

Doing MOOCs in Dili: Southern agency and open online learning in Timor-Leste

Monty King, the University of Western Australia, Unthinkable Digital



In the chat/tell the person next to you

What was the name of the first MOOC you tried and the platform/institution?

Can you remember your first impressions?

Introduction

- Managed LELI school Dili, 2009-2011
- First MOOC 2013: Learning to Teach Online (UNSW, Coursera)
- Started a PhD in Sociology of Education 2015
- Fieldwork in Dili 2015, 2016, 2017
- Became a FutureLearn Partnership Manager 2018
- Transitioned to Learning Designer 2019
- Left FutureLearn 2021 to work in consultancy
- Completed PhD late 2022

My PhD

- Thesis as a series of papers
- Applied principles of Ethnographic Action Research (EAR)
 Researcher as ‘social-cultural animator’
- Field research included participant observation, semi-structured interviews, ‘hanging out’, also facilitating blended MOOCs
- Part time external student working full time

Background to Timor-Leste

- 400+ years of Portuguese colonization
- 25 year Indonesian military occupation
- 2002 world's first new country of the 21st century
- 2002-2012 Timor Telecom telecommunications monopoly
- 2012 Sector liberalized; internet from 20c/hour in Wi-Fi 'hotspots'
- Explosion in Internet use, powered by Facebook



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MOOCs and OER in the Global South: Problems and Potential

Monty King
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HTML

LIVE AND RESEARCH

Literature review of peer reviewed papers 2014-2017

5 themes emerged:

- **Access:** transformed via mobile learning
- **Literacies:** language, digital and critical
- **Context:** often requires cultural translation to sites like Dili
- **Pedagogy:** MOOCs often reproduce didactic ‘banking’ models
- **North-South ‘flow’ of knowledge:** reproducing familiar imbalances

...more research is needed into the lived experiences of MOOC and OER users and potential users in the global South. This would help create insights into how they access and negotiate online learning environments within various structural constraints. (p.8)

Reading: Experiences of Timorese language teachers in a blended
Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) for Continuing Professional...

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Research articles

Experiences of Timorese language teachers in a blended
Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) for Continuing
Professional Development (CPD)

Authors: Monty King , Bernadete Luan, Esperança Lopes



- Co-authored with two staff at LELI English language school
- Ethnographic (participatory) action research cycle
- Blending the British Council/FutureLearn course *Teaching for success; the classroom and the world*
- Data from individual and focus group interviews

Benefits

- Access to quality learning resources
- Sharing and learning from others
- Motivating to develop teaching practice.
- Improving participants' English language skills.

[T]hey bring up a lot of issues that you are also thinking some teachers might have had that experience before... and then also we recognize what we are facing when we are teaching (p.282)

Challenges

- Internet access
- Time management
- Course design issues
- Limited certification payment methods and prohibitive cost

Anyone can participate in the course but then they can pay for a certificate even though they don't learn a lot... it's just like you pay for it get certificate, put in your CV (p. 284)



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Articles

Southern agency and digital education: an ethnography of open online learning in Dili, Timor-Leste

Monty King  , Martin Forsey  & Mark Pegrum 

Pages 283-298 | Received 05 Nov 2018, Accepted 03 Jun 2019, Published online: 10 Jul 2019

Introduces the concept of **Southern agency**:

[a]n individual's engagement within the particular forms of constraint and opportunity that exemplify life for many in countries of the global South. It is the mix of structured, cultured choices people face and their ability to work with the resources available to exercise power, limited as it may be. (p. 4)

Three ethnographic portraits of MOOC users in Dili.

Rosa

- Young, highly motivated student applying for international scholarships
- Looking for opportunities to study environmental science

I think it's ...strong evidence because it's through online and there's a certificate and those certificates are not from East Timor- because they're from Australia it's more international so people... believe it quickly instead of just a local certificate.



Ines

- Doctor trained in Cuba working in a Dili medical clinic
- Studying professional development course in pediatrics
- Sharing laptops to watch course lectures
- Language switching can be exhausting



Vasco

- First Timorese person to study at Oxford University
- Previously studied on scholarships to the US and the UK
- Needed a high IELTS score to enter scholarship program
- Had enough money left on an old Travellex card to sign up for a MOOC
- Now the head of a major INGO office in Dili

Neither victims of northern hegemony or neo-colonial dupes, these southern learners are agents in their own right, but rarely, if ever, in the conditions of their choosing. (p.12)



Restricted access

| Research article

| First published online November 17, 2021

International Scholarships and Southern Agency: An Ethnography of Alumni, Scholars, and Applicants

[Monty King](#)  , [Martin Forsey](#) , and [Mark Pegrum](#) [View all authors and affiliations](#)

[Volume 27, Issue 2](#) | <https://doi.org/10.1177/10283153211054144>

- International scholarships as social capital and mobility- a ‘golden ticket’
- Number of scholarship offered dwarfed by applications
- **Applicants** look for anything to enhance applications
- **Scholars** are familiar with online study, can sometimes study online from Timor
- **Alumni** often go into government and INGO work, looking for continuing professional development opportunities

MOOCs and international scholarships

International scholarships don't scale

Emerging digital education formats with greater potential to transform access to education

- International distance scholarships
- North-South virtual knowledge exchanges
- Collaborative online international learning (COIL)

What role(s) could MOOCs play in scaling quality international education?

Reflections

- Massive can be misleading: the more you generalise, the more you marginalise
- Blending MOOCs is an effective means of contextualizing learning
- Generative AI in MOOCs beyond *Future Bot*? As Socratic partner, personal tutor, study buddy, motivator?
- MOOCs have seen major changes in the past 10 years, and need to adapt. New technologies, new knowledge, new learner demographics

Change is inevitable, growth is optional

Questions?