

CADA DÍA SPANISH: AN ANALYSIS OF CONFIDENCE AND MOTIVATION IN A SOCIAL LEARNING LANGUAGE MOOC

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ABSTRACT

Student performance in a Connectivist Massive Open Online Course (cMOOC), featuring daily synchronous web meetings was analyzed to explore the possibility of increased participant motivation and confidence. Participant survey data and course performance data were compiled, analyzed, and interpreted for 1256 individuals who completed a pre-course survey and 54 selected individuals who completed the post-course survey and met the sample criteria. This qualitative study adds to the overall understanding of social learning in a blended cMOOC environment. Results suggest that Daily Online Task-based Social (DOTS) Learning in large-scale web meetings may increase an individual's language learning confidence and personal motivation.

KEYWORDS

Online Learning, Foreign Language Instruction, Pedagogy.

1. INTRODUCTION

Massively Open Online Courses are criticized due to the “Retention Problem,” (Koller, Ng, Do, Chen, 2013) demonstrating high numbers of participants in an online MOOC may not promote successful learning outcomes. Efforts to provide a more accurate picture of student success have included categorizing participants as “Passive participants, Active participants or Community participants,” (Milligan, Allison, Margaryan, 2013). In addition, participants in MOOCs often report feeling “isolated and alone” which may reduce motivation and confidence, (Bischoff, 2000). In an attempt to increase the number of students completing online programs, different designs have been suggested, including social learning opportunities, blended asynchronous and synchronous interactions in a connectivist environment or cMOOC, (Siemens, 2005).

To help explore these issues further, a Spanish Language cMOOC called “Cada Día Spanish” was offered through the Canvas Network, for eight weeks in the fourth quarter of 2014. The online course was a demonstration of how daily synchronous meetings could be applied to a cMOOC, for language learning. Over 1700 participants signed up for the course. Study participants were selected based on criteria, described below, and resulting in 121 participants self-identified as active participants and 54 individuals selected as study participants. Our intention was to explore ways to increase personal motivation and confidence, with the assumption that language skill may improve as a result. This study explores two specific questions:

- Does participant motivation improve through daily, online, task-based, social learning?
- Will participants demonstrate increased language learning confidence in this cMOOC?

The qualitative study seeks to determine factors contributing to language learning success (confidence and motivation), rather than providing a comprehensive language learning program.

2. CADA DÍA SPANISH – cMOOC DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

The design team reviewed various cMOOC models (Siemens, 2005; Littlejohn & Margaryan, 2013) prior to the development of a design framework for the Cada Día Spanish cMOOC. A review of literature focused on significant indicators for student success and how social presence and Socialcultural Theory (SCT) affects student outcomes, (Ellis, 2003; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Some of these same benefits of teacher confirmation and social presence may transfer to technically sophisticated online social, instructor-led and synchronous learning environments. There are three themes we explored in the development of the Cada Día experimental cMOOC: Connectivist MOOCs, Social Learning, and Task-based language learning.

2.1 Connectivist MOOCs

In the connectivist MOOCs, or cMOOC model, learners take a greater role in “shaping their learning experiences than in traditional online learning, while facilitators focus on fostering a space for learning connections to occur,” (Milligan, Littlejohn & Margaryan, 2013). cMOOCs focus on knowledge creation and generation rather than “knowledge duplication” (Siemens, 2012). Participant learners are asked to identify individualized learning goals in a self-directed environment. Students are provided a framework to respond to various activities at their own pace.

In a connectivist learning environment, the teacher assumes the role of facilitator, and guides students through feedback and encouragement. Although the facilitators are not responsible for imparting information, their role to direct students to find, analyze and share knowledge is critically important. However, massive courses make individualize instruction difficult, and synchronous online meetings have provided a method of maximizing facilitator to student interaction, (Henry, 2011). The cMOOC design removes the traditional “Instructor or Teacher” role and strives “to integrate instructional strategies that connect learners with each other in meaningful and authentic ways,” (Stewart, 2013), which will hopefully reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness.

2.2 Social Learning

Sociocognitive theorists describe social learning as an interactive group process in which learners actively construct knowledge and then build upon that knowledge through the exchange of ideas with others. The Social Learning model relies on the interaction of three important techniques: social presence, teaching presence, and cognitive presence, (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000).

