BUILDING DIGITAL LEARNING CONTENT FOR FRANCOPHONE BOOK TRADES TRAINING: ANOTHER STEP ON THE ROAD TOWARDS SUCCESS

Lamia Badra Belaziz
University of Clermont Auvergne
France

Abstract
The paper aims at identifying, emphasizing and questioning the characteristics and issues of ICT in the Francophone area, where French is a unifying force. It describes the mobilization of Francophone organizations for innovative projects such as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and demonstrates how it is still not suited to needs. This finding stems from two surveys conducted between September 2016 and January 2018 on social networks, with the aim of building a Francophone MOOC in the book trading sector. The surveys’ findings demonstrate that offering a suitable innovative learning tool is primarily a matter of commitment that needs time to mature and bear fruit.

Introduction
Nowadays, learning is not at all like what it would have been 15 years ago. ICT are developing rapidly and offer many perspectives to students, teachers and professionals alike (Willson & Pollard, 2009). Almost all countries, including Francophone ones understand the huge educational and financial challenge of these technologies (Sidir & Benchenna, 2008) that become a great springboard for the massive dissemination of knowledge and the fight against the digital divide.

However, ICT are undeniably a pedagogical upheaval that transform the positioning of the teacher as to what knowledge is no longer to be delivered but which is to be built by the learners through new processes (Biancarosa & Griffiths, 2012). This situation is valid everywhere, but it is very marked in the French-speaking countries where particular attention has been given to the digital by the political authorities and the French-speaking institutional organizations. I will first explain the reasons for this attention and give examples of mobilizations. Afterwards, I will make an inventory of innovative projects in progress proposed by francophone countries such as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) before focusing attention on a case study carried out by my master’s degree students who were supervised by Vincent Demulière and I. It concerns the feasibility study of a Francophone digital learning platform for book trainers and students. The purpose of this study is to apprehend the perception and expectations of Francophones about this new offer in terms on pedagogical contents, additional services and human resources.

ICT in the Francophonie Area
ICT are developing rapidly in the Francophone area where different countries and population share French with respect for cultural diversity. But, what does
*francophonie* mean? What characterizes this part of the world? Why is interest is now focusing on ICT in this area? And what are the current mobilization and projects?

**Francophonie: What Is It All About?**

Albert Camus, who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in Stockholm on December 10, 1957, said, "I have a fatherland, the French language" (Cortanze, 2010, p.11).

A brief review of the literature shows that French language is placed in the service of solidarity, development and rapprochement of peoples through the permanent dialogue of civilizations. We notice that it is also at the service of education, economic prosperity and environmental responsibility.

Worldwide, 274 million speakers speak this language, making it the fifth most spoken language in the world and also the second most learned language after English. It is the third business language in the world and the second most widely used in international organizations.

**The importance of the French Language in the Francophonie**

For many foreign speakers, learning French "is entering a rich, powerful and humanistic culture," as said Pierre Frath (2007, p. 23), professor of English linguistics at the University of Reims. This language still arouses a great deal of interest, in conjunction with the explosion of the African continent where 54.7% of the population are French speakers (AUF, 2018), and the French-speaking world population will count nearly 9% of the world's population by 2050, compared to only 3.5% today (Tagnan, 2017).

By 2050, the Francophone area will represent a vast market, one and a half times more populated than the European Union and carrying immense needs. In addition, the dynamic of today's French language teaching in China, the country's third-most-taught language, reflects the economic interest of French for those who are now embarking on the global and particularly African markets. This can only truly succeed if we continue to see significant cultural and scientific production in French. Indeed, it is striking to note that the use of French in scientific and technical publications continues to decline not only in the world, but also within the Francophone and even in France (Conseil Supérieur de la Langue Française, 2012).

**Digital Challenges for French-Speaking Countries**

Digital technology is disrupting politics, economics, and technology in all geographical and linguistic areas of the world. Nevertheless, there is a digital divide between developing and developed countries. Francophone developing countries are evolving in a digital environment where access costs are extremely high in relation to their standard of living. According to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), which is a United Nations specialized agency for ICT, the cost of Internet access is higher in developing countries than in developed ones (Miéré, 2016). Furthermore, access to infrastructures does not necessarily provide the output needed to take full
advantage of the potential of digital. Many rural and isolated areas are marked by the digital divide.

