

PAPER • OPEN ACCESS

## Distance Learning via MOOCs: Improving ESL Learners' Writing Skills

To cite this article: Nurakhma Shabani Jasni *et al* 2019 *J. Phys.: Conf. Ser.* **1424** 012031

View the [article online](#) for updates and enhancements.



**IOP | ebooks™**

Bringing you innovative digital publishing with leading voices to create your essential collection of books in STEM research.

Start exploring the [collection](#) - download the first chapter of every title for free.

# Distance Learning via MOOCs: Improving ESL Learners' Writing Skills

Nurakhma Shabani Jasni<sup>1</sup>, Harwati Hashim, Melor Md Yunus\*, Siti Fatimah Abd Rahman

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM)

\*melor@ukm.edu.my

**Abstract.** Students nowadays are exposed to technology and they are always interested in learning new things. By incorporating technology as a means of learning, the students would be able to develop interest in learning language and improving their ICT skills. Crossing the line of time and distance and applying the saying that learning could be done anywhere and every time, applying the theory of distance learning, this paper reviews the effectiveness using MOOCs to improve students' writing skills. Prior research regarding the use of MOOCs and technology, especially in language education and writing skills, is reviewed. Emphasizing on MOOCs as the platform of improving students' writing skills, this paper explains how MOOCs helps in improving the process of teaching and learning and the importance of self-directed learning.

## 1. Introduction

Students nowadays are exposed to technology and they are always interested in learning new things [1]–[3]. Traditional setting such as classroom no longer helps in motivating and developing their interest in learning. Thus, by incorporating media and learning MOOCs helps in developing students' interest towards their learning process because it is a new way of learning [4]. In this 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is extremely important to understand where the students' interest lies especially in order to understand and encourage them. By incorporating technology as a means of learning, the students would be able to develop interest in learning language and improving their ICT skills. One of the most common modes of learning today is via distance education. Distance education is a manner of conveying the process of teaching and learning, often on an individual basis, to students who are not available in the classroom [5]. This is convenient because it helps learning become possible in all kind of manner.

Moreover, [6] stated that distance learning in an educational program is a pedagogical concept applied by using three sets of variables which consists of variables in teaching and in learning and in the interaction of teaching and in learning rather than saying one of the variables are variables in communication and media. By using Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs), this added the variable of communication and media in distance education. This is because MOOCs is a platform that incorporate media and communication as a teaching method through different set of modules. While distance learning allows students to work at their own pace with themselves being their limit, [6] said that the purpose of distance education is that it is to recap the diverse relationship and strength of relationship among and between the variable that makes up distance learning. Crossing the line of time



and distance and applying the saying that learning could be done anywhere and every time, applying the theory of distance learning, this paper reviews the effectiveness of distance learning via MOOCs.

## 2. Writing Component in ESL

Writing is process of delivering thoughts by jotting it down on a piece of paper. Some people consider it tedious especially when the subject have been decided already and there is no relatable knowledge in regards to the subject. This mostly happens in school. In order for the students to master a language, they have to have a wide range of vocabulary, the ability to form a proper structure of sentence and the ability to understand the language and are able to reply to it fluently.

In Malaysian English context, these components of English in school are assessed from four aspects, reading, writing, speaking and comprehension. Students do not write very often and most of what they write is classroom-bound. Most of their writing are done in classroom or because it is a requirement for their subject. It is hard to choose a topic that the student could relate to and are able to draw out their own feelings and as they went into a higher system of education, the harder it is to comprehend the topic they are writing about. The most important factor in writing exercises is that students need to be personally involved in order to make the learning experience of great value. While encouraging student participation in the exercise, and at the same time enhancing and developing writing skills, compels a definite practical approach [7].

Effective writing, according to [8], consists of central idea, organization, supporting material, expression, word choice and point and the last one is spelling, punctuation and grammar. This means that in order for a student to master writing, they need to have the basic knowledge of the language itself and by mastering writing, they would, indeed, master the language itself. Writing requires not only the knowledge of the language, but also the ability to be able to think critically and the ability to be able to relate to the text so that the idea can be expressed vividly.

## 3. The Use of Technology in Teaching and Learning Writing

The findings of past studies reported that online learning and instruction have on language learning. For instance, [9] concluded that Internet- based or assisted language learning could help college students in independent language learning and academic writing because these students are enthusiastic and reasonably competent users of Internet-based tools and techniques. This is because the students are able to make their own research and are able to work independently without pressure. Eliminating the pressure of the datelines and being compared of their achievements, the student could work in a more comfortable and stress-free environment.

