

Seizing opportunities: MOOC takers making time for change

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Abstract

We interviewed people living in African countries who have taken Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) created by the University of Cape Town to ask about their challenges, goals, and value studying online. They are drawn to taking MOOCs in part because of the claims around flexible learning opportunities for people with busy lives. A striking feature in these interviews is the many references to the challenges associated with negotiating time to study online. Here we wish to move beyond simply identifying deficit models of time or time management and rather seek to understand the value of MOOCs to people with work or career transition goals. The MOOC takers' experiences are quite different to those in conventional degree courses as MOOC participation is voluntary and must be negotiated around existing commitments, suggesting a need for reframing of what is valued by people studying online in their own time.

Keywords: flexibility, MOOCs, online learning, temporalities, time

Introduction

We interviewed people living in African countries who have completed Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) created by the University of Cape Town (UCT). Our interest is in understanding how openly accessible online learning opportunities, offered in the form of MOOCs, are being valued by people and what they are using them for as they move in and out of study and work. Here questions of who has access to online learning resources shifts away from traditional concerns around accessing university infrastructure towards questions about having time, having spaces to study, needs of non-traditional students, and expectations of studying online. While our interviews are with those who overcame many of the challenges to complete the course, this still required them to negotiate time for study around work and family priorities, reflecting sometimes conflicting relationships and expectations. This is going beyond seeking a measure of, for example, the time commitments to complete a MOOC by analysing survey responses. We wished to consider reframing what is involved for someone to make time to study online in their busy lives.



Thus, we were interested in what people bring, how they negotiate time, and their future perspectives in shaping their experiences.

The reasons for why traditional universities have chosen to develop MOOCs and other forms of online study in recent years are diverse, but typically includes widening access and the creation of more flexible learning opportunities. Castells (2000), in analysing the challenges faced by universities and the information society, argued for the education sector to seek opportunities as we are entering a future of a 'timeless time' in the networked world (Muller and Cloete, 2017). His influential arguments centred on emerging economies making developmental leaps through geographic distance and time being reduced by new technologies, but this of course does not necessarily address the other structural challenges individuals may face.

The MOOCs discussed here are all hosted on Coursera, an international platform with whom UCT has partnered. The Coursera mission statement is that 'anyone, anywhere can transform their life by accessing the world's best learning experience' which is encouraging people to consider taking time to make changes. The time commitments needed for completing a course are prominently presented when enrolling. Furthermore, Coursera suggests that '[w]ith flexible start dates, adjustable due dates, and easy to use mobile apps, you can learn when and where you want' (Coursera, 2019). A diverse literature shows the many often hidden issues, associated with technology adoption that can get overlooked (Burke et al., 2017; Houlden and Veletsianos, 2019; Raddon, 2007; Sheail, 2018). Time in an online world remains important two decades after Castells' wrote about imagining a more connected future.

We first discuss our wider research project and how we see time in relation to MOOCs, online learning and the higher education landscape. We situate our study within current research on MOOCs and their flexible design, drawing out the centrality of time that is seemingly taken for granted.

Researching MOOC takers

UCT launched its first MOOCs in 2015, with goals that included showcasing local knowledge and developing institutional capacity for creating online courses (Chapman et al., 2016; Walji et al., 2018). The three-year MOOC Takers Research Project was initiated in 2017, seeking to assess some of the broader impact of the UCT MOOCs. Our initial research sought to characterise the perceived value of taking a MOOC in relation to life transitions (Walji et al., 2018). Here "transitions" refer to when people move between work and learning, between different disciplines of knowledge and between different levels of learning. Such transitions are described in the literature in various ways, including life-course changes, turning points and branching points (Rönkä, Oravala and Pulkkinen, 2003), indicating an underlying idea of events or opportunities that can result in people reassessing priorities or envisaging new options leading to life changes or seeking new career goals. Time is important for understanding such transitions and changes. A motivation for this current work is to better

understand the experiences of people who are making time to study through exploring flexible forms of online learning.

The research question is how do MOOC takers living in African countries talk about time for studying online? Here time and temporalities concern how people make time to study but also how they think about time when integrating studying online into their existing life commitments. Our interest in such questions emerges from higher education's wider intent to be transformative and supportive of people in constructing their purpose and future direction (Klemenčič, 2015; Walji et al., 2018). Such transformative events may not be directly linked to formal qualifications or teaching interventions.

