

MOOC学修体験 — 全身的学生サポートの精緻化モデルの応用 — MOOC Learning Experiences: Using the Elaborated Model of Systemic Student Support

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Massive open online courses (MOOCs) have overtaken the world of online education in hopes of democratizing education by overcoming barriers like access and cost. Learners, who have diverse interests and different backgrounds, from all over the world, pursue and learn from various MOOC providers. MOOCs have given opportunities for its learners to participate in classes they never thought possible. In order to make MOOCs meaningful and successful, MOOCs provide different forms of support to its learners.

This paper aims to present two MOOC learners' experiences: one about the science of happiness (edX) and another about foundation of teaching and learning (Coursera). Both analyzed their MOOC experiences vis-à-vis the elaborated model of student support (Jung & Hong, 2014), challenges, and other general observations.

The Elaborated Model of Systemic student

support (Figure 1) for Asian distance learners was developed by Jung and Hong (2014) based on Atkins' multidimensional ARCS (Affective, Reflective, Cognitive, and Systemic) model. However, Jung and Hong's model recognized the gender support aspect based on their study done of distance learners from the following Asian countries: Japan, Korea, Hong Kong SAR China, Malaysia, India, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. According to the model, these five aspects of support affect a successful distance learning outcome.

These are: affective support, reflective support, cognitive support, systemic support, and gender support. The detailed analysis of these types of support vis-à-vis the MOOC learners' experience will be explained in the succeeding paragraphs.

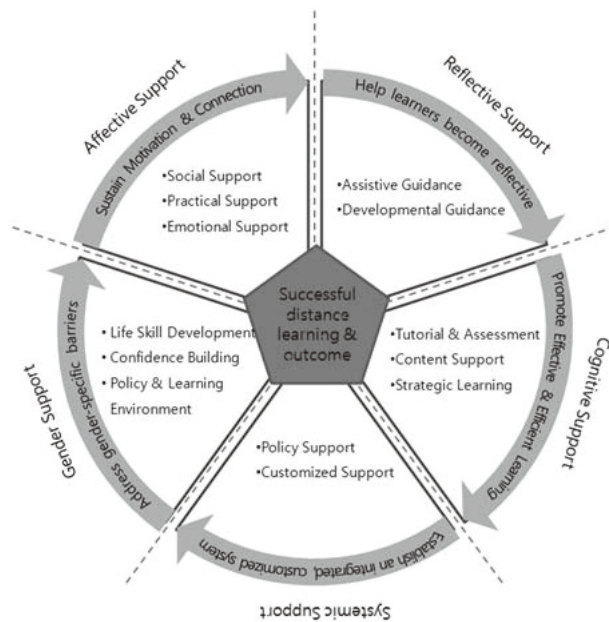


Figure 1. A model of systemic student support for Asian distance learners. Adapted from “An elaboration model of student support to allow for gender considerations in Asian distance education,” by I. S. Jung, and S. Y. Hong, 2014, *The International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*, 15(2). Retrieved from <http://www.irrodl.org/index.php/irrodl/article/view/1604/2829>

1. MOOC Learner Experience 1: The Science of Happiness (edX)

1.1 Course Overview

The course was offered in collaboration with the Greater Good Science Center (GGSC) at the University of California Berkeley. It was comprised of nine weeks of classes. The course had various topics related to happiness such as The Power of Social Connection, Compassion and Kindness, and Cooperation and Reconciliation during its first four weeks. The fifth week was for midterm exam. Then weeks 6-9 covered Mindfulness, Mental Habits of Happiness, Gratitude, and New Frontiers and Happiness “Fit”. The class had an official date of when it began its classes however it did not end after nine weeks. A student had about six months to complete the course. This was an xMOOC type of MOOC. xMOOCs usually have common design features such as video lectures, computer-marked assignments, peer assessments, supporting

materials for the topics, shared comment/discussion space, no or very light discussion moderation, and badges or certificates thereafter. In this MOOC’s case, payment of US\$49 can get you a verified certificate of the course.

