Lozano-Galant J.A.[(1)], Sanchez-Cambronero S[(1)], Castilla F.J. [(1)], Ley J. [(1)], García M.J.[(1)], Lozano F. [(1)], Romero, V. [(1)]
[1]University of Castilla-La Mancha, Civil Engineering Department
E-mail: joseantonio.lozano@uclm.es

A MASSIVE OPEN ONLINE COURSE (MOOC) FOR THE MULTIDISCIPLINARY DESIGN OF BRIDGES

Abstract. In last years, the traditional blackboard teaching has been incrementally supplemented by visual aids like slide projectors and videos. The phenomenal growth of the Internet has brought in new teaching media, such as Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs) that open the educational experience up to a broader and more distant set of students. This easy access to education can increase motivation and it is a useful commercial tool for universities. Unlike other disciplines (such as economics or psychology), the MOOCs are rarely used to spread Civil Engineering courses. To fill this gap, and to encourage the use of MOOCs among Civil Engineering Schools, this paper presents the experience of the MOOC for the multidisciplinary design of bridges created by the University of Castilla-La Mancha. This MOOC is based on the experiences learned from the contest on bridge construction with knex for undergraduate students organized by this university in 2015, 2016 and 2017.

Keywords: Internet, Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs), Project Based Learning, interactive user forums.

Лозано-Галант И.А.[1], Санчез-Камбронеро С.[1], Кастилла Ф.И.[1], Ли И.[1], Гарсиа М.И.[1], Лозано Ф. Ромеро В.[1]
[1]Университет Кастилии и Ла Манча, Строительный факультет
E-mail: joseantonio.lozano@uclm.es

МАССОВЫЙ ОТКРЫТЫЙ ОНЛАЙН-КУРС (МООК) ДЛЯ ПРОЕКТИРОВАНИЯ МОСТОВ

Аннотация. В последние годы традиционное преподавание с использованием обычной доски дополнялось визуальными средствами, такими как слайд-проекторы и видео. Феноменальный рост Интернета привел к появлению новых учебных средств массовой информации, таких как онлайн-курсы общего пользования, которые делают доступными образовательные ресурсы для более широкого и удаленного контингента студентов. Легкий доступ к образованию может повысить мотивацию, что является полезным коммерческим инструментом для университетов. В отличие от других дисциплин (таких как экономика или психология), МООК редко используются для распространения курсов по дисциплинам направления «Строительство». Чтобы восполнить этот пробел и поощрить использование МООК среди строительных университетов, в настоящем документе представлен опыт создания такого курса для многодисциплинарного проектирования мостов, созданных Университетом Кастилья-Ла-Манча. Этот курс основан на опыте, полученном на конкурсе по строительству мостов, с заданиями для студентов-магистрантов, организованных Университетом Кастилья-Ла-Манча в 2015, 2016 и 2017 годах.

Ключевые слова. Интернет, Онлайн-курс Общего Пользования, Проблемно ориентированное обучение, Интерактивное общение.

1. Introduction

Throughout history, traditional teaching, in which a professor led the learning experience of students with nothing but a blackboard, has been the most common educational methodology. Despite that traditional learning has been

quite straight forward, some variations have appeared in the last years. For example, since the 90s, some practical disciplines (such as medicine or engineering), complement traditional teaching with the Project Based Learning (PBL). In this methodology, the students are the ones leading the classes by using their recently acquired knowledge to solve proposed problems under the professors' guidance. The popularity of PBL is an example that illustrates the advantages of adapting the educational methodologies to the different contents to be taught.

A major change in education history started with the computer revolution, as new and emerging pedagogies brought dramatic changes in the educational landscape. Since then, the phenomenal growth of the Internet has increased the popularity of computer based educational tools, such as E-learning, which enable the students to learn anywhere and anytime. The endless possibilities of these new tools include the ability to share material in all kinds of formats, conducting live online classes (webinars), as well as enabling communications with professors and other students via chat and message forums. International associations (such as IABSE [1]) use E-learning platforms to spread Civil Engineering worldwide.

Nowadays, due to their unlimited possibilities, one of the most popular Internet learning tools are the Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) [2]. In addition to non-traditional course materials such as filmed lectures, problem sets, MOOCs might provide interactive user forums to support learning interactions, homework/assignments, and online quizzes or exams. Unlike other tools, MOOCs are based primarily on short (5-20 min) pre-recorded video lectures, which the student watches on a weekly schedule. Among the most popular MOOCs platforms it is to highlight Coursera [3], and EdX [4]. These sites have proved as a very useful commercial tool for top universities (such as MIT, Stanford, Princeton or Imperial College).

Unlike other disciplines (such as economics or psychology), MOOCs are rarely used in Civil Engineering. To illustrate this conclusion the topics of the MOOCs listed on the main MOOC platforms (Coursera and edX) were analyzed. For example, in the field of "Structural Engineering" the number of MOOCs is very reduced (2 out of 669 in Coursera and 8 out of 1409 in edX). These Structural Engineering MOOCs are listed in the table below:

Table 1

Examples of Massive Open Online Courses on the "Structural Engineering" field.

