

TEACHING ENGLISH THROUGH A MOOC?

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Abstract

MOOC, Massive Open Online Courses, is a new trend in teaching and learning English. It is actually an e-learning. The teaching is conducted through internet access. Therefore, the teachers and learners must have access to internet so that MOOC can be implemented. Learning through a MOOC can be very interesting since learners can meet lots of friends to share ideas, to give and get feedback, to learn from others, and to make a reflection too. A MOOC can also encourage learners to be autonomous. What about teaching through a MOOC? Based on the experience in joining a MOOC, it can be concluded that the program must be very well prepared. The very well preparation includes the material for the course and also for the IT. There must be collaboration between creative English teachers and IT experts to design teaching and learning activity through a MOOC. Is it possible to teach English to our students through a MOOC? This paper tries to describe what, how, and why a MOOC is. It will be continued by analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of using a MOOC in teaching English. The result hopefully can answer the question written as a title of this paper.

Key words: MOOC, teaching, English

Introduction

English teaching and learning has been developing through times. Since the era which is technology era, the development of it is influenced by technology. The current trend in teaching and learning, including English, is MOOC, Massive Open Online Course.

MOOC is new. Therefore, there are not many colleges or institutions, especially in Indonesia, applying it. However, there are available facilities for teachers and students to join a MOOC. As far as internet access is available, everyone can join it for free. This is an opportunity that must be taken since it can give lots of advantages.

Colleges in Indonesia now are provided with internet access. Accordingly, joining MOOC is not a problem for teachers and students as far as they are willing to. Joining a MOOC is exciting, challenging, and motivating. To make it familiar is important so that teachers and students can take advantages of a MOOC.

The point is that whether a MOOC can be implemented in teaching English to Indonesian students. This paper will discuss MOOC; analyze its strength and weaknesses, and the possibility to use it in teaching English to students in Indonesia.

What is a MOOC?

MOOC is new in the field of teaching and learning activities. This is closely connected to technology that is internet access. MOOC stands for Massive Open Online Course. This term emerged in 2008. MOOC is one type of open online course format (Haggard et al, 2013:10).

What is a MOOC? McAuley states, "A MOOC is an online course with the option of free and open registration, a publicly-shared curriculum, and open-ended outcomes. MOOCs integrate social networking, accessible online resources, and are facilitated by leading practitioners in the field of study. Most significantly, MOOCs build on the engagement of learners who self-organize their participation according to learning goals, prior knowledge and skills, and common interests" (McAuley et al, 2010:10).

Referring to the abbreviation, MOOC possesses specific features (Mora, 2013). First, it is Massive. It means that this program should be accessible to a large number of students. Even, it can be very large that could cover course participants from many countries in the world. Coursera, as an example of MOOCs provider, had 374 courses from 70 institutions with 3,670, 803 students in 2013 (Haggard et al, 2013: 14). "Shaping the Way We Teach" for example, is a MOOC provided by Coursera that is addressed to teachers of English as a foreign language. The participants are English teachers from Indonesia, Vietnam, Spanish, and more countries in which English is a foreign language.

The second feature is Open. It means that it opens to everyone to join it. There is no requirement for someone who wants to take a part in MOOC. Open also means free access to learning sources. Participants are free to access video, readings, quizzes, etc. These can be downloaded and saved by the participants.

The third is Online, MOOC is conducted using internet. All the information will be sent to the participant through the email address. Everyone can join this program anywhere in the world as far as internet access is available. So, it can be done remotely by participants from different parts of the world.

The last is Course. As a course MOOC has learning target that will be achieved by the participants. During the course there is an interaction between learners/participants and teachers and between learners and learners. Of course, it does not need any classrooms or physical attendance. There will also be assessment or evaluation to measure the achievement of the target, which is the learning objective.

How a MOOC is used

To become a participant in a MOOC, one has to register her/himself. It is usually done after invitation is received. Once he becomes a participant he will get all information about the program through his/her email regularly. The first information is all about the courses. It covers information about the syllabus of the course, what activities the course has, the regulation, etc. From the syllabus the participants will know what they will learn during the whole period of the course and what they are supposed to be able to do by the end of the course. Then regularly the participants will receive information about what they have to do in each period/week. MOOCs are usually shorter than the regular class. It can be 6 to 8 weeks instead of 14 to 16 weeks (Norman, 2015).