According to the report published by ITU, access to the Internet in rural areas is progressing much slower than in urban areas, especially in Africa, because the deployment of terrestrial communications infrastructure is so difficult to accomplish (L'Actu Web d'Edith, 2018). It is estimated that the differences are even more pronounced in the poorest countries for which data is rarely available. In addition, there are disparities in household income and expenditure within the countries themselves that have a significant impact on the affordability of online services and content for many citizens. Consequently, French-speaking developing countries are mainly consumers and not producers in the digital economy, as the fields of infrastructure and manufacturing industries of digital equipment remain essentially monopolized by developed countries.

Concerning education, the focus today is on innovation and excellence in the context of strong international competition that leads the educative community to promote collaboration with developed countries (UNESCO, 2012). Thereafter, what are the innovative strategies and logics displayed in the political and educational discourse by main institutional actors to overcome this digital fracture?

**ICT & Political Mobilization of French-Speaking Countries**

During the fourteenth Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the French-speaking countries in Kinshasa, on 13 and 14 October 2012, Francophone political leaders highlighted the importance of strengthening the presence of French in the digital world, particularly through social networks and collaborative platforms. From this summit it emerged that the appropriation of technologies is an issue of primary importance for the youth and for the achievement of sustainable development goals.

In this regard, the International Organization of La Francophonie (OIF, acronym in French) has mobilized massively to guarantee the neutrality of the Internet network, the freedom of expression and the protection of the common goods of the information society. Its major aims are to provide free software, and Internet governance. This organization sets up, for example, digital incubation platforms for young people to enable their online training. It also provides them with practical resources for the creation and management of businesses.

Several structures from the OIF have been mobilized in this context. I will refer to one prominent example; the Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF), which has invested significantly in the implementation of the Francophone Virtual University project to ensure the university's adaptation to the digital revolution. This virtual university provides a training tool with significantly lower costs for higher education bodies in Francophone countries. Its fields of action include research and training to ensure that information and knowledge are truly shared. Its aims are to increase the influence of French-speaking scientists in the international community and to
provide researchers from these countries with tools similar to those of other researchers.

 Furthermore, the goal of this agency is to support French-speaking universities to offer excellence in training. In this context, two programs are supported by this agency: The Open Distance Training (ODL) and MOOCs. Our study only examines the MOOCs and situates them within some of the ongoing Francophone projects.

**Francophone Digital Learning Tools: A Focus on the Existing Offer**

As previously emphasized, the AUF is mobilized in the ODL area. For the 2017-2018 school year, the AUF is offering 105 diplomas: 12 university degrees in medicine (DU), 13 licenses (L3), 22 Masters 1 and 58 Masters 2, alongside MOOCs intended for those who seek complementary training (AUF, 2018). These courses are suitable for students and employees who can take courses remotely. AUF member universities from different countries supervise these projects: Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Canada-Quebec, Egypt, France, Lebanon, Madagascar, Morocco, Senegal and Tunisia.

According to this literature review, the MOOCs are online courses of a university level available on the Internet (Landry, 2014) (Université de Genève, 2018). This acronym appeared in 2008 but it was only from 2012 that it became widely known. This year has been deemed by the New York Times (Pappano, 2012) as "The year of the MOOC," as many universities, led by prestigious Ivy League institutions, started to organize free online courses.

The term MOOC is an Anglicism, and several proposals have been made to translate it into French. Georges-Louis Baron proposes AMOR, which designates a Massively Open Learning Network. Jean-Michel Salaün opts for COPT, which designates Course Open for All or CLOT for Course or Online Training Open to All. However, it is widely agree that the spread of the English word is such that there is no need to translate it.

Since 2013, large French-speaking schools such as the Federal Polytechnic School of Lausanne and the National Conservatory of Arts and Crafts (CNAM) in France are developing their own MOOCs. The most popular topics for the French-speaking public are computer science, management and business, law, and political science. Three MOOC platforms currently dominate the sector: FUN (FUN.MOOC, 2017) for France Digital University, Coursera, which offers courses at major American universities, and Open Classrooms.

