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# INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATION ITRO 2014

**PROCEEDINGS** 



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With this publication, the CD with all papers from the International Conference on Information Technology and Development of Education, ITRO 2014 is also published.

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#### **INTRODUCTION**

This Proceedings comprises papers from the **International conference on Information technology and development of education** that is held in the National House of Mihajlo Pupin, Idvor on June 27<sup>th</sup> 2014.

The International conference on Information technology and development of education has had a goal to contribute to the development of education in Serbia and in the region, as well as, to gather experts in natural and technical sciences' teaching fields.

The expected scientific-skilled analysis of the accomplishment in the field of the contemporary information and communication technologies, as well as analysis of state, needs and tendencies in education all around the world and in our country have been realized.

The authors and the participants of the Conference have dealt with the following thematic areas:

- Theoretical and methodological questions of contemporary pedagogy
- Personalization and learning styles
- Social networks and their influence on education
- Children security and safety on the Internet
- Curriculum of contemporary teaching
- Methodical questions of natural and technical sciences subject teaching
- Lifelong learning and teachers' professional training
- E-learning
- Education management
- Development and influence of IT on teaching
- Information communication infrastructure in teaching process

All submitted papers have been reviewed by at least two independent members of the Science Committee.

The papers presented on the Conference and published in this Proceedings can be useful for teacher while learning and teaching in the fields of informatics, techniques and other teaching subjects and activities. Contribution to science and teaching development in this region and wider has been achieved in this way.

The Organizing Committee of the Conference

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# MOOCS IN HIGHER EDUCATION – STATE OF THE ART REVIEW

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Abstract - This paper discusses a new trend in education, so -called Massive Open Online Courses - MOOCs and their implementation in higher education. MOOC courses are designed for an unlimited number of users, they are usually free and they are available exclusively online. MOOCs arise from so-called OER movement, i.e. the movement of open educational resources promoted on the UNESCO Forum in 2002. The application of these courses is differentiated in two types: cMOOCs and xMOOCs. MOOCs have been developed to support multiple platforms and with that, their massive use began. Students and professors very well accept the use of MOOCs in higher education. Professors agree about MOOCs usefulness and successful, but disagree about their formal acceptation on Universities.

#### I. INTRODUCTION

With the continuous development of technology, new challenges for the higher education emerge. The Internet and its wide and unlimited use has brought new trends, most of all in the way people communicate and share information. The e-mail, the social networks, the blogs, the discussion forums and similar platforms are now part of the everyday lives of ordinary people and have significantly improved the availability of data from all fields.

These trends have had their impact in the development of higher education. One of the newest and most interesting outbreaks is the appearance of massive open online courses (MOOCs). Our research has the goal of introduction with the meaning of these courses and the implications they have for higher education.

In the paper, we first give the definition and short history of MOOCs. Then we make a difference between different types of MOOCs and give overview of the most successful platforms for these courses. At the end, we present the advantages and disadvantages of MOOCs and the motivation for their use from individuals and Universities.

The paper is based on multiple researches and publications from electronic sources, most of

which are from reputable researchers whose specific field of interest are the MOOCs.

# II. MASSIVE OPEN ONLINE COURSES AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

#### A. What are Massive Open Online Courses?

According to Wikipedia [1], Massive open online courses (MOOCs) are courses aimed at unlimited participation and open access via the web. Simpler is the Oxford Dictionary definition [2], which says MOOC is a course of study made available over the Internet without charge to a very large number of people. The main goal of MOOCs comes from their definition. For the needs of this paper, we give our definition: MOOCs are courses, which are designed for unlimited number of users; they are usually free and available exclusively over the Internet.