There are variations in the how a MOOC is used. However, they usually share the features mentioned above. To know clearly how a MOOC is used an example is taken from Coursera with its program *The Way We Teach 1: The Landscape of English Language Teaching*. This program is conducted in 5 weeks. The syllabus explains clearly what the topic for each week is and what activities the participants are suggested to do every week. The TO-DO LIST activity guides the participants on what they are supposed to do every week.

The activities for each week in *Shaping The Way We Teach 1* consists of Video introduction, pre-week knowledge check, watching video of the week topic, required and optional readings, required and optional discussion forum, contest (optional), weekly quiz, and completed posts in the required discussion. The information is detail and clear so that every participant can do the activities autonomously. However, this course provides a center of help to give help participants solve especially technical problems.

The first thing to do by the participant is reading *the to-do list*. In *Shaping the Way We teach 1*, the participants start by watching video introduction in which the instructor introduces the topic of discussion in a week. This activity is followed by *Pre-week knowledge check* in which the participants should answer some questions related to the topic. It is a kind of reflection or self-checks of what the participants have known already about the topic. There will be a prompt feedback to the answer so that each participant knows how well he/she understands the topic.

The next activity will be watching video which shows the teaching and learning activity or the implementation of strategy or method in a classroom activity. The participants can see how to practice strategy or method they are learning. The video watching is followed by quiz related to the content of the video. Participant can repeat answering the quiz as it is not graded. This activity can be used to deepen the understanding of the discussed topic.

Following those activities are readings which are divided into required and optional readings. Both are provided by the course and they can be downloaded so that participants can read many times. The readings are about the topic discussed. Based on the video watching and the reading activities participant then share their opinions by posting them in the discussion forum. This forum is also divided into required and optional discussion forums. Following those activities, there is a contest which is optional for the participants.

At the end of each week a weekly quiz which is graded is given. The participants who want to be certified must complete at least two posts in the required discussions at the end of each week. The participants also have to submit two assignments (making lesson plans) to complete the course.

Why using a MOOC?

Considering the features of MOOC and how it can be used, it sounds good and exciting to use MOOC in teaching English. It can be a break from daily routine for both teachers and students. Something different is usually interesting. MOOC can be done by the students anywhere and anytime within the given period of time. No need to have face to face activity with teachers in the classroom. It is relaxed, MOOC also allows students to learn in their own rate using interesting media. The video is interesting and can be seen many times. It gives better understanding of the materials learnt.

In addition to video, downloading reading materials in MOOC will add references and will broaden the students' knowledge and view. The readings provided in MOOC are usually up to date. The participants can print them out and learn it as many times as they need before they post their opinion in the discussion forum.

Posting in the discussion forum is interesting activity. Waiting for getting response from others is exciting and giving response is a challenging activity. The interaction taking place in the discussion forum

may yield a better understanding on the topic of discussion. Thus, discussion forum can be used to learn new things and share ideas. It will help students do reflection and improve their learning mastery.

The contest and the quiz in MOOC are interesting and challenging for students. They can check their own understanding, measure their mastery of certain topic, and know their score without being embarrassed. They can get feedback and learn the correct ones when they make mistakes. It fosters better understanding in the students.

The last is the assignment. Participants are supposed to submit the assignment more or less twice in a five-week course. The assignment is given after they learn and discuss one or two topics in depth. So, students are supposed to have mastered the learning materials.

Those activities can also be done in teaching English. It can be teaching knowledge or language skills. MOOC which is still new in Indonesia can be used in teaching English for some good reasons. It is challenging, interesting, helps students interact with peers and build learning autonomy, relaxed, and can be a break from routine.

The strengths and the weaknesses of MOOC

MOOC as a course that relies on internet access possesses strengths and weaknesses. The strengths comprise the following important features.