2.2.1 Social Presence

Social presence, in an online learning environment via computer-mediated communication (CMC) represents the degree of awareness of the other person in a communication interaction. If there is no “awareness” of another student or facilitator, the individual will feel alone. Several studies have observed that there is increased social interaction when the instructor “has not forgotten the importance of the human touch” (Pacansky-Brock, 2014).

2.2.2 Teaching Presence

Teaching presence is an understanding of the presence of an instructional path, designed by a facilitator, teacher or designer. This presence may be observed in videos, activities and communications from the facilitators. Teaching presence is strengthened through daily email correspondence, and synchronous web meetings.

2.2.3 Cognitive Presence

The third element, cognitive presence, is “the extent to which the participants in . . . a community of inquiry are able to construct meaning through sustained communication” (Garrison et al., p. 89). Online Learning environments that are instructor-led, combined with synchronous web conferencing may be able to take full advantage of the interaction between social presence, teacher presence and cognitive presence.

2.3 Task-based Language Learning

Task-based language learning (TBLL), also task-based language teaching (TBLT) or task-based instruction (TBI) employs the use of common language exchanges, (Ellis, 2003; Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu, 2011.). A key component of TBL includes a shift from teacher-produced material to student-produced material. Students are asked to share learning experiences, rather than the teacher directing learning experiences. Since conjugations, vocabulary and grammatical syntax may be easily found online, facilitators guide students through the task framework, and challenge them to improve their responses (Stroud, 2013). The language facilitators do not teach, rather they encourage student to student feedback and peer support.

Participants are encouraged to help each other revise and improve their responses to the task-based problems. Some have suggested that the approach is not pedagogy, but “paragogy,” relating to peer production environments (Corneli & Danof, 2011) including the co-creation of ad-hoc spaces for dialogue and support. Facilitators provide quality criteria for knowledge creation and generation. The notion of Learner Generated Content (Perez-Mateo, Maina, Guitert, & Romero, 2011) is associated with learners’ productions in Web 2.0 and networked environments. This type of social learning experience facilitates informed but personal views on topics and how they contribute to knowledge construction.

2.4 Cada Día cMOOC Course Design

The Cada Día demonstration project cMOOC was designed to address weaknesses identified in other MOOC models, such as participant isolation and loss of personal motivation. The experiment was designed to improve individual motivation and confidence through Daily, Online, Task-based, Social or “DOTS” (Henry, 2011) language learning, with daily online synchronous web meetings. The language learning tasks in the Cada Día Spanish cMOOC were authentic activities that a friend may share with another friend. They were simple activities, with opportunities for increasingly sophisticated responses. Participants were invited to share their activity in a synchronous web meeting. These activities are included below and in figure 1:

- Identify a song in the target language and share the lyrics.
- Identify a word and share a sentence with the word.
- Identify a short story and read the story.
- Identify a verb, conjugation and sentences using the verb.
- Identify a conversation tip, and share the communication strategy
- Compose a short description of a trip you have taken or would like to take
- Compose a short description of your family and friends.

These activities were posted in the Canvas Learning Management System, for asynchronous review and revision. Participants were invited to share their activity in a synchronous web meeting. Synchronous web meetings were held at Noon EDT UTC-4 hours. Over the eight week program offering, there were 40 weekday meetings and two special Saturday meetings.



Figure 1. Cada Día Spanish cMOOC task-based activities. These activities were posted in the Canvas LMS, then participants were invited to share the activities with native language facilitators in a synchronous web meeting

2.5 Qualitative Study Method

Qualitative analysis of individual participant motivation and confidence levels was observed using participation data in the eight week cMOOC, and through pre-course and post-course feedback comments. Motivation was observed through increased activity, as well as self-reporting levels of personal confidence. The methods for observing increase (or decrease) in personal motivation included the end of activity personal assessment and survey, attendance at the synchronous daily web meetings and a willingness to volunteer to present activities in the web meetings.

2.5.1 Participant Surveys

- **Pre-Course Survey** - “Welcome to Canvas Network” - Survey. Administered online to enrolled cMOOC participants. 10 quantitative questions and 2 text response questions. (N=298).
- **Post-Course Satisfaction Survey** - User Experience Survey. Administered online to enrolled cMOOC participants. 10 quantitative questions and 2 text response questions. (N=54).
- **Activity Assessments and Survey** - These surveys appeared after the participant completed an activity. They included a total of six questions: Four questions, related to motivation and confidence and two randomly selected language skill assessment questions. The post-activity assessment was administered online in Spanish with English translations.