People taking MOOCs are not compelled to do so and thus may be better described as volunteer learners. They may be motivated to learn for free or at low cost knowing there are no consequences for not necessarily completing everything. While the motivations are diverse, this audience often includes people who may be on the margins of an intended career and not yet fully recognised professionally. These are not the traditional students of universities but include people who may want to enrol at a university in the future. Although being online is a requirement for taking a MOOC, some still faced structural challenges of network connectivity and the cost of bandwidth. Successful course completion is likely to mask barriers that reflect inequalities amongst MOOC takers, and which a focus on time helps to unpack.

Literature review

Much of the literature on people taking MOOCs has drawn upon surveys and activity data as sources. In many cases these data collection instruments had originally been intended for assessing the technology used. Simply extending this has obvious limitations for informing different research questions as the specific contexts and how experiences change over time often cannot easily be interpreted. For example, a study by Watted and Barak (2018) using survey data, had explored how MOOC completion related to time and motivation. The limited evidence leads to suggestions that those learners who 'lost interest' in the course are most likely to 'drop out'. Kubincová, Dale and Kerr (2018) interviewed people taking a MOOC to help promote uptake of a formal online degree course and found time and 'time management skills' factors correlated to 'dropouts'. A study by Eriksson, Adawi and Stohr (2017) that interviewed MOOC takers found four main factors influencing dropouts with lack of time and the ability to manage time effectively being the prevalent factor. A valid critique of such research is that it risks conveniently suggesting a deficit model where students are considered as lacking in some way, either due to life circumstances or personal abilities of managing time, since little is known of their lived experience or circumstances (Bennett and Burke, 2017).

There are some notable features of MOOC engagement that are widely discussed in the literature. Clow (2013) and Howarth et al. (2016) use the metaphor of a funnel to illustrate the striking reduction in participation on MOOCs over time that research has sought to explain. The drop-off in participation broadly reflects the widely observed behaviour of the

MOOC mode (Adawi, & Stöhr, 2017; De Rosa, 2018; Eriksson, Romero & Usart, 2017), so it is certainly not surprising that time often has significant correlations with other variables. We argue though that adopting such a deficit model is telling us little about the diversity among people in how they use their time or are motivated, since the broader trends tend to hide lived experiences which could be more informative about MOOC takers' actual experiences.

The online and distance education literature has researched how time and spatial dimensions can be used to investigate the lived experiences of students. Sheail (2018) uses the term 'translocality' to describe how students may experience being simultaneously situated in more than one place across physical and online environments. This research is questioning the simplistic view of online programmes as 'reaching out' from the university campus to the world, arguing that it requires more than simply an online mode to create educational opportunities that open up connections across multiple locations, times and temporalities (Sheail, 2018). Barbara Adam's (1998, 2000) concept of timescapes has also been used to analyse the time dimension alongside the physical landscape. Timescapes provide a frame used to describe experiences of learning in distance and higher education by recording both visible and invisible aspects of the lived life of students (Burke et al., 2017; Harvey et al., 2002; Raddon, 2007). This includes a focus on the wider social lives of people and explores the experiences of being marginalised while seeking to study further. Here timescapes helps bring to light the often overlooked 'spatio-temporal relationalities' that shape higher education and inequality. It is these timescapes, Adam (1998, 2000) argues, which shape subjectivities, discourses, and practices. The notions of timescapes, as well as temporalities (people's experience of time), can help deepen understanding of the challenges reported while studying online at a distance (Bennett and Burke, 2017; Harvey et al., 2002; Raddon, 2007).

The timescape concept does not focus on the different measurement of time or what time is but rather directs attention to what one does with time in a particular situation and how time can then influence perceptions and values. With MOOCs, people are making the choice to negotiate time to study online and seek some value, which is the focus of this study. Adams and Yin (2014) explored what it is like for university students to participate in a MOOC as part of their undergraduate course load. This research is situated in a 'phenomenology of practice', presenting descriptive snapshots of the lived world of the MOOC for undergraduate students and offers a brief phenomenological reflection on the theme of temporality.

The literature includes other conceptual frameworks that have also been used in describing experiences relating to time. Flexibility is often associated with MOOCs and other new online learning modalities; yet, it is clearly hard to simply realise the benefits (Houlden and Veletsianos, 2019). Within a workplace context, Ballard and Seibold (2004) investigated dimensions of organizational members' experience of time. Here a distinction is used between "enactments" of time and "construals" of time to distinguish for example negotiating around time constraints and how people speak about their available time.