Title	University	Platform
L'art des Structures 1: Cables et arcs. École [5]	École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne	Coursera
Mechanics of Materials I: Fund. of Stress & Strain and Axial Loading [6]	Georgia Institute of Technology	Coursera
The Art of Structural Engineering: Bridges [7]	Princeton University	edX
The Engineering of Structures around us [8]	Dartmouth University	edX
Dynamics [9]	Massachusetts Institute of Technology	edX
Introduction to Steel [10]	Tenaris University	edX

Title	University	Platform
Advanced Introductory Classical Mechanics [11]	Massachusetts Institute of Technology	edX
Mechanics Review [12]	Massachusetts Institute of Technology	edX
Elements of structures [13]	Massachusetts Institute of Technology	edX
Mechanical Behavior of Materials, Part 1: Linear Elastic Behavior [14]	Massachusetts Institute of Technology	edX

The analysis of Table 1 shows that most of MOOCs in "Structural Engineering" are based on very specific technical concepts. In fact, the authors were unable to find more general courses focused on the design of bridges. To fill this gap, and to encourage the use of MOOCs among Civil Engineering Schools, this paper presents the experience of the MOOC for the multidisciplinary design of bridges created by the University of Castilla-La Mancha (UCLM). This MOOC is based on the experiences learned during the three editions (2015, 2016 and 2017) of the bridge construction contest with K'nex for undergraduate students organized by the Civil Engineering School of UCLM. The aim of this contest was double. On the one hand, introducing potential students into one of the most encouraging works of a civil engineer, this is: designing and building a bridge in a certain location including structural, economic, construction, environmental and aesthetic considerations. On the other hand, introducing potential students in the key methodological teaching tool of this school: the PBL, by letting them do instead of telling them what to do.

In the following sections, the bridge design contest is first framed and explained as one of the PBL activities carried out by the Civil Engineering School of UCLM. Then, the main characteristics of the elaborated MOOC are summarized. Finally some conclusions are drawn.

2. Project Based Learning

Students demand an education that helps them to acquire the skills required by their employers, easing their early recruitment in construction companies. Aware of this necessity Aalborg University in Denmark incorporated the Project Based Learning (PBL) in its academic program. This pedagogical methodology consists of a learned focused educational approach where the student extends previous knowledge to new problems through self-directed reflection, research and practice in solving problems [15]. This tool shifts from a method of instruction, that is teacher driven and led to one where the student is empowered to conduct self-directed learning.

The first university that introduced the PBL into the Civil Engineering studies in Spain was the Civil Engineering School of UCLM. Nowadays, both the Degree and Master on Civil Engineering offered by this School include a number of PBL subjects focused on each of the major professional areas (Structures, Hydraulics, Transportation and Urban Planning). A major concern

of all these PBL subjects refers to those concepts already acquired in preceding teacher driven subjects [16].

As example of a PBL activity at the Civil Engineering School of UCLM, the following section describes the contest of bridge construction with K'nex for high school students.

2.1 Contest on bridge construction with K'nex

The aim of the contest is to enable high school students of Castilla-La Mancha Region (Spain) to understand the number of disciplines involved in the design of bridges by building a scaled bridge in a certain location based on structural, economic, construction, environmental and aesthetic considerations. To do so, the students were provided with the construction toy system K'nex (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Pieces of K'nex construction system

The contest was founded by the Spanish Foundation for Science and Technology (FECYT), UCLM, the company ProiMancha and Spanish Professional Association of Civil Engineering (Colegio de Ingenieros de Caminos, Canales y Puertos).

The contest is divided into two different stages.

- Stage 1: Free bridge construction. The teams were divided into semifinals, where they were challenged to build in 1 month a bridge supported on two boxes (Figure 2). The participants fixed all design parameters based on the following sections: (1) Cost (20%). Each K'nex piece was assigned with a price in such a way that a symbolic bridge cost could be estimated. (2) Span (30%): The longer the span (and the closer to 180cm) the better. (3) Load (25%): The higher the loading bearing capacity of the bridge (and the closer to 6kg) the better. (4) Valuation of a group of experts (25%).