2.5.2 Study Sample

The qualitative study sample was determined by selecting participants who completed all surveys and who participated actively in the cMOOC for the entire eight-week period. The course was offered through the Canvas Network and advertised through social media, Google Adwords and Facebook. Over 1700 participants signed up for the online class and expressed an interest in the daily web meetings. From this initial pool, 1256 completed the pre-course assessment and survey. Participants were asked to self-identify as an “Observer, Active Participant, or Passive Participant.” Only self-identified “Active Participants” were included in the qualitative study. Passive Participants were not interviewed or surveyed, since participation is critical in the analysis of increased or decreased confidence and motivation.

We were fortunate to have a large group of willing participants, however many only submitted one or two activities. From the enrolled participants, only a small number participated to the extent we would categorize as “Active Participants.”

Table 1. Cada Día Spanish cMOOC Participant Activity

Activity Category	Submission
Total Asynchronous Tasks Posted	919
Total Task Assessment Responses	684
Total Synchronous Participants*	321
Total Synchronous Presenters*	118

* These represent unique participants, who would have likely participated in more than one activity.

In addition to selecting participants who completed survey responses, we looked at participant online learning activity. We did not include time as a metric of learning activity. It has been suggested in other studies that the length of time studying a language would likely improve skill, as well as confidence (Vesselinov and Grego, 2012), but in an online environment, it is difficult to measure active time. Study time is difficult to document based solely on the time a participant started an activity, until the participant finished an activity, since they would likely be reading and studying outside of the application as well. Therefore we measured participant’s learning activity based on completed activities, rather than time spent in the online learning environment.

The participants identified for further qualitative analysis were selected based on these criteria:

- Completed all study surveys
- Willingness to participate in the qualitative study
- Identified as an “Active Participant”
- Completed all seven learning activities
- Participated in at least ten web meetings
- Presented an activity in at least one web meeting
- At least 18 years of age
- Native English language speaker

This selection process resulted in a total of 54 participants to be analyzed for patterns of engagement and self-reporting. We were interested in how the active participants perceived gained or lost confidence and motivation over the eight-week program.

Table 2. Cada Día Spanish cMOOC Demonstration Project Participants

Participants	Number
Total cMOOC Participants	1703
Total Asynchronous Participants	647
Total Synchronous Participants	321
Self-Identified “Active Participants”	118
Study Participants selected	54

3. RESULTS

3.1 Participant Confidence and Personal Motivation

Does the cMOOC format, coupled with daily web meetings for participant presentation increase confidence and personal motivation? For the purposes of this study, we defined “Participant Motivation” as the change in the number of asynchronous actions such as activity submissions, assessment responses, and synchronous actions through web meeting attendance and web meeting presentation(s). After participant data was stripped of personal identification, each response was weighted based on the level of confidence indicated. For example, “I am not confident” was weighted 1 and “I am very confident” was weighted as a 10, using a

Likert Scale. We asked participants to self-report “hours studying each week,” although we did not track actual online hours of activity. We also looked at actual participant “Activity,” which reflected weekly activity submissions and participation in synchronous events over the eight week program offering. A specific individual (coded by participant number) was compared for each activity survey response. Individual responses were plotted on Figure 2, showing the general trend individual confidence and motivation over the entire experience.

Table 3. Motivation Survey Response Weighting

Question	Weighting
Q7: 0 to 1 hour	[1]
Q8: 1 to 3 hours	[2]
Q9: 3 to 5 hours	[5]
Q10: 5 to 10 hours	[8]
Q11: More than 10 hours	[10]
Q12: I am not confident	[1]
Q13: I am a little confident	[2]
Q14: I am more confident	[8]
Q15: I am very confident	[10]
Q16: I want to speak fluent Spanish	[10]
Q17: I want to speak Spanish well.	[8]
Q18: I want to speak a little Spanish	[5]
Q19: I am just observing	[1]