The proposed distance learning programmes cover the following areas (AUF, 2018): engineering sciences, medicine and public health, the environment and sustainable development, education and training, law, economics and management and humanities. In this last area, for instance, there is a francophone MOOC entitled Cultural essence, political necessity, which aims to understand the Francophonie as a geocultural and geopolitical space. This training lasts seven weeks and is carried out by the University of Lyon 3 in partnership with CNAM, FUN, Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne,
Meanwhile, we note that the offer of distance education, in this case MOOCs, is delivered at a slower pace in Francophone countries, especially in those where French is neither the official language nor the main language used by populations. Indeed, the current offer is very rich in English and the situation remains highly unequal and fragile between developed and developing countries in the Francophonie.

What do Francophones really think of this situation? Today, professional French-speakers have the choice between a training offer proposed by the developed countries, mainly in English, and another offer of training in limited French. What do they prefer exactly? Is the criterion of language decisive in their choice? And how can we propose a quality offer more adapted to Francophone issues? To answer these questions, we will focus our analysis on the information and book trades sector in French-speaking countries that are part of Humanities. We note that its supply is scarce compared to other disciplines. We deal with these issues in the second part of the paper.

**Francophone Digital Learning Offer: The Case of Information and Book Trades**

The current offer is not sufficient for learners in information and book trades, who are either interested in widening their field of knowledge to meet the needs of the labour market, or to cope with changes in society in general. Indeed, there is the France Digital University platform, which lists some thirty distance learning courses in French. Of course, if learners are English-speaking, the offer is less existent. They can search for digital courses and/or lecture videos through the EdX or Coursera platforms. Meanwhile, the offers specifically dedicated to training in the information and book trades are rare. According to our analysis, it is not widely available in French, but by digging a little it is possible to find a list of courses that are likely to interest learners. We can cite for example, the MOOC *Gérer les Documents Numériques* proposed by the CNAM (EBSI, 2016). However, we do not find in any sole MOOC package, a comprehensive attention of fundamental subjects (such as the knowledge of the book actors, their role and tools in the book chain like publishers, broadcasters, distributors, booksellers and librarians) alongside the aforementioned subjects.

Therefore, we assume that if francophone information and book production such as trades’ learners choose learning within MOOCs, it is not only just for its convenience, but also more for its quality contents. Secondly, we suppose that they prefer accessing «à la carte» training from home, that follows their needs, and that they have a particular fondness for MOOCs delivered in French.

**The Project in Action: Methodology Description**

The present analysis is part of a monitoring and reflection on the design of a French-language MOOC on the subject of the book trade that we have led
since 2016. It is an innovative educational project that intends to offer French-speaking book professionals an online training tool that fully exploits the possibilities offered by digital technology. To date, there is not yet a project like this.

This present study is a collective project carried out by surveyors who came from very different backgrounds and have different profiles. First, five students enrolled in the MSC Book Trades and Digital Mediation in the Department of Culture at Clermont Auvergne University. Second, contractual and permanent teachers worked in this same university. All of them shared the same enthusiasm to see this project through to the end.

Note that Clermont Auvergne University directed multiple French-language consortia with Canada, Armenia, Quebec, etc., for research in science. It is a member of the Franco-Lebanese Association for Education and Culture, French International Network of trainers, the Association for the Management of knowledge in Society and Organizations. It is a part of the Fédération France-Québec Francophone networks of diplomas and former graduates as well as the French-language Regional Scientific Association.

Concerning the method chosen, we carried out two surveys and we used Facebook to send them. Indeed, we wished to reach the maximum of Francophone easily to discuss with them our object of study, which would have otherwise been difficult. In addition, we wanted to establish a virtual community made by individuals with different profiles but the same centers of interest, and make them participate in the project remotely (see Figure 1).

Therefore, we considered Facebook the ideal place to experiment with a Francophone digital learning tool, which would enable us to engage many persons who are involved in book production and/or love books. We moved up from 170 to 590 subscribers in March 2018.
A Focus on the Surveyors
Over two years, two groups of students (2 students in 2016-2017 and 3 in 2017-2018) have chosen to work on this project start to finish. During the 2016-2017 academic year, the first group carried out monitoring work on the MOOC theme and innovative pedagogies. They produced presentation documents, and conducted a feasibility study. The second group, which took over the following year, reflected on the content and the design of the future Francophone MOOC based on the findings of the first survey. They carried out the second survey that aimed to define precisely the desired courses.