1.2 Affective Support

Based on the model, affective support is the means to sustain motivation and connection. It is comprised of: social support, practical support, and emotional support. In this MOOC’s case, affective support was not a problem. The content was already motivating from the beginning. The existence of teams within the MOOC also helped in added motivation. The team concept was quite unique knowing that one of the biggest challenges in online learning was motivating one’s self. Members of the team (teams can be based on locations, interest, or organization) encouraged each other to continue studying. My own team (Let’s put happiness into practice team) reminded

each member about basic requirements and weekly check-ins. Learners also engaged in other ideas that may or may not have been discussed in the forum. Having a team (maximum of 30 members) made learning more manageable and 'personalized'; it was like having a classroom within a school with the added community/family feel. When a member feels like giving up and just about to quit, someone will push and cheer to continue what has been started. Affective support-wise, the team was the main source of motivation for tasks related to the MOOC. Aside from the team, some peers and TA's, and in some cases, even the instructor themselves, provided their own feedback via the discussion boards hence solidifying motivation and strengthening the connection.

1.3 Reflective Support

The model also emphasized assistive and developmental guidance in this support for distance learning. In this MOOC's case however, it was not so strong. Reflective support would have been effective if the MOOCs being taken are directly related to your career or school. In this MOOC's case however, most were simply taking the course due to curiosity. Some took it as a class requirement. Some were from the field of psychology and perhaps also studying happiness. Thinking about them, I can then say that the reflective support is not really that strong.

1.4 Cognitive Support

This highlighted the promotion of effective and efficient learning through tutorial and assessment, content support, and strategic learning. Interacting with the content: reading and analyzing the articles, relating with the scenarios and examples being provided, watching and analyzing the videos, and critically processing the guide questions, expanded my knowledge of what constitutes happiness. The notion that there was a science behind it was

thoroughly explained by these materials. The video in Week 2 between instructor Emiliana Simon-Thomas and happiness expert Sonja Lyubomirsky although long was very informative. Dr. Lyubomirsky's extensive knowledge on the subject through previous studies was really helpful. Emiliana's framing of the questions, as well as the inclusion of some questions posted on the discussion board (previously), also provided novelty in the topics discussed. Aside from the content, the interaction with fellow students, TA's, and instructors, provided different perspectives of happiness. In addition, one of the activities from the class, Three Good Things was very helpful and soon most students in the class were applying it in spite of the initial requirement of only doing it for just a week. Below is one sample entry:

Three Good Things January 16, 2016

1. Drinking what I have been craving for
2. Seeing my cute, cheap planner that looks even better than pricey ones
3. Receiving a call from my best friend

“craving for hot chocolate achieved”

It's winter where I am and I always crave for hot chocolate. Here however, the hot chocolate I can get from the cafeteria isn't the sweet one I like. Thankfully, I still have my stock of Swiss Miss that my Mom sent from the US. While drinking it, it made me smile and I was easily soothed by its warm, sweet taste. Hours later and while I write this, I am still smiling at the thought of my craving satisfied

“old planner replaced by a new (yet cheaper) one”

Being in Japan, I am always tempted to buy 'kawaii' (cute) things however at the moment my funds cannot really support these 'wants'. So it was to my dismay that the planner I bought last December had to be replaced (it got drenched when the sprinkler opened after a fire in the house we stayed in). I feel happy seeing that after buying a 'simple' one (planner) and

wrapping it in a cute wrapper, it suddenly looked almost-kawaii. :) Now, I feel more positive and inspired to write anew the things and tasks I will work on.

“sweet words from best friend”

In spite of my best friend and I not seeing each other for five years, it still amazes me how her words manage to make me smile and happy. She still made me feel her support in spite of our distance from each other.

There was not much tutorial in the MOOC however there was an intensive form of assessment integrated throughout the entire course. Weekly check-ins that looked like ‘informal’ questions on materials we have previously studied were also placed within the course. These questions were only a few: the most being only about four questions. In case of mistakes, one can retake. All of these weekly check-ins (about your happiness rating) and content assessments were plotted in the progress chart. Content support-wise, there is no shortage of instructors and TA’s that assisted students in their queries related to the content. Whether these questions were thrown via discussion board, FB, or Twitter, someone replied within 24 hours. Another thing was how learners provided thought-provoking questions that challenge us to ponder about the content and sometimes, even in life as well. One of these unforgettable instances was when the topic posed was: meaningful life versus happy life.