#### B. Short History

The beginnings of MOOCs are not so far in the past. It is considered that they have emerged from the Open Education Resources (OER) movement. Open Education Resources are freely accessible, openly licensed documents and media that are for teaching, learning, educational, assessment and research purposes. The term has been coined on the UNESCO forum in 2002, which had explored the implications of the initiative for developing countries at MIT University. Ten years later at the World Congress for OER of UNESCO, the Paris Declaration was signed. The Declaration among other things recommends fostering awareness and using of OER and encouraging the open licensing of educational materials produced with public funds

The first official MOOC is the course of George Siemens (Alabaska University) and Stephen Downes (National Research Council), called "Connectivism and connective knowledge", which was created at Manitoba University in Canada. Besides the 25 students of this University.

the course was followed via the web from additional 2300 students from the general public. All content of the course was available through RSS feeds and online students could participate via collaboration tools, including blog posts, threaded discussions in e-learning system Moodle [4] and through meetings via social platform Second Life [5]. Because of this course Dave Cormier from Prince Edward Island University and Bryan Alexander from National Institute coined the term MOOC for technology in liberal education [1].

#### C. Types of MOOCs

In the short development cycle of MOOCs, two types are differentiated until today: cMOOCs and xMOOCs. One type is not better than the other is, they are simply different.

In the cMOOC term, "c" means conectivism and the first MOOC created is part of this group. The theory of the creator of the course is based on the idea that the learning happens in a network, where students use digital platforms like blogs and social networks to connect with the content of the course, other learning communities and other learners with the goal of creating knowledge [6]. In cMOOCs, students are encouraged to contribute actively to learning by using digital platforms. The course organizers, who later share them through email or newsletters, are summarizing the students' contributions daily. cMOOCs are usually not sponsored by higher education institutions, but are organized by individuals with passion for a specific subject. The organizers devote time for creating a framework for learning, where students from all around the world can connect and share, contribute and collaborate, while simultaneously learn about specific subject and expand their network of professional and personal contacts. Despite being open, cMOOCs are also flexible, which means they fully match the needs of their participants and provide learning customized for these needs [7]. Its visionaries George Siemens and Stephen Downes are explaining this type of learning the best, who in his new book explains the learning, as "Learning is the creation and removal of connections between the entities, or the adjustment of the strengths of those connections. A learning theory is, literally, a theory describing how these connections are created or adjusted"[6].

Even though the first MOOC is a cMOOC, the massive open online courses truly gained their popularity with the appearance of the first xMOOC course in 2011. Creators of this course on

the topic "Artificial intelligence" were Sebastian Thrun and Peter Norvig from Stanford University [8]. They expected a few thousand students, but the course was enrolled by 160.000 students from 190 countries around the world, which made it massive in the true meaning of the word. After finishing this course, Thrun founded Udacity.com, a platform that offers mainly science and technology courses. Soon after that Coursera.com and edx.com, which is a platform for free online courses of the Harvard and MIT Universities, were also opened [7]. Since then the number of similar platforms, sponsored by higher institutions, but also from different profit and nonprofit organizations, has been constantly growing. These types of MOOCs, which are offered on University platforms, are based on traditional studying materials and higher education methods of learning. They frequently involve video lectures and quiz-tests as a method of evaluation. Usually they include content available on the Internet, outside the learning platform.

All this being said, the basic difference between cMOOK and xMOOC is that in cMOOCs learners are in the center of attention and they are the main contributors to the learning, while in xMOOCs in the center of attention is the professor who leads the course and gives directions to learners. Although the digital platforms for communication are of crucial meaning for cMOOCs, their use is also encouraged in xMOOCs. For higher education, xMOOCs are more significant, because they are closer to the traditional education.

#### D. The most popular platforms

In their paper "MOOCs and open education: Implications for higher education" [9]. Li Yuan and Stephen Powell from the Centre for Educational Technology and Interoperability Standards, analyze the most popular MOOC platforms, their functions and their interests. One of the best known is edx.com, which has already mentioned is a joint non-profit platform of MIT and Harvard Universities. These Universities use MOOCs to understand how students learn, with the goal of improving learning and teaching on the traditional campus. Coursera.com, Udacity.com and Udemy.com are for-profit platforms, which usually make money from course certificates, but they also work on development of other business models like selling information to students, advertising of sponsored courses, charging fees for credited courses etc. P2pu.org and

khanacademy.org are platforms sponsored by foundations and their goal is to provide opportunities for everyone who wants to learn online, allowing them free access.