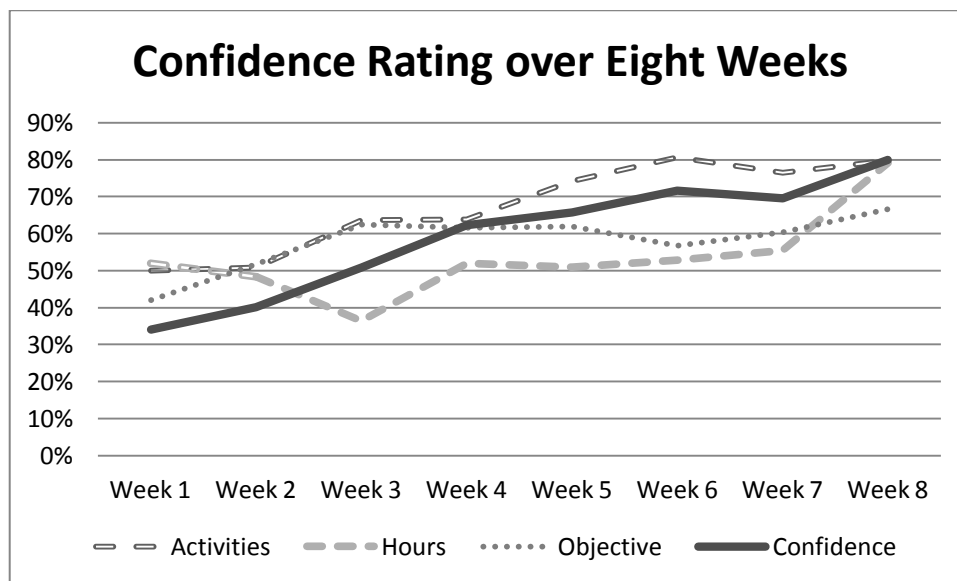


Figure 2. Confidence Rating Over Eight Week Period

3.2 Selected Participant Feedback and Comments

- **Participant 166852** Volunteering was helpful for me to get rid of my fear of speaking in Spanish. I learned better from the activities I shared.
- **Participant 170799** I feel the only way to learn something like a foreign language is to immerse yourself. When you're not exposed to Spanish speakers regularly, this is the next best thing.
- **Participant 201085** I volunteered because it was a great way to practice the language, and interact with others as well. I know basic Spanish, I mostly needed help speaking the language.

- **Participant 172152** The feedback for my mistakes was immediate and really upped my learning curve.
- **Participant 168080** I was able to choose the level of my participation, meaning if a question was too difficult for me to answer, I could try a more simplistic answer and, thus, still participate.
- **Participant 151464** I had an opportunity to learn from the feedback given to more advanced students.
- **Participant 192840** The expertise of the Facilitators staged an obviously "safe" place to make mistakes. Something most of the other students mentioned to me as being one of the things they appreciated most.
- **Participant 121560** Humor was included, which created a more enjoyable and memorable experience.
- **Participant 184261** I liked the mild, almost passive way I learned new things. It was a refreshing departure from the traditional teacher-lectures-students approach.
- **Participant 209679** This course has been both fun and interesting. The Live Meeting and conversing with students all over the world is inspiring. Learning another language is helpful in so many ways both personally and professionally. It opens new windows to the world and in so offers new perspectives to a person's life.
- **Participant 197501** Through this course I am much more motivated to learn than before. The activities have helped me a lot improve my level of proficiency.
- **Participant 183102** It has given me more confidence and expanded my ability to understand spoken Spanish. I have also learned to write sentences in Spanish extemporaneously.

4. CONCLUSION

Our intention was to determine if the cMOOC format, coupled with daily web meetings for participant presentation, would lead to an increase in motivation and confidence. The participant commentary indicates that the cMOOC format did improve motivation and confidence, as defined in this study. However, the responses were largely anecdotal and the data results were restricted to participants with high engagement. Further study is needed to demonstrate relationships between social online meetings, increased language skill, perceptions of confidence, and persistence of motivation. Research questions related specifically to this study could include:

- Does individual goal identification improve motivation or language learning outcomes?
- Does participation in live meetings increase participation in other online programs, (such as Duolingo, Busuu, WeSpeke, SpanishDict, etc.)
- Does the existence of synchronous opportunities in a cMOOC increase retention?

A recommendation resulting from this study is to encourage daily, social interactions through language learning tasks shared with facilitators and participants in web meetings. Other studies have found that students who lack motivation or confidence in their study of Spanish, often "studied very irregularly, e.g. a few hours in the beginning of the study followed by long periods of inactivity," (Vesselinov and Grego, 2012). If motivation and confidence can be increased through daily social task-based learning, it would follow that language comprehension may increase as well. The approach used here, daily large-scale web meetings, using structured task-based activities, may increase social engagement and motivation to reach individual language learning goals.

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