In this study, we draw on Ballard and Seibold's conceptual framework that distinguishes between "enactments" of time to mean actual practices and strategies and "construals" of time to describe how people think and talk about time to analyse the actual practices exhibited by MOOC takers. These constructs are further delineated into more specific and granular sub-constructs, which have been useful for distinguishing between and understanding particular behaviours and practices. Applying enactments and construals of time to an analysis of how MOOC takers spoke about time for study allows exploration of people's practices in relation to managing and performing time. It sheds light on how beliefs and perspectives about time are played out among this group of successful MOOC takers. This is intended to move beyond instrumental time and time management to inform a more layered understanding of people's timescapes as they enacted them and had construed time in situated online learning spaces.

Interviews with MOOC completers

We interviewed those who had completed a MOOC created by UCT and were living in an African country. While MOOC completers represent a small proportion of those who had enrolled, we deliberately selected those people who had been able to make time for study and thus were best able to inform the research question. This purposive sampling strategy involved first identifying completers through the MOOC platform and then sending invitations to those meeting the selection criteria to be interviewed via email. This sampling approach led to 58 semi-structured interviews being completed. Most of these interviews were conducted telephonically, lasting between fifteen and thirty minutes. Each audio recording was transcribed and coded using NVivo for broad themes we had identified from the literature.

Each interview started with asking learners who they were, what they did, and their challenges when taking the MOOC. Although not asked explicitly about time, most people spoke specifically about how they made time to study and the negotiations this had involved. Here, drawing on our conceptual framework, we analyse the enactments and construals of time that concern the way people were experiencing or negotiating their daily activities and responsibilities to include study. Coursera seeks to make it easy to learn flexibly. The reality of these opportunities may sometimes be questioned when the circumstances are unacknowledged (Houlden and Veletsianos, 2019). In a number of interviews people referred to such promises of studying flexibly, anytime and anywhere. We were especially interested in how the platform together with the design of the courses contribute to how people experience time and respond to such promises of online education.

The Ballard and Seibold (2004) dimensions of time provided a framework we adopted for coding how MOOC takers spoke about their experience of time. We first analyse the enactments of time before considering the construals of time, although people may have spoken about these together. When coding the interviews, the following sub-constructs were used (Ballard & Seibold, 2004):

Enactments of time: the way we negotiate to do work in timeous ways

- Flexibility - notion of “rigidity” of task completion plans
- Linearity - perception and management of time as continuous
- Pace - time as fast or slow
- Punctuality - matching task completion to a negotiated time
- Delay - tardiness related to work processes or tasks
- Scheduling - how precisely plans are formalized against an external calendar or clock
- Separation - elimination of extraneous factors during task completion

Construals of time: the way we think and talk about time

- Scarcity of time - time seen as a limited
- Urgency of tasks - pressure and prioritisations of time needed for deadlines and task completion
- Present time - oriented toward present time perspectives
- Future time perspectives - oriented toward future or long-term planning or intentions

While these constructs may well overlap in meaning, when applied to understanding how interviewees actually managed time, the granularity is helpful for understanding and explaining particular strategies MOOC takers adopted.

In the 58-interview data set, there was an even gender balance and a total of 14 African countries represented, with 68% being South African. The largest single group, representing 37% of the total, were employed and in the age range from 25 to 44. A majority had university qualifications. This roughly mirrors overall enrolment patterns for MOOCs globally (Glass, Shiokawa-Baklan and Saltarelli, 2016). While eight of UCT’s MOOCs were mentioned in the interviews, 39 of the 58 interviewees had taken one of the following three courses:

- *Becoming a Changemaker* is an introduction to social innovation that aims to inspire people to make social changes. A companion course, *Innovative Finance*, looks at impacting investing to bring about social change.
- *Understanding Clinical Research* is an introduction to interpreting statistical analysis as it might appear in medical publications.
- *Climate Change Mitigation* explores the complexity of issues facing developing countries who wish to grow their economies in climate friendly ways through the case of a multi-country initiative.

Each of these courses is six weeks long, with an estimated study time of two to three hours per week, typically comprising an hour of video content along with reading resources, quizzes and peer review assessments. There is an option to purchase a certificate or apply

for financial aid to receive a certificate at no cost. This makes it possible to provide evidence of completing a course and link the certificate to an online curriculum vitae for example. Only a small proportion of interviewees obtained a certificate.