According to the research of the site openeducationeuropa.eu, made in December 2013, Europe is also following the trend with MOOCs, the leader being Spain with the greatest number of courses, and UK, Germany and France are following on the list. Until now, approximately 400 courses have been created, the most common topics being science and technology, social sciences, applied sciences and business. The bestknown European providers of MOOCs are the European higher education institutions and the platforms UnX. Miriada X. OpenupEd, OpenCourseWorld, Iversity, FutureLearn etc. [10].

#### E. Advantages and disadvantages

According to Dr. Shelley Kinash from Bond University, Australia [11], there are many characteristics of MOOCs, which differentiate them from traditional education, some of them being considered as advantages. MOOCs are usually independent subjects, and students around the world can enroll from anywhere in anytime. balance between synchronous asynchronous way of learning, which means that sometimes both the teachers and students are online, but most activities are designed so students can pay attention to them in the time that suits them the most. The time for enrolling and finishing the course is usually not limited. MOOCs use the concept of customized learning which means that the weight and the challenge of the content and exercises are adjusted to the level of knowledge of the learners. Most of the MOOCs take advantage of newest technologies to provide and enhance learning. Lots of them have multimedia content, use video lectures, games, quizzes etc., which represents more entertaining way of learning. The first advantage Universities consider when offering MOOCs is marketing. MOOCs are in a way an ad for the University that offers them, and a free opportunity for potential students to try the course, without being officially enrolled at the institution. Besides that, MOOCs are used for research of the new pedagogical platforms, to experiment with new approaches to learning and new technologies. According to many professors, MOOCs and the open approach to education are an important modern day value.

Despite the many advantages, there are also problems that emerge about MOOCs, the first

being the dropout rate. According to the most relevant research so far, conducted by Katie Jordan, as a part of her doctoral thesis, MOOCs usually end up finished by less than 13% of the enrolled students, which means that the failure rate reaches over 90% [12]. In addition, many employers consider that MOOCs produce substandard students with lower level of knowledge as opposed to traditional education. Another important disadvantage is the problem with accreditation. The most of the MOOCs are not accredited at all, and the ones, which are, usually charge fees for the credits. At the same time, these fees are not standardized. Many professors believe that the accreditation of MOOCs should not be rushed, because of the difficulty of evaluation of students and the increased opportunity of cheating while taking exams online. The platform Udacity.com has offered one way for solving this problem, by offering students to pay \$80 so they can take the exam in test-centers of the global education company Pearson [13]. There is also the concern that with accrediting MOOCs, the big, well-funded Universities will align or lead to extinction the smaller Universities, with the introduction of so-called global education. Quality MOOCs also require significant resources, primarily in the design, administration and staff, who should have experience in adaptive learning. Considering that these courses are still young in their development, significant investment of time and finances is required to be up-to-date with modern technology and new content. Last, but not least important problem with MOOCs is the intellectual property, which is not exactly defined with online materials.

Given the above advantages and disadvantages of MOOCs, the thoughts for their future differ. While some professors think that MOOCs will slowly replace Universities, as we know it, others believe they will extinct and remain to be an interesting page in the history of higher education [11].

#### F. Motivation for MOOCs

When it comes to MOOCs there are multiple stakeholders, each with their own motivation. There are tutors whose task is to facilitate MOOCs, institutional managers who help in determining the place of MOOCs alongside the traditional education, the policymakers who consider the long-term implications for education and the capital investors who are interested in the return-on-investment rate [14]. However, the most

important stakeholders remain to be the students who enroll in these courses and the professors who design and tech them.