Two coordinators lead this project. First, a book professional who led the group Bertelsmann, Flammarion, Privat and Chapitre.com before becoming a consultant and digital editing project manager in the company he co-founded: 4ePub. Second, a researcher in information and communication sciences whose work focuses on the management of innovative information systems projects (ENT, elearning and Digital Libraries) and the analysis of the representations and effects of these systems on the learning and professional practices of information specialists whose aim is to facilitate the knowledge access to learners.

Sample Description
Students and coordinators searched all existing training catalogues in French related to the book trades and identified all training organizations that deal with them (Klein, 2017) (Raffin, 2018). This work enabled us to list all the teaching modules related to the profession of the publisher and the bookseller. Then, we delivered a survey of these modules in the form of closed questions. Therefore, we have organized all educational modules that are likely to interest respondents, profession by profession. Also, we built other closed questions to identify needs of those surveyed and the requirements, according to the respondents, to follow for a good training.

The people, who join us, have different profiles: private trainer, teachers, pedagogical researchers, students, employees, jobseekers, ICT’ Project Managers, and users of ICT tools. Very quickly, we received a great deal of feedback obtained via Facebook. As noted before, we have 590 subscribers who are either directly involved, have taken distance courses or are just curious about the project.

Moreover, we noticed that many people were ready to be part of the adventure when they joined us in the Facebook group. Many told us that a MOOC of this kind was missing in the training landscape. We will develop further the main findings of both surveys in the following section.

Francophones’ Opinions: The Analysis of the Main Findings
Both surveys are complementary. The first survey aims to find out if Francophones know of examples of MOOCs and use them and if the new training offer that we propose interests them. The second survey aims to identify the teaching modules that interest these Francophones in order to build the training model.
The results are substantive yes and demonstrate the attention given to the project. Indeed, 92% of respondents showed interest in the project and wanted to continue communicating further to establish a successful collaborative project. They believed that it is an example of a new innovative educational idea that is useful to all, whether they are professionals or book lovers.

**The Main Results of the First Survey**
For the first survey, we had 221 responses in March 2017 (Klein, 2017) (Badra, 2017), and we reached 636 in April 2018 (Nanty, 2018). This survey reveals that 95, 5% of the respondents envision using the MOOC book trades’ offer. Most of them want to develop a MOOC on book production and be able to have access to professional testimonials too.

For 79.1% of respondents, the MOOC would be used alone, without additional face-to-face training. The main reason advanced is that the MOOC makes it easier to combine private and professional lives.

Concerning the type of MOOC content, 57.3% of the respondents are interested in a MOOC bookstore, 68.4% by a MOOC edition and 68.2% by a MOOC library. They declared the availability of French MOOCs in one or more modules but they did not find a complete offer in the book trades. In response to the question “Who can be the trainers?” the majority of respondents do not want a MOOC without professional trainers. Students were not feeling able to deliver lessons. However, it is the responsibility of MOOC managers to integrate them into the process to demonstrate that they have something to contribute to this training.

Furthermore, the analysis of the first survey results reveals that many southern French-speaking countries do not have specific training in the book trades. Thus, they are waiting with impatience for it. However, 67% of respondents highlighted the complexity of this project and considered that further collaborative work dealing with different aspects (such as technology, changes in human behavior, legal evolutions, and new practices in work processes) should be studied before designing the platform.

Finally, the respondents of the first survey believed, that a professional will be more interested in following the MOOCs of other professions than his/her own, to become fully aware of the realities of book production.

**What Are Results from the Second Survey?**
In the second survey, 27.8% of respondents were men, and 72.2% were women. Of the twenty respondents, 72.1% of them lived in France, 11.1% were from Belgium, and 5.6% from the department of DOM TOM, la Réunion. All participants wished to be informed of the continuation of the project. This survey reveals that 83.3% of the respondents preferred the MOOC because it is dedicated to the book trades, 50% were interested because it is professional, and 50% were willing to use this offer because it is Francophone.
In this second survey, the respondents selected the teaching modules that interested them in the fields of bookselling and publishing. These modules are divided into six sub-sections namely communication / marketing, law, accounting, design, IT and the book market. The respondents showed by their choices a need to see or review the fundamentals of the profession. Indeed, in the field of publishing, 83.3% of respondents preferred following the accounting and management module and, 72.2% selected the computer module; 55.6% of the respondents chose the communication and marketing module. 66.7% chose the module and 55.6%, the design module.

In bookstores, respondents chose only three modules: accounting and management (61.1%), communication and marketing (55.6%) and the book market (55.6%).