The courses interviewees had enrolled in, broadly reflected their own context. Those taking *Becoming a Changemaker* were generally working for NGOs, education institutions or a social enterprise and seeking new ways of working outside their current practices. A high proportion of those taking the *Understanding Clinical Research* course were in an early career position, often in time demanding occupations with many at rural healthcare facilities. They would often express an interest in becoming more involved with medical research in their future careers. The people taking *Climate Change Mitigation* included many established professionals working for example as consultants who had an interest in hearing from regional experts about climate change issues as this was important to understand for their work. Biographical information about the MOOC takers we drawn upon here are summarised in Table 1. Pseudonyms and demographic categories have been used in describing some of the diversity of the sample.

Table 1: Biographical information about the interviewees

Pseudonym	Age	Country	MOOC
Thembi	25-34	South Africa	Understanding Clinical Research
Aliya	55-64	Libya	Understanding Clinical Research
Lucy	45-54	Botswana	Understanding Clinical Research
Charlotte	35-44	South Africa	Changemaker
Miranda	Unknown	South Africa	Innovative Finance (companion course to Changemaker)
Anna	25-34	South Africa	Changemaker
Maertje	55-64	South Africa	Changemaker
Sadhvi	25-34	Mauritius	Changemaker
Lemba	35-44	South Africa	Climate Change Mitigation
Patrick	55-64	Zambia	Climate Change Mitigation

Talking about time

Drawing on our interviews with MOOC takers, we organised these broadly under enactments of time (time to study and time for tasks) and construals of time (thinking about time) to illustrate how people talk about their experiences and contexts. We highlight some of the expected and unexpected aspects, reflecting a wide range of MOOC takers experiences. This analysis does not suggest generalizability, but rather seeks to inform understandings of the experiences of studying online that otherwise remain invisible.

Time to study

Interviewees often described how they needed to negotiate and make time participate in the MOOC when asked about the challenges they faced to study. These relate to enactments of

time. Here we were interested in how people described finding time to study in a day or week. In this timeframe, often experiences in the scheduling, separation and flexibility dimensions were described. Flexibility relates to the notion of 'rigidity' of their task completion plans. Scheduling concerns the extent to which precise plans, activities, and events are formalized against an external calendar or clock (Ballard and Seibold, 2004), which here may be communicated through the Coursera course interface or their daily routine. Finally, separation indexes the degree to which "extraneous factors are eliminated or engaged during task completion" (Ballard and Seibold, 2004).

Thembi is a pathologist at a rural hospital in South Africa who completed the Understanding Clinical Research course. She talks about her motivation to find time to learn, actively separating this from her other activities.

... at that time I was so stuck, I needed to learn ... [but] actually couldn't really afford any studies ... I saw these online courses, the MOOCs, ... [and thought] to keep myself busy ... let me just take one of these courses ... from you know good universities So, I just decided to take the course

Thembi talks about the need for continual development, likely important for career advancement or because of the status as a specialist in a rural hospital, but not able to afford the time or money. The solution MOOCs seemed to promise though was tempered by connectivity issues:

I live in a very remote area ... so I had to download most of the lectures first and then when it's completed downloading, then that's when I can actually listen to the video lecture.

These complications around access involved a number of enactments; in particular, that of scheduling the preliminary task of downloading videos that takes up time, after which she would need time to engage with the lectures. While she succeeded in completing the course, this preliminary step seems to have reinforced her spatial positionality as being from a 'remote area' and partially disconnected. This marginality expressed through the need to schedule downloads adds a further barrier to accessing the learning and would likely discourage those less motivated. Indeed, this points to the difficulty of enacting another construct - of flexibility - which is often purported to be a benefit of online learning.

Aliya, a doctor and educator from Libya, like Thembi, would negotiate a separate time for study by scheduling her studying before or after work, subject to electricity and internet availability.

I'm using it when I have free time. Sometimes at night, sometimes early morning according to my schedule and according to the situation of electricity and net availability.

While Thembi and Aliya had adopted strategies within the scheduling and separating dimensions of time to overcome infrastructural constraints, not everyone spoke about such challenges in the same way. Even though Lucy described herself as being physically isolated and relying on solar power, she was able to see the positives of separation of time through negotiating access challenges for learning online. She emphasised the joy in being able to learn online and was especially positive about the flexibility offered. She had completed the Understanding Clinical Research course and spoke about how she was in control of her time.

