MOOCs for In and Out of EFL Classroom

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ABSTRACT

The Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) have been a buzzword ever since Coursera, edX and Udacity launched their services consecutively in 2012. An increasing number of courses are opening every day, and students are enrolling from everywhere around the globe. In this short article, the author introduces practical examples of the application of MOOCs to EFL teaching in and out of the classroom, as well as utilizing MOOCs for her professional development as a language teacher.

INTRODUCTION

The current situation surrounding EFL teachers is different from the past. Teachers who are living in the era of the Internet and smartphones can access various materials very easily. Not only books, but a variety of teaching and learning materials are available from websites and smartphone apps. YouTube videos and TED speeches are already familiar to many teachers and students. However, Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are a relatively recent introduction to the education field. The primary instruction language of MOOCs is English, and MOOCs have the potential to be excellent materials for English language learners (Anzai & Akahori, 2015a; Manning, Morrison, & Mcllroy, 2014).

Furthermore, MOOCs can provide quality opportunities and learning experiences not only for learners but also for teachers. Perveen (2018) investigated English teachers in Pakistan regarding the use of MOOCs for professional development and found out that participating in MOOCs is beneficial for professional development as well as for improving language skills and teaching skills. In this short article, some practical applications of MOOCs to classroom teaching and professional development will be discussed.

MOOCs

According to the MOOC.org website, massive open online courses (MOOCs) are "free online courses available for anyone to enroll. MOOCs provide an affordable and flexible way to learn new skills, advance your career and deliver quality educational experiences at scale" (see e.g., http://mooc.org). Even before the launch of Coursera, one of the biggest MOOCs, in February 2012, a significant number of universities were providing distance education courses. MOOCs, however, are not only courses that are open to everybody but they are also free. However, the situation has been changing, and many courses offer the option to pay for a certificate of completion or unlimited access to the course.

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MOOCS IN THE CLASSROOM

Use of MOOCs in EFL classrooms has a brief history and has not spread widely, but the potential of MOOCs in the EFL classroom is enormous (Anzai & Akahori, 2015b). For example, Freihat (2014) utilized MOOCs to develop English listening skills of Saudi female students and found out that the MOOC has been effective in the development of listening skills.

Learning How to Learn (platform: Coursera)

For the beginner level (TOEIC 300 and around) English class for first-year university students in Japan, the author applied for the course "Learning How to Learn", one of the most popular personal development courses at Coursera (Coursera.org). Aside from her preference of using authentic materials as a supplement, there were two reasons for choosing this particular course for the class. Firstly, the course fits all who want to improve learning skills and learn more effectively. Since the students are freshmen, learning how to learn might be beneficial. Secondly, the feasibility was considered. The overall instructions were clear enough for beginner-level English learners to understand, moreover, the content videos were entertaining and short. In addition, Japanese subtitles were available for the videos, so that students could check for understanding using their first language (L1) when it was necessary. The table below is the agenda of the actual application of the course. Since the purpose of applying the course was that students can experience studying something in English rather than studying English as they experienced during secondary school days, so we only finished the first week of the course together. According to the course survey, one of the students commented that "this course was good because I could learn difficult content in English (even though the level of the class was the lowest)."

Table 1
Sample lesson plan applying the Learning How to Learn Coursera course

Day	Activities	In Class	Homework
1	Introduction of Coursera and T's experience	O	X
2	Watch and learn the video 1-1 together	O	X
3	Download Coursera app and register to the course / Watch video 1-2 and 1-3, then discuss in groups	O	O
4	Use smartphone app and learn video 1-5 and 1-6 with their own pace / Review them at home	O	O
5	Watch and learn video 1-8 / Try learning strategy introduced in the video 1-6	X	O
6	Watch and learn video 1-7 and 1-8	O	X
7	Watch video 1-9 at home	X	O
8	Watch and learn video 1-9 together	O	X

9	Ss discuss this experience in groups	O	X

MOOCS OUT OF CLASSROOM

For Students

MOOCs can not only be used for supplemental materials and assignment, but also for self-study material. For instance, those who want to take standardized tests like IELTS and TOEFL can take courses provided by the test developing companies at MOOCs like edX and FutureLearn. MOOCs can be a preparation to study abroad (Manning et al., 2014).

The author observed many students' faces light up when they used Kahn Academy, another MOOC platform, as an advisor of the English Consultation Room which is a part of the self-access center at the institute. Kahn Academy is an excellent platform for students who are good at math and science, but not good at humanities including English. Since Kahn Academy was developed to help K-12 students in English speaking countries, it covers the whole range of arithmetic, mathematics, science, and subjects taught at elementary and secondary schools. In short, learners can study K-12-level scientific subjects in English. Moreover, gamification of this platform can help learners keep tracking their learning.

For Teachers

MOOCs also offer a tremendous possibility for professional development of language teachers. Participating in MOOCs can improve language proficiency, gain new and necessary knowledge for teaching (Perveen, 2018) and present good opportunities to observe and learn from other teachers. The following are the courses the author participated for these purposes:

Professional Development

- Blended Learning Essentials: Getting Started (FutureLearn)
- Dyslexia and Foreign Language Teaching (FutureLearn)
- Miracles of Human Language: An Introduction to Linguistics (Coursera)
- Understanding Classroom Interaction (edX)

Learning from Other Teachers

- How to Write an Essay (edX)
- English for Academic Study (FutureLearn)
- Business English: Making Presentations (Coursera)
- Tricky English Grammar (Coursera)

CONCLUSION

The application of MOOCs to EFL teaching and learning has an excellent possibility for both students and teachers (Manning et al., 2014) but it still has not been tried enough yet.

The author wants to invite other teachers to utilize MOOCs as teaching and learning materials, and also as opportunities for professional development.

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