1.5 Systemic Support

Access-wise, there was no problem: videos and most of the materials in the courseware on edX app on a smartphone or tablet so no problem encountered with that. The video content also had no problems whether being accessed within the app or via browser.

In the discussion forums, the differences in culture were not really a factor; if any, it has become helpful

because it allowed learners to view happiness in various cultures, countries, and contexts. The teams were also placed so that various people from similar locations or with similar interests/background may ‘study’ together. This customization helped a lot in encouraging more feedback from students whose main language is not English.

1.6 Gender Support

This aspect it seems was not taken into consideration when the course was prepared. There were no clear gender-specific barriers within the coursework and its materials.

1.7 Challenges

Like in any learning environment and in spite of being intrinsic motivated, there were still a few difficulties encountered in this MOOC. One of these was the long pre-recorded video. The thought of being able to stop and play the video was good however the video was so long. The other challenge encountered was for me reconciling the fact that this was learning. Having been exposed to the traditional mode from a young age and in spite of studying about online learning and reading materials about it, and accepting its existence, it was still no surprise to find one’s self (sometimes) not giving MOOC “study time” the same weight as with my traditional classes.

1.8 Recommendations

This MOOC would have been more effective if two things will be improved: chunking the video would be good and preparing a mindset for the MOOC learner prior to the course is vital hence anyone taking a MOOC or intends to take one would understand it and the reason/s behind it.

2. MOOC Learner Experience 2: Foundations of Teaching for Learning – Professionalism (Coursera)

2.1 Course Overview

This course focused on steps to professionalism, which included improvement and enrichment of knowledge, philosophy of teaching and assuring the concept of sustainable development by continuous improvement for our knowledge and skills. It also explained the meaning of being a part of community of professionals --- working with each other to improve what happens in our school. This course was part of the Foundations of Teaching for Learning program to deepen one's understanding of learning and teaching and what makes a teacher a professional. The MOOC was divided in six weeks and discussed these topics: what it means to be a professional, ethics, codes of conduct and standards for teachers, legal and administrative responsibilities of a teacher, developing a personal philosophy of teaching, being part of a professional learning community, and continuing to develop as a professional. In the second and the fourth week, there were peer assessments. Each learner had to evaluate three assignments. In addition, there was a weekly quiz and three interviews with another professor three times throughout the whole course.

2.2 Affective Support

The instructor taught me a lot through the required and supplemental videos and recommended readings. He encouraged me to participate in the discussion board guided by some questions, which he presents every week. He was instrumental in making me absorb the meaning of being a professional teacher. He, along with a more experienced instructor, each held three. Instructors and staff responded quickly to questions on the discussion board. They probed a lot of questions we posted. They motivated students by asking more detailed questions to enhance our analytical and critical thinking. Everyone kept saying

positive words as a kind of appreciation for our interaction.

2.3 Reflective Support

The most important thing for me is combining knowledge and skills together. This is what happened in this course through demonstration of basic concepts about the teaching profession and its required skills, ethics and pertinent codes of conduct. In addition, it made me reflect on how I am as a teacher. I thought about what I was doing when I was teaching and to which extent I was professional. Self-reflection was considered to be the first step towards performance's improvement. Realization as well is very important to make change. When I compared my concept regarding professionalism before and after taking the course, I noticed the differences and the effects of the course. Even if I were professional, I would not have discovered the true meaning of profession until this course.

2.4 Cognitive Support

In analyzing cognitive support, I also used Moore's transactional distance theory. According to Moore, there are three types of interaction in DE (1989). These types are learner-content, learner-instructor and learner-learner. Reflecting on my MOOC, the three elements existed and were measured too. First, the learners interacted with the content through learning, watching videos, reading extra materials and watching the lectures, which were measured by weekly quizzes. Second, the learner-instructor interaction mainly occurred in the discussion board when the instructors asked students to discuss some questions. This was then measured by probing more questions to encourage students to clarify and elaborate on their answers. Third, learner-learner interaction was done also through the discussion board too by exchanging some ideas and different experiences. Apart from that, this mode of interaction was also seen through

the peer assignment.