I do consultancy work. So, I work for myself, so I schedule my stuff around when I want to do it. And also, I'm living on my own, so I've got no real distractions, I can work till whatever time I want, when I want, how I want. I want to add that I absolutely love it, I've got to watch that I don't become addicted to it. ... I can lock myself up my whole weekend.

Lucy's work and location required her to be flexible and not be rigid, so she found the course format fitted well with her routine. She was aware that spending entire weekends studying online might be seen as unusual behaviour; yet, found the immersion while learning to be very rewarding.

How people negotiated time to study, as discussed above, appeared closely related to their level of motivation as well as how much control they had over their environment including the practical aspects of power supply and connectivity. Any of these factors compounded flexibility and therefore the ability to schedule or separate time.

Time for tasks

Experiences of time in relation to completing specific tasks in the MOOC such as assignments involved planning in relation to course deadlines and expectations. Here they were not negotiating when but how they could now complete specific tasks in the time available. The MOOC platforms guide people to structure their time and work towards completing a course by providing an ideal course schedule suggested as a timeline. A dashboard shows the upcoming week's course content and assessment tasks. Prominently displayed are the lengths of the following video lectures in minutes and due dates of upcoming assessments. Coursera makes it relatively easy to re-join the current cohort without a penalty, and thus change deadlines and slow the pace. While some spoke about dashboards and signals being helpful, others likely misinterpreted or overlooked the cues being provided. So, while the Coursera platform was designed to accommodate flexibility around task completion and allow people to move through the course in their own time, this was not apparent to everyone. Time dimensions enacted by MOOC takers include experiences of punctuality and delay.

Charlotte had completed the Changemaker course while working under considerable time pressure in a new job and completing her PhD. Reflecting on her experience, she wished she had been able to renegotiate when she would complete tasks.

If I think about my crisis with time, maybe if there was more flexibility in being able to do the course over a longer period of time. But I understand there are challenges with that kind of facilitating and that often, when you do that, it can be like a never-ending thing and that I know there are reasons why there are deadlines.

This MOOC was something additional, and while she had an appreciation of why courses might have deadlines, it was seemingly difficult for her to imagine renegotiating the deadlines. She was likely adopting a formal student identity where enactment of punctuality is emphasised; yet, these deadlines were not intended to be inflexible and there was no penalty for postponing. Here the platform-imposed schedules are to encourage people to remain in cohorts and finish sooner rather than delay which Charlotte had likely recognised. So, these courses are deliberately paced with artificial deadlines to encourage self-directed learning to complete. Charlotte quite possibly may not have completed had she followed a slower pace although several others who had discovered how they could join a later cohort when under time pressure were able to complete their courses flexibly.

Miranda recently changed careers, having first worked in corporate and later for educational NGOs, and then took the Innovative Finance course, a companion course to Changemaker, as she developed a new career. She spoke about her experience with allocating time for the peer review assignments, observing a change in pace in a course that was unfamiliar to her, having not done peer review style assignments previously. Typically, these assignments involve a writing task followed by the reviewing of three peers' assignments. In relation to degree-level courses, these are far less demanding, both academically and in time commitments, yet still require some academic skills and creativity. The assessment task Miranda refers to aptly titled 'Pick Your Issue Area', involved creating a visualisation of an innovation idea which she did as a PowerPoint presentation. This demanded her attention:

Yes, I think just time allocation. Because, you know, when you sit down to do the presentation, it does give you some detail of the time, but I think if you could give more focus on the time that is required for completing the exercises. ... I think you need to stress that it takes a lot of time and focus. People really have to be prepared to sit down and really, you know, commit themselves to doing it well and properly.

Miranda is referring to how Coursera presents estimates of time needed for completing tasks. The time for watching a video is precise but for a peer review assignment this would only be a rough estimate. Miranda related her experience of the pace of time while committing herself to completing the task, finding that she had spent longer than the

anticipated time. This points to a need for better signalling of different time expectations and the possibility of taking longer. For Anna, who completed the Changemaker course, the time estimates for the course were more easily managed.

I thought that it was really well timed. There was enough time to do all of the projects. And the videos were just long enough ... The chunks of work were so manageable, and the time frame was very manageable, that I did not really struggle with that. I think the longest I would have worked on one thing would have been two or three hours a week, maybe.

The chunks Anna refers to include videos and quizzes and is sometimes used to describe flexible course modes. Anna is herself a lecturer at a university and a motivation for completing this course was to learn for herself how a student experiences the challenges and the time demands of studying online.

