

Exploring Possible Reasons behind Low Student Retention Rates of Massive Online Open Courses: A Comparative Case Study from a Social Cognitive Perspective

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Abstract. Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) have been widely lauded by the press since its fairly recent inception. Besides its wide popularity among learners worldwide, the majority of MOOCs still present challenges with steep dropout rates in spite of their promising enrollment numbers. While enjoying various benefits MOOCs brings along, learners apparently face new challenges. This paper intends to explore possible reasons behind this phenomenon from a social cognitive perspective by analyzing and comparing the same subject content taught in both the traditional face-to-face setting and on a MOOC-based platform.

Based on past research and theories including both the larger distance learning fields as well as recent MOOC-specific ones, three areas, namely, the lack of self-efficacy, self-regulation, and self-motivators are identified to help present an exploratory framework in interpreting findings of this study. Although far from all encompassing, this exploratory framework attempts to enhance our understanding of distinct challenges MOOC learners as well as MOOC designers face.

Keywords: MOOCs, Distance Learning, Student Retention Rate, Sustainability of Learning.