providing new opportunities for open and distance education. The objective of this paper is to describe the use of MOOCs by the Hellenic Open University. Particularly, a description of HOU main drivers for developing MOOCs are presented, followed by the selection procedure for the appropriate MOOC platform. Furthermore, “meaeX”, the Greek MOOC platform, is presented along with a description of the first MOOCs offered by HOU. Finally, the paper concludes by presenting HOU future goals regarding MOOCs.

Keywords

MOOCs, Hellenic Open University, meaeX, Greek MOOC Platform
1 The need for MOOCs in Hellenic Open University

The term Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) was coined in 2008 by George Siemens and Stephen Downes after conducting online course CCK08 (Fini, 2009), successor to a series of previously successful Open Online Courses (Fini et al., 2008). Hellenic Open University (HOU) adopts the definition of a MOOC which the HOME project and OpenupEd proposed and it is shared by many European partners: “MOOCs are online courses designed for large numbers of participants that can be accessed by anyone anywhere as long as they have an internet connection, are open to everyone without entry qualifications, and offer a full/complete course experience online for free” (Jansen & Schuwer, 2015).

HOU is the sole Greek State University that provides distance education in both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. HOU develops and implements appropriate learning material and methods of teaching for distance education. Nowadays the registered students of the institution are 36,041, while 27,770 students had graduated from HOU.

Internal Assessment and Training Unit (IATU) is an independent unit of the HOU, whose main objective is to support the continuous improvement of HOU education. IATU’s activities also include the assessment of the educational process of the HOU, the external evaluation, organizing and coordinating tutors’ training and conducting research on eLearning & contemporary evaluation methods.

HOU student’s age for the academic year 2013-2014 was 39.2 years old on average (SD= 7.5 years) and most of them are working, having a limited time to devote to their studies. Based on the long time passed from their previous education, HOU aims to take advantage of MOOCs by developing and providing introductory courses to the Course Modules offered by the institution, that cover a specific subject on an undergraduate level, in order to bridge the gap between secondary education and higher education.
In addition, HOU, through IATU conducts yearly training courses for the new members of the tutors community. In these courses, the new educators, are introduced on both technical and pedagogical practices used in HOU. To this end, a hierarchical educational model is followed: Few experienced educators train a small number of tutors, which in turn educate all the new tutors. Such continuous education of the teaching staff helps towards upgrading the quality of education in the HOU. The HOU offers its courses by employing 1,730 tutors today, while over 10,000 applied for these positions, and therefore MOOCs create the opportunity for a very large number of people to have access to quality learning modules with low cost development and support compare to traditional and in person training.

For all the aforementioned reasons, the IATU, aiming at the continuous improvement of the educational functions of the HOU and guided by the requirements for enhanced level of service quality, invested in the development of MOOCs.

2 A comparative evaluation between different MOOC platforms

In order to determine how HOU could develop its own MOOCs, a comparative evaluation between different MOOC platforms was conducted. The initial requirements set by IATU included based MOOC features (such as open access, freedom of pace, etc.), but also the use of open source code and therefore analyzing the results (Fig. 1), it is observed that although all platforms provide open courses promoting free access, the significant issue of open source is only provided by edX and Khan Academy platforms.
After the investigation, the edX platform seemed to be more suitable for a HEI with the principles of HOU. Selecting the edX platform, HOU can (a) promote the use and the development of open source educational systems, through a framework of open and free access, (b) save a significant amount of its resources, as HOU will develop its own MOOC platform, (c) manage on its own the issues of maintenance and updating of the developed courses (Sideris, Tsironis, Xenos, 2015).

3 meaeX: the Greek MOOC Platform

Based on the initial study as presented in the previous section, the IATU with the collaboration of the members of the Software Quality Research Group (SQRG, http://quality.eap.gr) developed the Greek MOOC Platform named meaeX (Fig. 2) which is based on Open edX, the open source platform that powers edX courses (https://open.edx.org).
The meaeX platform currently has 3 courses developed by the IATU team and its collaborators, the meaeX01: Open & Distance Education course, the meaeX02: Information and Communication Technologies of HOU course and the meaex03: Foundations and Basic Principles of Computer Science course. A short description of each one is presented hereinafter.

3.1 meax01: Open & Distance Education course

Applying techniques for distance education is a challenge for any teacher who was first involved in such a process. Through this course one will know the specifics of adult learners and the principles of adult education, will see the dimensions of openness and distance education, will become familiar with the basic techniques
of conducting group counseling meeting, and evaluation of a written work, in general. The course duration is 8 weeks with an average workload of 2-5 hours/week.

3.2 meax02: Information and Communication Technologies of HOU course

The HOU as an institution that provides education entirely remotely, it invests in using new technological methods and tools. Towards this end, the use of information and communication technologies is important for the continuous optimization of the provided instruction. This course analyzes the key information systems and e-services of the HOU. The objective is to provide know-how for the use of the HOU learning technologies and to enlarge the knowledge horizon of the teachers and all potential stakeholders with information sources. The course duration is 5 weeks with an average workload of 7-10 hours/week.

3.3 meax03: Foundations and Basic Principles of Computer Science course

The purpose of the course is to describe the modern world of computers and it is intended primarily for those interested parties wishing to acquire a general knowledge related to information management and the use of computer applications. The course duration is 6 weeks with an average workload of 2-3 hours/week.

4 Conclusion

MOOCs may become a powerful tool for a variety of class styles. HOU pioneers new educational methods, which are based on the principles of distance education. As a result, it is considering MOOCs as part of its policy and invests in the development high quality MOOCs for training academic staff and for bridging the gap between secondary and higher education for its students. HOU
commitment with MOOC will be enhanced in the following years with more MOOCs offered using meaeX, as well as deploying new techniques and methods in the fields of offering open education and assessing the quality of the MOOC users experience.

References


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