The enactments of time experiences illustrate some of the many difficulties of making time even for those that ultimately succeeded. While there is diversity across the interviews, there are some patterns viewed across the courses. The assessments in Climate Change Mitigation and Changemaker courses were more demanding than Understanding Clinical Research and this is reflected in the interviews. Those with little flexibility in their work schedule, such as health professionals, tended to emphasise some of the difficulties they had following a flexible course model. Not unexpectedly, those already working flexibly or familiar with the MOOC format often described more positive experiences. Interestingly some had likely expected a traditional academic course mode and adopted a formal student identity (Klemenčič, 2015); these people seemingly found it harder to imagine how they could choose to enact their time differently such as returning to a course later. They may too have been aware that any delay would likely have resulted in them never returning.

Thinking about time

In the interviews we specifically asked people about what they valued after having completed their MOOC, what they had done with what they had learnt, if they used their certificate and if they intended to take further online degrees or courses. In their responses to these questions, people spoke about how time was scarce and urgent together with some of their future time perspectives related to long term goals. These construals of time illuminate how people perceive, comprehend, and interpret their lived experiences of learning online.

Maertje, a business school lecturer living in South Africa, described how she seeks out learning opportunities for herself.

My overall experience was that some [MOOCs] are great, some of them are terrible. It's a way I like to learn, because I like to learn on my own and at my own pace. ... Yes, they're interesting if nothing else. Some of them, the one that I did with you, I thought

was particularly well-presented and good. ... I actually prefer to do at least two or three a year. I haven't in the last 12 months because I just ... I have not ... That the hours would mean hours that I'm not sleeping. So, I haven't been able to, but the plan is to use them.

For Maertje, while her time is limited, she plans on completing a number of courses each year having developed agency of what she chooses. This freedom was important in establishing her identity as someone seeking learning opportunities for future use.

Sadhvi, with a degree in chemistry from UCT, described her experience while she was seeking to make a career change:

I started working in a lab and I realised that I didn't really like it. So, I decided to have a career change and that's when I started following MOOCs.

She completed the Changemaker course while in a stressful period of looking for a new career. She spoke specifically about how she was managing her time well.

There is a matter of discipline, just keeping up with the course and everything ... I had to like really dig deep or source inspiration ... especially the peer-reviewed ... I think that was an interesting challenge ... Well, I had a routine. I knew that on this day at this time that's my two or three hours allocated to my course.

Sadhvi was describing both what she needed to do to complete the course but also how she deals with clock time and the discipline she imagines an employer might expect. She explains that:

For me to be able to put that [MOOC certificate] on my CV, because I was changing careers and I did need something tangible to show to potential employers.

Even though her time is scarce she is also making her own choices by signalling her interests and ability to make changes and taking this future time perspective. A number of others, who spoke about self-development, also referred to the importance to them of demonstrating an ability to manage time.

Lemba is an independent consultant in South Africa and saw value in being well informed. He had previously taken postgraduate online degree courses and has experience with the pressures of studying online. He saw himself as somewhat unusual in embracing the flexibility of MOOCs that many others found hard. Lemba completed the Climate Change Mitigation MOOC exhibiting a future time perspective.

Nothing is impossible, so no matter how busy I am, I know that I have to add to my knowledge, I have to add my skill. And so, that's exactly what is there, so it's not every course that gives you a timeline that you can do it at your own pace. Okay, but when

there's a timeline there, then you're up and running. So, it actually enables you to culture yourself to get what you want.

It's easier. I don't need to go sit down in a formal university, I'm a professional. I'm busy on a daily basis, I've got family, I've got a position, I've got aspirations. So, I'm going to be limited, these guys are listening to one, crazy lecturer somewhere you know I can at my own time you know in the night when everybody is sleeping. I can conveniently complete three or four hours, on a usual basis I spend close to five hours or six hours to improve myself. I may leave one or two days in the week, but I just want to learn.

Lemba's construal of time appear attached to a student identity which he uses as motivation:

So, for online schools, it's not for irresponsible people, it's for educated, committed and determined people. That is just it, if I compare between online and regular universities, somebody is forcing you to come to class, somebody is forcing you to write exams, somebody is forcing you to be graded. But online is actually for those that are really ready to succeed in life.