There are multiple factors that motivate students to enroll in MOOCs. They include economic benefits, development of personal and professional identity, challenge and achievement, as well as fun and enjoyment. Polls conducted by researchers at Duke University, in relation to their first MOOC, showed that there are four main student motivations for enrolling in online courses [15]:

- To gain understanding about the subject without specific expectations for completion or achievement;
- For fun, pleasure, social interaction and intellectual stimulation;
- Convenience, often in combination with barriers to traditional education and
- To experience and explore online education.

Although polls conducted before the start of the course showed fun and pleasure to be quite important, in the polls conducted after the end of the course most students said they had a general interest in the topic. They reported that they used the online course to help them decide if they want to enroll at University, while a significant minority said they could not afford formal education. This is only one research about the motivation of students enrolling MOOCs, but this subject is very wide and should be thoroughly researched in the future.

As for teachers, the largest survey of MOOCs teaching experience and the professors' motivation was conducted in early 2013 by the Chronicle of Higher Education and includes 103 professors as respondents [16]. The results generally showed that although the process of creating MOOCs is extremely time-consuming (average 100 hours per course); professors believe that these courses are successful. The maintenance of the course and the answering of students questions took extra time. For the evaluation 74% of the respondents said, they used automatic technology system, which they consider reliable. The most used materials for the courses were their own video lectures and open educational resources. Although teachers invest a lot of time in preparing the course, 72% believe that formal accreditation should not be allowed. As motivation for creating and maintaining MOOCs, they cite several reasons, the most common being:

- To assist in the availability of higher education (71.8%);
- To increase their impact as an instructor (40.8%);
- To increase their reputation in their own discipline (37.9%);
- To collect tips for enhancing the traditional lectures (36.9%);
- To increase their visibility in the media and the general public (33%).

When it comes to enthusiasm over MOOCs, the professors change their opinion from being skeptical (before the MOOC experience), to being more enthusiastic (after the MOOC experience).

#### G. MOOCs in practice

Although MOOCs seem to be revolutionary, they are just the next logical step in higher education, following the appearance of online education and including open education resources.

When it comes to MOOCs in practice, almost all platforms follow similar path of organization. The courses are usually prepared from University professors, who engage in recording video materials and preparing reading materials for the students. Once the course begins students are offered weekly plan of videos, readings and assignments they are supposed to finish until the beginning of the next week. Most of the assignments have immediate feedback, but there are also some, which are evaluated by peers, and results are given in few days. Professors send weekly newsletters to students introducing to them the topic of the week and encouraging them to take part in the discussion forums. Forming study groups (whether face-to-face or online) is also encouraged. Courses are usually 6 to 8 weeks long, and at the end of each there might be an exam or just summary of the weekly assignments score. To pass the course 70% score is the minimum required.

As an example, we did a research on how coursera.org works [17]. They motivate students to enroll into their courses by offering them learning at their own pace with the end result of achieving their goals. The four ideas that were crucial in shaping the platforms' idea are effectiveness of online learning, mastery learning, peer assessments and blended learning. Professor Maha Bali from the American University in Cairo after taking few courses offered from coursera.org concludes that the designers of these courses

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should focus more on promoting deeper learning, than on designing easy assessments that encourage course completion, because even if completion rates can be improved in the short term, this trend can harm the reputation and future development of MOOCs in the long term [18].

To write about MOOCs in practice and stay upto-date is a difficult task, because as it is the case with all of the new trends, new researches emerge every day. Even at the time, we are writing this paper and until it is published, there will certainly be some revolutionary things happening in the MOOCs world.

#### III. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper was introduction to MOOCs and elaboration of the implications they have. From what has been stated in the paper it can be concluded that with the increasing availability of technology, these courses will expand and the interest for them tends to rise. In order to follow the trends, relevant institutions in the Balkan countries should take seriously the MOOCs, fit them in their plans and create conditions for their introduction as part of formal and non-formal education. With this, in addition to inclusion of more students, employees in higher education will gain significant experience in the use of new technologies and obtain ideas for enhancing the traditional ways of teaching.

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