

MOOCs in Germany

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1. History of MOOCs in Germany

The first MOOC in Germany was “The future of education”. It was held from April to July 2011 by the e-learning platform of the University of Frankfurt in cooperation with Jochen Robes, a blogger who specializes in education. Moreover, the first MOOC platforms containing several MOOC courses started in 2011/2012.

However, MOOCs became more popular in Germany very recently due to news about the huge success of MOOCs in the USA. At the beginning of 2013, German media started to spread news about MOOCs. In the spring of 2013 iversity and the Stifterverband für die Deutsche Wissenschaft launched “The MOOC Production Fellowship” as a competition for online course concepts. A jury chose 10 of the best MOOC concepts out of more than 250 entries. The winners were each awarded €25,000 for the production of their courses. One of the most famous MOOCs in Germany, iversity, declared bankruptcy in June 2016 and in August the same year it was taken over by Holtzbrink Publishing Group.

As a result of the refugee crisis in Germany, the number of MOOCs aimed specifically at refugees is at the moment increasing. The most important example is Kiron¹, a social enterprise that aims at providing refugee students with the opportunity to graduate with an accredited university degree, free of charge.

2. Pedagogic framework

In Germany, the number of MOOCs is now increasing. However, they are far less popular than in the USA. German educational experts and universities recognize the huge potential of MOOCs, but there are no rules or guidelines whatsoever for MOOCs. That means that anyone can create and publish MOOCs! Consequently, many MOOCs lack a didactic structure and are often created by inexperienced teachers. The main German consumer organization and foundation (Stiftung Warentest) tested MOOCs in April 2014² and came to the same conclusion. It can be said that MOOCs in Germany are still in an experimental phase³.

Since 2014 educational institutions started to establish expert groups on MOOCs in order to research advantages and disadvantages of MOOCs and to create a framework for the use of MOOCs in education. In March 2014 the National Expert Forum on the Digital Future of Education was created. This is an initiative established by Centrum für Hochschulentwicklung, Stifterverband für die Deutsche Wissenschaft and the German Rectors’ Conference. It is financed by Germany’s federal ministry of education and research and closely cooperates with representatives of the federal states. Within the forum six expert groups work on different subjects along the scope of e-learning. They discuss crucial questions and develop benchmarks as well as recommendations for universities and

policy makers.⁴ The German Rector's Conference published a position paper in June 2014 claiming that MOOCs have huge potential but that they lack a didactic concept⁵.

The majority of German MOOCs does not offer personal support by the teacher, thus learners mainly watch lecture videos and learn through self-study. There are discussion forums but they are mainly used by the participants and hardly ever by the teachers.

It should be also pointed out that at the moment in Germany MOOCs do not replace a university degree! Most companies do not (yet) recognize certificates acquired through MOOCs. However, big companies like Telekom and Adidas are starting to create their own MOOCs or cooperate with MOOC providers

3. Existing MOOCs in Germany

Iversity⁶

This MOOC has approximately 1.000.000 users⁷ (as of October 2015) and is founded by Jonas Liepmann as a student. It is a digital learning platform for higher education and professional development. Iversity is aimed at universities, nonprofits and knowledge-based companies that would like to share courses with participants from all around the world. Participants can receive recognized credentials and the platform works closely with the following partners: European Commission, Open Education Consortium, German Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy, EXIT, European Social Fund (ESF), GESIS – The Leibniz Institute for Social Sciences. The MOOC offers scheduled courses as well as self-paced courses on the following topics: Migration in Europe, Climate change and Health, Clinical Management of HIV, Introduction to Political Philosophy, Social Entrepreneurship, Dante's Divine Comedy, Business Informatics, Spanish for Beginners and so on. It is being used by the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences, University of Applied Sciences Münster, Technical University Berlin, Hertie School of Governance, Toulouse Business School, UDIMA – Distance University Madrid. Participants in Iversity courses can get a certificate if they meet all conditions at the end of the course. There is currently one course that is eligible for ECTS credits.

OPEN HPI⁸

OpenHPI has more than 200.000 users (as per August 2015)⁹ and is the educational Internet platform of the German Hasso Plattner Institute, Potsdam. It offers interactive online courses covering different subjects in Information and Communications Technology (ICT). Some of the courses there are aimed at a broad audience, for example, the workings of the Internet and the WWW, the building of databases, or security technology in IT. Other courses are aimed at a specialized audience: for example, participants who would like to learn more about in-memory data management, the semantic web or multicore and cloud computing

Participants can receive the following certificates:

- Confirmation of participation (condition: participants need to have visited at least 50 percent of the course material)

- Record of Achievement (condition: participants need to have earned more than 50 percent of the available points in the weekly assignments and the final exam)



- Qualified certificate: (A Qualified Certificate contains the participant's photo and a supplement with detailed course information. The participant agrees to be proctored via webcam during the graded exercises and exams. With the help of this online proctoring technology, openHPI determines that the registered user is taking the assignments and the final exam in person.)

OpenCourseWorld¹⁰

OpenCourseWorld is founded in 2012 and includes subject areas like business, IT, Health Management, etc. Anyone can enroll in the courses and participants can receive a certificate if they meet all conditions after the course. This platform cooperates with a number of experts coming both from the university and research fields to create the MOOCs (for example: University of the Saarland, Technical University of Munich, University of Hamburg-Harburg).