Lemba suggests that successful students, or those ready to succeed, will make the time to expand their knowledge and skills. The interviews asked specifically about future plans and studying further, either a MOOC or possibly online degrees. These discussions often included mentions of making time to incorporate MOOCs in the future. Miranda, whom we introduced earlier, subsequently purchasing a certificate, as she felt this was relevant and beneficial to her career in the NGO education space. Miranda was asked if she would do any more MOOCs.

I have considered it, but it all comes down to capacity and I am pretty full. But I think these MOOCs are excellent. The fact that it is over four weeks. I mean, it is still a big commitment for time, but four or five weeks is very manageable you know. It doesn't feel like too much of a call on your time.

Miranda is relating the time commitments of a longer degree course with her experience of MOOCs. With a future time perspective, she is imagining what she might manage. A formal qualification may currently feel unachievable, but she continues to explore options. In addition to wanting to advance their careers and studying further, there were also cases where people spoke about making time to share knowledge they gained.

Patrick is a mining consultant from Zambia and the only challenge he mentioned was with the cost of data for accessing the Internet. He explained how he intended using what he had learnt from the Climate Change Mitigation course:

... in the next four to five months I'm concentrating on trying to finish my PhD degree. Once I've finished, I'll see how I can actually use it. In fact, I've even enrolled or registered as a mentor on your MOOC platform. But I was not very active because of being too busy, but once I finish my PhD, I think I'd like to sort of contribute to imparting the information on this issue of climate change.

While Patrick's time is especially scarce, he also speaks about a future when he will have more time and intends scheduling time to share his knowledge with others through joining Coursera's volunteer 'community' mentor programme. Here Patrick is expanding the student identity to include that of mentor and someone enabling the learning of others.

Several of the MOOC takers were similarly imagining an apprenticeship into a student identity that for them involves reassessing personal construals of time and considering adopting a more professionally oriented understanding of time. As they apprentice themselves further into becoming an online student, their perceptions of time that are internally influenced by their sense of pace and urgency, are challenged by the reality of their lived experience. Understanding how MOOC learners seek to develop their identities and connection with a university's other study opportunities informs how MOOCs might be made more valuable to learners with transition goals. Recognising their enactments of time, as well as how people construe time, helps unpack what is valued by MOOC takers and how they make time for studying online, as well as how the MOOC design creates a learning timescape.

Conclusions

Our research has focused on how MOOC takers spoke about time for studying, with the intention of deepening understandings of their challenges, ambitions and aspirations in online learning spaces. Identifying dimensions of time helps capture how people experienced the negotiations around making time for study. While some exhibited considerable agency this was spoken about in very diverse ways and reflected student agency (Klemenčič, 2015). Being able to make these choices was mostly described in positive terms as work and family commitments were usually more important and difficult to re-schedule. The analysis suggests this reflects more than just time management skills or even the motivation to study but points to interrelated relationships between time enactments enabling people to schedule and separate time for flexible learning along with dispositions about time as being future oriented and scarce. There are also a range of spatial, social, connectivity and access dimensions that could be considered.

Interviewees often made a point of describing themselves on the margins and possibly not yet fully recognised professionally, some living in remote locations, facing structural challenges of network connectivity, cost of bandwidth and unable to access formal higher education. Yet for those interviewed who had all completed a MOOC, there was a sense of accomplishment especially in overcoming some of the challenges experienced finding time. They were able to try studying online at low cost and often found value. Whether MOOCs

have grown from a movement seeking to respond to inequality by imagining new open pedagogical spaces (Pollack Ichou, 2018) is still a contested space. While these initial lofty aims have certainly not been fully achieved, many new questions have arisen about interpreting the impact and current evolution of these courses being created by universities to offer learning opportunities. Notwithstanding the limitations of generalising from this sample dataset, our study adds nuance and context to this continuing discussion. At least for people in similar circumstances to our interviewees, the opportunities offered by MOOCs were appreciated and valued.

In reflecting, we must also consider what those creating courses might do differently. The interview data presents an ongoing dilemma - how to design a learning experience that can both help keep one on track with appropriate nudges or deadlines, while also offering enough flexibility to self-allocate time when it is possible. As we have shown, individual MOOC takers' experiences can be very different making this hard to address. Both MOOC platforms and the course creators have needed to investigate how people respond to their design choices. For MOOCs appreciating what it can involve for online learners to make time to study seems especially important given the diverse contexts in which people find themselves. Understanding of people's timescapes points to the importance of time for learners as these experiences have clearly persisted in their attitudes towards and memories of studying and likely influence their future choices.

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