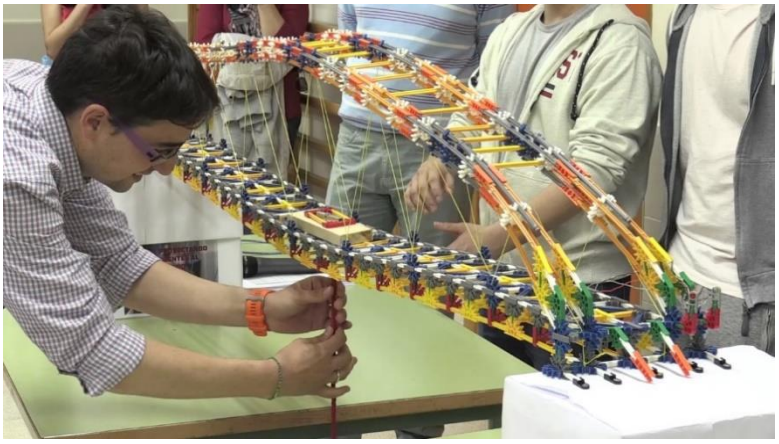

Figure 2: Example of the Semifinal designs

– Stage 2: Adapting the design for a certain location. The winners of each semifinals were challenged to adapt and built, following actual construction techniques, their initial designs in 6 hours (see Figure 3). All the teams have to use the same scale model (E 1:50) reproducing a section of the Tajo River in Toledo (Spain). In order to ease the excavation of the foundations these models are made of polyethylene (Figure 3). The winner was selected according to the following criteria: (1) Span (10%): All participants spanned 180cm, nevertheless this length might be reduced if intermediate elements (such as piles or pylons were used). (2) Cost (20%), (3) Bridge Depth (20%): The thinner the bridge depth the better. (4) Deflection during a loading case (20%): The smaller the deflection under 2kg load the better. (5) Valuation of a group of experts (20%), (6) Valuation of the public on an online survey (10%)

Figure 3: Suspension bridge design built on the 2017 contest

All the designs of the Second Stage were included into an exhibition at the train stations of the main cities of the Castilla-La Mancha Region (Toledo, Ciudad Real and Albacete). A picture of the exhibition in Toledo is presented in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Exhibition at the Train Station of Toledo (2017)

As presented in the following section, the built bridges were also used as examples to illustrate multidisciplinary design aspects on the developed MOOC.

2.2. MOOC for the multidisciplinary design of bridges

All areas of the Civil Engineering School of UCLM participated on the elaboration on a MOOC addressing the considerations of their fields for the multidisciplinary design of bridges.

The MOOC is divided into different areas (such as Structural Engineering, Hydraulic Engineering or Geotechnical Engineering). For each of these areas, the students will have available different recorded lectures. The following lectures were recorded with the help of the C:TED: (1) Fundamental structural concepts: Compression, Tension, Bending, Shear and Torsion. (2) Bridge Typologies: Beam bridge, Truss bridge, Frame bridge, Arch bridge, Cable-Stayed bridge, Stress Ribbon Bridge, and Suspension bridge. (3) Urban Planning. (4) Geotechnical Engineering: Pads, and Piles. (5) Hydraulic Engineering: Laboratory test showing the piles excavation in a stream. (6) Material Engineering: Laboratory tests showing the behavior of different materials. (7) Construction techniques of each bridge typology. (8) Transportation. (9) Topography. (10) Environmental Engineering. (11) Budget. An example of one of these lectures is presented in Figure 5.

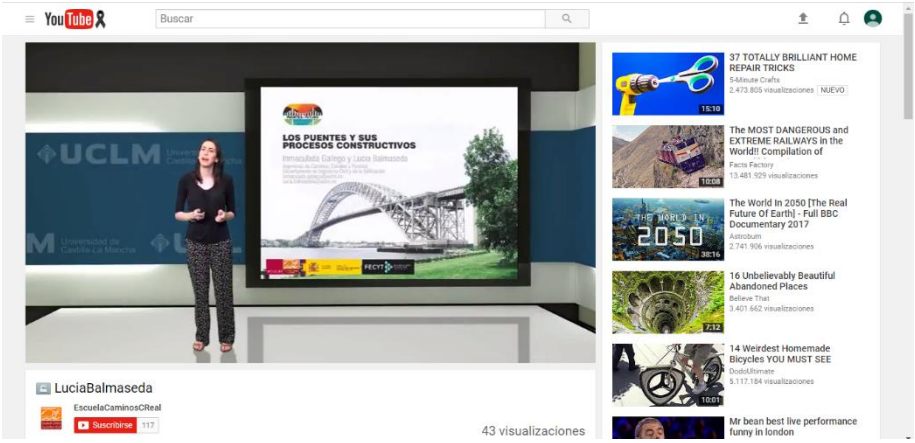

Figure 5: MOOC lecture for the Multidisciplinary Design of Bridges on Youtube

After each area, the students will adapt what they learned to the examples of the K'nex bridge. They also have access to open forums where they can discuss directly with the professor in charge as well as with other students. The MOOC will be finished by the beginning of 2018 and published on Coursera and EdX both in Spanish and English.

3. Conclusions

This paper addresses the first Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) for the multidisciplinary design of bridges based on the experiences learned from the contest on bridge construction with K'nex for undergraduate students organized by the Civil Engineering School of University of Castilla-La Mancha (UCLM) in 2015, 2016 and 2017.

The developed MOOC, which will be published by the beginning of 2018, will put into value the profession of Civil Engineering as hopefully will encourage young people to study it.

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