MooIn¹¹

MooIn is a learning platform operated by Fachhochschule Lübeck and it covers courses with all types of topics

KIRON¹²

Strictly speaking, Kiron is not a MOOC provider. Kiron itself does not produce MOOCs. Kiron creates a personal study program for its students (mainly refugees) using MOOCs offered by platforms like coursera, edX, iversity and openHPI. Kiron Open Higher Education (gGmbH) is a non-profit organization founded in 2015 based in Berlin and with branches in France, Istanbul (Turkey) and Amman (Jordan). Kiron is not a university and does not offer a university degree. However, Kiron offers refugees the chance to take part in a two-year course program. After completion, participants can start a study program at one of currently 12 partner universities all over Germany which, after a three-year study program will award them a Bachelor degree. The teaching program at Kiron consists of blended learning, where online courses are complemented with live and direct online tutoring and offline services like our Buddy Programme, Mentoring Programme, Study Hubs and Career Services. The platform has currently 1.500 students and offers four tracks: Social Sciences, Business & Economics, Computer Science and Engineering.

Other MOOC platforms

The Virtual University of Bavaria and The Virtual Linguistics Campus operated by Philipps University Marburg also offer MOOCs. The courses are open to anyone but they are only free of charge for registered students of these universities. Otherwise users have to pay a course fee in order to take part in the courses. Strictly speaking, these are not MOOCs as they are not free for everyone. However, in exchange for the course fee, students also have the chance to chat with a professor and get feedback on papers and homework assignments which other MOOC providers usually do not offer.

4. Implementation of MOOCs in educational institutions

Educational institutions in Germany do not feel the need to start offering MOOCs on a large scale. MOOCs are mainly seen as a marketing instrument¹³. Very little information is available if and how educational institutions implement MOOCs. There are no statistics and one can find only opinions in

online articles or discussion forums. It can be concluded that it remains up to each educational institution whether and how they implement MOOCs.

In a survey conducted in 2015 among German universities, 75 % of the universities said they were keeping themselves informed about MOOCs and one third of all universities claimed to be offering MOOCs or to plan doing so¹⁴.

Currently, teachers using or producing MOOCs are volunteers. They make up a very small number, partly because of a lack of IT skills. For another survey conducted in 2015, the Institute for Higher Education Development and German Centre for Higher Education Research and Science Studies were able to identify only 100 teachers or pedagogic staff who create or use MOOCs in class.¹⁵ In the same survey no German universities claimed that they plan to establish a study program based entirely on MOOCs as those which exist in the US¹⁶.

As a conclusion it can be said that In order to promote MOOCs, teachers need to improve their IT skills.

5. Links to MOOCs

MOOC providers

- Iversity: <https://iversity.org/en>
- OpenCourseWorld: <https://www.opencourseworld.de/pages/landingpage.jsf?faces-redirect=true>
- Open HPI: <https://open.hpi.de/?locale=en>
- MOOIN: <https://mooin.oncampus.de/>

Iversity Top 3 MOOCs:

1. The Future of Storytelling (29.000 participants) by University of Potsdam (Germany)
<https://iversity.org/en/courses/the-future-of-storytelling>
2. Design 101 (or Design Basics) (18.000 participants) by Accademia di Belle Arti in Catania (Italy)
<https://iversity.org/en/courses/design-101-or-design-basics>
3. Public Privacy: Cyber Security and Human Rights (17.000 participants) by Humboldt Viadrina School of Governance in Berlin
<https://iversity.org/en/courses/public-privacy-cyber-security-and-human-rights>

Kiron: <https://kiron.ngo/>

¹ <https://kiron.ngo/about>

² <https://www.test.de/Online-lernen-Zum-Nulltarif-dem-Professor-lauschen-4662073-0/>

³ <https://www.e-teaching.org/lehrszenarien/mooc>

⁴ <https://hochschulforumdigitalisierung.de/en>

⁵ https://www.academia.edu/12343152/Massive_Open_Online_Courses_Modelle_und_Konzepte_des_Online-Lernens

⁶ <https://iversity.org/en/pages/about>

⁷ <https://iversity.org/en/pages/one-million-enrollments?!=de>

⁸ <https://open.hpi.de/courses>

⁹ <https://hpi.de/news/jahrgaenge/2015/200000-einschreibung-immer-mehr-online-nutzer-lernen-weltweit-auf-openhpi.html>

¹⁰ <https://www.opencourseworld.de/pages/landingpage.jsf>

¹¹ <https://mooin.oncampus.de/>

¹² <https://kiron.ngo/>

¹³

https://www.academia.edu/12343152/Massive_Open_Online_Courses_Modelle_und_Konzepte_des_Online-Lernens

¹⁴ http://www.e-fi.de/fileadmin/Innovationsstudien_2015/StuDIS_15_2015.pdf

¹⁵ http://www.e-fi.de/fileadmin/Innovationsstudien_2015/StuDIS_15_2015.pdf (p. 8)

¹⁶ http://www.e-fi.de/fileadmin/Innovationsstudien_2015/StuDIS_15_2015.pdf (p. 9)