Technology allows students to work in a more fun and interactive way. They could encourage their friends to work harder from just commenting and giving emoticons. For example, if someone made an error in their writing, a peer could make a comment with “@@” to show they were confused or speechless, or they could follow a comment with “:-D” to show they were happy with the writing or to provide encouragement [10]. Through this learning process, the students had greater chance to observe the mistakes made and mend their past reoccurring mistakes while making connections and interacting with their fellow peers. They were also able to obtain knowledge and skills from the writings, comments, and feedback of others while reflecting on their own. Furthermore, in the process of reviewing and commenting on their peers’ work and offering comments and feedback, the students were able to modify their original work and improve its quality [11].

Through technology, the student could reflect on their mistakes not only on a one to one basis, they were able to reflect and offers feedback from their friends without being discouraging. [12] proclaimed that social constructivist theory undertakes that students act and reflect within an environment, and this is then followed by reflecting, abstracting, and increasing experiential knowledge. Thus, through MOOCs as the platform, the students would be able to do all those without having to change and adapt to anyone’s pace of learning.

#### 4. Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs)

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) is an open free access via Internet platform that focuses on enhancing students' skills by providing distance education for students who are unable to come to class. It provides more than 4312 courses across the world online focusing on the concept of open learning. Open learning is an online learning platform that goes beyond content delivery to focus on community, connectedness and student engagement. This platform uses the concept of social media approach allowing people to interact using chats, liking and commenting on other people's post with the intention of engaging the students in a fun social student experience. Student interactions in online discussions can expedite a learner-centred approach to teaching and provide students with an opportunity to practise and learn knowledge and skills in a supportive and encouraging environment [10].

While maintaining the room of improvement for each individual by completing their modules, MOOCs also provide blog pages and built in galleries for further understanding as well as a column for feedback for them to express their thoughts and understanding for each post. At the end of the course, if the student were able to complete the whole module and the course work, the student will be awarded with a certification for their participation. This will give the student a sense of achievement and will encourage the student to study better. This is based on The Hawthorn Effect theory which stated that some people have the tendency to work harder and perform better when they were being observed. At the end of each course there will be a reflection segment which helps the student understand more of their learning method and also helps the student realize what they gained throughout the whole module. The reflection would help both the student and the instructor because the feedback would help in the development of the course itself and the learning platform. Knowledge is something you gained daily and it evolves rapidly. The feedback would maintain the constantly advancing syllabus and helps the instructor to be more aware of the students' need as well.

MOOCs allows the instructors to watch over the students' progress of the work they do and shows how many percent of the task that they had completed. Although MOOCs allows students to have a complete control over what they do and at their own stride, the instructors were not to just sit and do nothing if the students were not doing anything. They can take part of the learning by pushing them more or asking why was the problem. This one to one observation is more effective than teaching in the classroom when the instructor has to focus on everyone in order for each of the student to understand. This is related to Stephen Downes and George Siemens connectivism theory where learning happens not only when they are by themselves but through connections within networks [13]. The theory uses the idea of a network with nodes and connections to define learning. Students recognize and interpret patterns and are influenced by the diversity of networks, strength of ties and their context. This means that their knowledge is continually being acquired. They learn by themselves and make the effort to search for thing they don't know and are constantly creating new networks because the diversity of opinions let them learn something new each time. These networks are also connected by the fact that when fellow students shared their knowledge and posted something and they constantly learn new things because everyone have their way of interpreting things. Favouring the information sharing and duplication, the pedagogical approach embedded in this type of MOOCs is behaviourism [14]. Behaviourism operates on the principle of stimulus-response where all behaviours are cause by the surroundings and the negative and positive reinforcement. When their peers share new info and commented on their post, they feel compelled to reply and feel encouraged to post more. MOOCs makes use of this theory in order to boost the students' confidence to write more.

#### 5. Pedagogical Implications and Conclusion

Applying the concept of distance learning in a classroom will not only help conserve time, it will also be good hands on experience for the students. The students will be able to develop their ICT skills and able to use technology in a good way for technology is a useful servant but a dangerous master. Future teachers need to be able to teach and at the same time possess other skills as well in order to survive

and adapt. While attention in selecting the apt hardware and software for the classroom is essential, it is the skill and attitude of the teacher that ascertains the efficacy of technology amalgamation into the curriculum [15]. While the environment affects the ambiance of studying in class, incomplete accommodation discourages the student to study. Thus, it is the responsibility of the school too, to be able to provide the right material and stable internet connection while limiting the internet only for educational purposes. This will accommodate the teachers and students in implementing technology in classroom.

