MOOCs for Cultural Heritage Education: An Exploratory Analysis

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Outline

- This study reports results of an action research project that engaged Iraqi academics in the development of Open Educational Resources (OER) to promote knowledge of cultural heritage in the general public.

- It provides evidence of how general models such as MOOCs might be adapted to support societies and social setting.

Introduction

- Universities can play a major role in the development of sustained peace in post-conflict societies, through non-formal learning and topics related to cultural heritage.

- This is because the features of open educational resources (OER) can enable to reach wide audiences with diverse social backgrounds.

The Iraqi society

- Iraqi society has been described as historically organic and largely united.

- During the past two decades, ethnic and sectarian differences emerged as a results of intervention and agitation from foreign entities such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS.

Universities and Social Cohesion

- The Iraqi Universities organize events that highlight tolerance and, also, encourage postgraduate students to focus on social challenges.

- Studies within the social sciences and humanities offer historical evidence on pluralism and diversity that can support the efforts of tolerance and cohesion.

Educational contents and tools

- Efforts to promote peace and cohesion require educational contents and tools that are accessible to large segments of the population, including huge non-formal learners and individuals without prior study at the university level.

- OER, therefore, provide a set of concepts, approaches and methods for education about cultural heritage focusing on peace and tolerance.

Literature review

- Writers confirm that the use of OER in non-formal education often have less consideration than in formal academic programmes of study.

- This adds that more research is needed across different contexts, both geographically and in terms of the mode of study.

Literature review

- Understanding how OER functions in educational contexts requires an understanding of the social use of technology.

- MOOCs seem to be more relevant to these courses than other kinds of OER

Methods

- This research designed to study how MOOCs can be used to improve engagement with cultural heritage and develop mutual understanding in a post-conflict environment.

- Academics were recruited from two Iraqi universities to be involved in the study as interviewees.

- They also represent a diverse sample in terms of gender

Methods

- These participants work in fields related to cultural heritage, like History, Archaeology and Anthropology.

- The action research consisted of a one year training project designed to develop skills in the development OER and MOOCs.

- The participants were interviewed to explore their sense of mechanism in changing society outside the university using MOOCs.

- Data were analyzed using open coding and thematic analysis

Participants' motivation

- The participants were all keen to develop skills and improve their competence in the use of MOOCs.

- The reason for their motivation in the view that MOOCs held great promise for achieving a more socially cohesive society.

- The participants shifted from what they were believe that OER is for only academic learning.

Internet for supporting culture heritage

- Participants have emphasized the strong appeal of the Internet to young people as a positive development that OER can leverage to increase the outreach and participation in cultural heritage education.

MOOCs could be influential for supporting the culture of society… because for young people to hear any news or learn something new, they do not depend on television, radio, or newspapers. The first way of transmitting information to them is the Internet, and therefore, the Internet is a very effective way to reach society as a whole.

Attitudes and attention

The user-oriented approach to MOOCs should involve attention to the collective attitude of social groups, including their likely choices and preferences.

If I design the material of an event such as a lecture or workshop in the form of an explanatory video and I launch it through MOOCs, then many young learners for example may benefit from it, especially if it includes things that such young learners usually like, such as music, pictures or animation. These things can increase the desire of the learners to engage.

Attracting groups' culture

The attention to the distinct features of each targeted audience will contribute to the more successful presentation of MOOCs and then to improve engagement with cultural heritage.

We have to know how to attract each group in the community to ensure the content presented is effective for them. Different groups in society may have a suitable material (content), so we must define the characteristics of the target group and then design the content that we seek to present in a manner that the group can understand and respond to it.

Environmental Challenges

In their emphasis on the difficult task at hand, some of the participants indicated that there was a dearth of expertise and structural support necessary to handle it.

Any change related to culture is very difficult and we unfortunately do not have knowledge of the change management process. The change requires administrative stability...this is a process of change and not like setting up an e-network or preparing hardware and software. It is a process linked to a cultural aspect rooted in educators, and this needs good management.

MOOCs Resistance

- MOOCs, in general, was positioned as an unusual culture of practice, producing unwillingness and sometimes a strong sense of opposition in some academics.

I'd say OER has contributed to the increase of opponents to it in the university... In a symposium on the OER approach some years ago, many attending professors were opposed to using OER. I remember someone's words that always ring in my ears; he said that we will break down the education in Iraq if we insist on using these techniques. He said that in the symposium and to the public.

Conclusion

- Participants voiced enthusiasm about possibilities for MOOCs in cultural heritage education, particularly sharing learning with a broader and more diverse audience beyond traditional university learners.

- However, the use of MOOCs for a specific purpose - to increase the engagement with diverse cultural heritage in a post-conflict environment, seem to be complicated and deeply entwined in the social and cultural context.

Conclusion

- In addition to functional concerns such as staff skills, learners' access to devices, and internet connectivity, participants voiced concerns about the ways in which MOOCs might disturb existing institutional structures, and more general skepticism about the role.

Thank you for your interest

Interesting references

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