1. As there is a beginning and an end in the course, the objectives are clearly stated. It is quite clear what the students will be able to do at the end of the course.
2. It is interesting because the students can watch the video, meet many friends, and discuss together.
3. It is challenging for quizzes and contests are provided. This also makes the students curious to know their own understanding of the discussed topic. They will know how good they perform.
4. It widens the view of the students because they can share ideas, take and give feedback, and receive up to date learning materials.
5. It is open and usually free. Anyone can join the course and they need no registration fee.
6. Students can choose the most comfortable time to learn within the given time range.

Although MOOC demonstrates strengths it does not mean there are no weaknesses. The weaknesses are as follows.

1. It cannot be applied in places where internet cannot be accessed.
2. Students need to be familiar with internet and have computer.
3. It is difficult to assess/measure the students' learning mastery. It is not known whether they are not honest in doing the assignment because there are no face to face activities.

The strengths and weaknesses of MOOC should be used as considerations before using it to teach.

Teaching English using MOOC in Indonesia?

There are many MOOCs available that can be accessed. There are providers for that such as Coursera, EdX, Udacity, etc. Can we use it to teach English to our students? So far there are no colleges or institutions in Indonesia producing a MOOC and using it to teach English to students. There is an idea to produce it but has not yet been realized.

It can be said that internet access is not a problem in big cities in our country where students learn in colleges and universities. So, one of the requirements, *online*, is met already. Most students and teachers in higher education are familiar with internet.

Another requirement, *massive*, can also be met. There are so many students learn English in different cities in Indonesia. It means the massive program can be conducted. However, colleges or universities must sit and discuss together if they want to use MOOC as an alternative way of teaching English to their students. It concerns with syllabus of the English department at least.

To fulfill the requirement of *open* is the job of the MOOC producer. This is the technique of how everyone is allowed to join the course which is the work of experts in information technology, not of the English instructors.

The English instructors/ programmers' work is on designing the course. They have to plan and decide the learning objectives, how the teaching of the materials will be conducted, to design the activities students will do and how the assessment will be conducted. The instructors can design the teaching skills such as writing, reading, etc. or knowledge of teaching English such as methods, techniques, etc. In collaboration with IT experts, instructors/ programmers should also prepare videos that are important in MOOC.

Thus, teaching English using MOOC in Indonesia is possible to be applied with some notes. First, English teachers from different colleges' universities must sit together with IT experts and work together to produce a MOOC. There must be English instructors who are willing to devote their time to organize and manage the course with the help of the IT experts. They also must have commitment to manage the course.

Organizing and managing MOOC needs special time for English teachers/instructors so that they may be cannot do some tasks given by the faculty to them.

Second, to apply MOOC as an intra curricular activity is not easy, unless it is just conducted in one institution. There is more possibility to conduct it as an extra-curricular activity when the participant are massive, coming from several institutions.

Since MOOCs to teach English have not been found in Indonesian colleges or universities, what we can do is to join the available MOOCs provided by prominent providers. English teachers can choose the courses they need because there are many. English teachers will get some materials and videos from joining the course. They can learn from there to make their teaching better. As MOOCs is open access, teachers can suggest their students to join the MOOCs too.

Conclusion

A MOOC is an interesting media to teach and to learn subject, including English. It is interesting, challenging, and exciting. For that reason, it will be very good when it can be applied in teaching English to Indonesian students.

Some of requirements to develop a MOOC can be met in the field of language teaching. Internet access, curriculum developers, and IT experts are available. It means, there is possibility to develop it and using it to teach English. However, still MOOCs have not been developed and realized. What can be done now is for English teachers to join the available MOOCs. They will get new insight and inspiration for teaching their students better. Even, teachers can suggest their students to take a MOOC if possible.

Recommendation

Colleges and Universities in Indonesia should work together to develop MOOCs that can be accessed by students in Indonesia. It will give students a chance to broaden their knowledge and improve their skills in English. A MOOC in English will give more exposure to students because learning English in the classroom is limited by time. A MOOC can also be an alternative way of teaching and learning, breaking the daily routine in the classroom.

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