## 6. Conclusion

This literature review aims to identify and analyze the trends, datasets, methods and frameworks used in the topic of attribute independence assumption assumptions on NB between 2010 and 2018. To conclude, regarding using MOOCs to assist in learning English writing, it would be beneficial for both the students and the instructor. It is time conserving for both part and a self-directed learning could help the student in becoming more independent and helps them in widening the approach of learning. Additionally, it was much easier for them to learn from each other through posting on each of the modules provided with the additional instructions and built in galleries that provides information and examples. Moreover, using MOOCs to do assignments was convenient and reduces stress and environmental impact. This is due to the pressure elimination and a comfortable environment to work at.

Having a social media flow like, MOOCs allows comments and like on the assessments of the user, these is very useful and beneficial in terms of motivating and encouraging the students to work harder. Incorporating media and technology in learning allows student to have more fun while gaining extra knowledge, forming them into a holistic student with the ability to learn in any way and utilising the technology respectably. MOOCs as stated as [14] is the more traditional approach to learning and a source of information and knowledge. This is because the role of the teacher is arbitrated; the class is 'recorded' beforehand as in they provide a full set of resources, exercises and automated test. This show that even with the absence of a teacher, they still facilitate the learning by providing the kind of help the students might need in order to finish the set of questions prepared in advance.

## Acknowledgement

This research is supported by Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia under research scheme no. (i) GG-2018-001; (ii) KRA-2018-044.

## References

- [1] Hashim H, Yunus MM, and Embi MA, "Factors Influencing Polytechnic English as Second Language (ESL) Learners' Attitude and Intention for Using Mobile Learning," *Asian ESP J.*, vol. 14, no. 7, pp. 195–208, 2018.
- [2] Yunus MM, Nordin NM, Salehi H, Sun CH, and Embi MA, "Pros and cons of using ICT in teaching ESL reading and writing," *Int. Educ. Stud.*, vol. 6, no. 7, pp. 119–130, 2013.
- [3] Yunus MM, Maimun AL, and Chua PL, "Language learning via ICT: Uses, challenges and issues," *WSEAS Trans. Inf. Sci. Appl.*, vol. 6, no. 9, pp. 1453–1467, 2009.
- [4] Yunus MM, Osman WSW, and Ishak NM, "Teacher-student relationship factor affecting motivation and academic achievement in ESL classroom," *Procedia - Soc. Behav. Sci.*, vol. 15, pp. 2637–2641, 2011.
- [5] M. S. Abbasi, A. Tarhini, M. Hassouna, and F. Shah, "Social, Organizational, Demography and Individuals' Technology Acceptance Behaviour: A Conceptual Model," *Eur. Sci. J.*, vol. 11, no. 9, pp. 39–68, 2015.
- [6] M. G. Moore, "Three types of interaction," *Am. J. Distance Educ.*, vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 1–6, 1989.
- [7] D. Adas and A. Bakir, "Writing difficulties and new solutions: Blended learning as an approach to improve writing abilities Writing Difficulties and New Solutions: Blended Learning as an Approach to PhD in teaching English Language Methods , AL-Quds Open

- University ,” no. September, 2018.
- [8] D. S. Wilbers, “Five Elements of Effective Writing,” vol. 4, pp. 1–2, 2018.
  - [9] M. A. Conroy, “Internet tools for language learning: University students taking control of their writing,” *Australas. J. Educ. Technol.*, vol. 26, no. 6, pp. 861–882, 2010.
  - [10] R. Shih, “Manufacturing aluminium and zinc sacrificial marine anodes,” *Corros. Mater.*, vol. 37, no. 2, pp. 36–39, 2012.
  - [11] S. C. Tseng and C. C. Tsai, “On-line peer assessment and the role of the peer feedback: A study of high school computer course,” *Comput. Educ.*, vol. 49, no. 4, pp. 1161–1174, 2007.
  - [12] H. Uzunboyly, N. Cavus, and E. Ercag, “Using mobile learning to increase environmental awareness,” *Comput. Educ.*, vol. 52, no. 2, pp. 381–389, 2009.
  - [13] N. Bailey, Jemimah; Cassidy, Dara; Breakwell, “Keeping Them Clicking: Promoting Student Engagement In MOOC Design,” *All Irel. J. Teach. Learn. High. Educ.*, vol. 6, no. 2, p. 1972, 2014.
  - [14] M. L. R. Renau, “Designing, Developing and Implementing A MOOC: Improve Your Writing Skills,” *Secundària Obligatòria i Batxillerat Farmacio*, 2014.
  - [15] N. Bitner and J. Bitner, “Integrating technology into the classroom: Eight keys to succes,” *J. Technol. Teach. Educ.*, vol. 10, no. 1, pp. 95–100, 2002.