Initial motivation is a key factor for learning in massive open online courses

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The study analyzed the psychological factors that influence the learning of the participants in the massive online courses. Its results show that initial intention is related to individual differences in drop-out probability.

The research was carried out by means of a survey of 1,768 participants from six MOOCs. The students were classified in function of their motivational profile and learning intentions at the start of the course. The results show that initial motivation is clearly associated with the satisfaction and perceived quality of the learning experience. "A good initial diagnosis of the learning intention and motivational profile of each student can therefore help to design personalized learning plans, as well as improve the degree to which students benefit from the course," explains University of Seville teacher Isidro Maya.

Since MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) started the OpenCourseWare movement by publishing its course materials as open educational resources, many types of initiatives have been developed to open access to education via the use of digital technologies. Among other resources, MOOCs have proliferated. These offer specialized online courses (often free) to an unlimited number of students. However, the drop-out rate of students that start a MOOC (massive open online course) are very high. It is therefore useful to analyze the student profiles, establishing typologies and individual profiles. As the study by the Personal Network and Community Laboratory (LRPC) and the JRC shows, the initial diagnosis of learning intention can be very useful for improving educational performance.

Researchers from the University of Seville have carried out a study within the MOOCknowledge project, a European initiative that collected data on a large scale on participant in MOOCs between 2014 and 2018. The project gathered information from more than 23,000 users from a total of 84 MOOCs.

The Laboratorio de Redes Personales y Comunidades de la Universidad de Sevilla (Personal Network and Community Laboratory) collaborated in the preparation of the databases generated in this European Commission project. Currently, the data is being used in various research projects, and have been especially useful for exploring the impact of the MOOCs on learning, employability and the development of professional careers.

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