Furthermore, the respondents highlighted the importance of integrating into the MOOC, specific content dealing with the cultural diversity and literary wealth existing in the different French-speaking countries.

According to the second survey, reasons that would push respondents to use the new offer are:
- Developing their knowledge on a specific area (74.4%)
- Sharing good practices (56.8%)
- Developing a concrete professional project (32.2%)
- Having a first look at the entire book world (25.6%)

Moreover we notice that the question of the price of training seems problematic for many in the first survey. Indeed, very few considered paying for access to MOOC content whereas 50% of respondents seemed interested in a paid certification in the second survey.

Discussion

The survey shows the expectations of Francophones who need to have a supply of inexhaustible, renewable and new knowledge and skills in the book trade (see Figure 2). The expected MOOC must be accessible to all in French and offer courses evolving according to changes and changing circumstances.

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**Figure 2.** Prominent results in both surveys about the project.
We also see that the MOOC is a response to a real need. Indeed, it is difficult to go to face-to-face training, especially for small structures. Furthermore, the study shows that almost all the respondents in the two surveys want to have a training module for events in bookstores and publishing.

Among the most prominent points, we note the major thematic areas desired by Francophone professionals (teachers, trainers and other professionals), concerning the desired performance features of Francophone digital learning tools and the selectivity and high quality of information contents.

Finally, almost all respondents want to find in the platform, a multimedia educational content to use easily. This brings us back to the context of professional training and how to best build valuable economic model.

In addition, both surveys reveal that digital is important and should be addressed in the courses offered. The themes of digital and trade 2.0 are the most popular amongst all the proposals made.

Conclusion

The literature review has allowed us to understand correctly the importance given by French-speaking countries to the French language. It explains the main reasons that encourage French-speaking states to use ICT, and institutional organizations to further develop distance learning. The challenge is threefold: to fight against the digital divide, to democratize access to knowledge for all members of the Francophone community and to preserve their values and interests at the international level.

The knowledge of these facts has guided our fieldwork with an objective to offer a relevant and effective online learning tool to all Francophones seeking to acquire and/or strengthen their knowledge in the Book professions. Prior research work allowed us to identify the existing offer, and the strengths and limits of this offer, in order and thus to better define our scope of action.

The two surveys allowed us to collect the opinions of the interviewees on the expected training offer and to identify precisely their needs in terms of content, particularly on the desired courses in the fields of bookselling and publishing.

What Would be the Next Stage of the Project?
The project is already generating a lot of interest. Subscribers on Facebook give us their expertise and want to be more involved. Respondents to both surveys specified their expectations in terms of content and the desired performance features. Indeed, if the result of the market study proves conclusive, it is necessary to proceed to the realization of the business plan, which constitutes the logical continuation of the market study.

It will now be necessary to develop this plan to formalize the project and obtain bank financing, profit from participation from external investors,
private investment, and to negotiate preferential rates and payment terms with a future supplier. Therefore, the next step of the project is to write the business plan in which the project will be developed. We also have to precise the roles of stakeholders, and to define our marketing strategy, the human resources management, etc. We have to include all planned expenditures and resources envisaged in the short and medium term.

Therefore, the drafting of this plan will be useful for us since it will enable us to structure our ideas, refine the project and ensure its viability. As it is aimed at fund-raisers, we must prove the sustainability and quality of the project and highlight the expected return on investment. Therefore, the business plan must be clear on the editorial side and consistent in financial terms.

Furthermore, we should define the desired performance of our platform. We must think about video editing of lessons (primary source), supplementary reading materials, assignments or evaluation exercises. We must also define the type of analyses, quizzes, collaborative works and practical exercises that help to develop the skills of learners and their networks.

To conclude, we can say that the project takes a new turn for the better but still represents significant challenges, because we have to prove the financial strength of the project as well as its scale. Therefore, we will liaise more closely with to the AUF to support us in our project.

In any case, the goal remains the same: creating an open learning community including teachers, computer scientists, professional in book strata, suppliers, producers, and other stakeholders that will produce goods and services by bringing value to learners who are themselves part of that same ecosystem.

Notes
1. Vincent Demulière is a book professional, consultant and a digital project manager in the 4epub’company.

References


**Author Details**

Lamia Badra Belaziz

lamia.badra@uca.fr