With regard to learning strategies, the course was based on cognitive constructivism theory. This concept places constructivism places interaction at the center of the learning process. This type of interaction was between the learners' current knowledge and what is he/she heard and observed in the context. Learning was based on experience and the present knowledge. It has many instructional strategies like social collaboration, multiple perspectives, negotiation of meanings and real case scenarios.

In the MOOC, the learning process depended on interaction, the present knowledge and experience for the learners as the course does not offer a lot of knowledge; it just highlighted the most important concepts to open a lot of discussion on the board. The instructional strategy in this course was based on real cases to provide learners a good opportunity to reflect and share their own experiences.

2.5 Systemic Support

The learner had not faced any problems in terms of access such as Internet connection, watching videos, or browsing any website for extra information. Furthermore, the teachers offered quick responses to any technical problem the learners have. Also, whether you are online on the discussion forum or not, you will always be updated as there is an automatic email notification to inform you about any action has been done on the discussion forum.

2.6 Gender Support

There was not any gender inequality in the course content. As a female learner, I have not noticed or experienced any barrier however there was no specific content to address this.

2.7 Challenges

The challenges faced while taking the MOOC were related to the way of teaching. One instance

was being distracted many times while watching the videos. Some learners, like myself, learn best by doing not only by listening or watching some audios or videos. When you try to execute what you learn you can have a real opportunity to apply all your knowledge, skills and experiences. You can easily recognize your weak points by analyzing your mistakes. Although I finished the course, I am still uncertain whether I am a truly a professional teacher or not yet. Knowledge is not sufficient to be able to answer what you want to be. Theory is as important as practical teaching and learning. Therefore, I want to observe my progress and compare my performance before and after taking the course.

2.8 Recommendations

Forms of eLearning like MOOCs can be important yet they still need to be improved. While it helps most people achieve the concept of lifelong learning by providing access anywhere, sharing experiences, and enjoying the variation of teaching methods, it is most suitable for students/people who cannot join any university to learn. It eases the road for many people to learn more about their field or their area of interests. On the other hand, students learn independently; without any kind of real or face-to-face interaction, which is very important in the teaching and learning process. The interaction existed only on the discussion board, which was inadequate for some students like myself. The peer assignment had many weak points like not having clear criteria to evaluate others' assignments, as the criterion is very general. As a student, I wanted to be evaluated by teachers or professors, not by other students, because I want to learn more and I want to be able to correct my own mistakes after understanding them in depth.

As adults, we can overcome the drawbacks or the shortage of eLearning in general by implementing what we learned and taking the whole responsibility

to reflect on ourselves. We could have another solution --- to use these courses and videos as a kind of support for a real course. That is, to integrate this course with a face-to-face course, which indicates applying blended learning to achieve the advantages of the traditional teaching and the online one.

3. Conclusions

The MOOC learning experiences by both learners proved to have positive effects. The content, being a new, was one. The extra materials, the weekly quizzes, and the opportunity to listen and watch the same lecture as many times was also a great experience. The opportunity to exchange points of view with my teachers at any time was somewhat liberating. On the other hand, both learners agree that face-to-face interaction was missed. The existence and prevalent use of peer assessments in online learning will take a while to get used to as admitted by both learners.

The MOOC experience has allowed both learners to rethink their mindset regarding MOOCs as an alternative source of knowledge. It also made them more aware of cultural, interest, and career background differences due to other learners from all over the world. It was an excellent and real opportunity to share experiences and learn from each other. Even the ways of discussing these experiences were different with everyone. The cultural and background differences enhanced the MOOC experience all the more. Moreover, MOOCs have somehow helped both learners to be in a better position to decide what courses to take, when, why, and how. Planning and strategizing how to learn via MOOCs can be truly beneficial in filling the gap between current situation of the level of knowledge and the required one. As MOOC learners, both learners also realized that he or she must be more active and engaged with fellow team members. On a positive note though, constant and

consistent guidance plus continued support from the various support systems: affective, reflective, cognitive, systemic, and gender could make these learning experiences and its outcomes a successful and meaningful one.

References

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