

EFL in Openness: A Project Based Language Learning with MOOCs and Online International Exchange

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Abstract— Open education has been getting much attention in various educational fields, and the language education is not an exception. It is a movement to enhance opportunities for learning, which empowered by the current technological revolution. In particular, the web has been employed in English as a foreign language (EFL) education to change a traditional classroom, and has created a community in which students are able to actively participate in, exchange ideas, and collaborate. By introducing two case studies, project based language learning with MOOCs and online international exchange, this paper explores new possibilities in Open learning and advocates the active use of ICT to foster English language learning.

Keywords-English education; MOOCs; distance education; international exchange.

I. INTRODUCTION

Open education is a movement that expands educational opportunities. It relates to both methods and ideology. From the elite to minority, men to women, to education-benefitting areas to remote areas lacking access, it aims to expand opportunities for learning. There has been continued debate and trial and error amongst EFL teachers as to how best to remove the borders of the classroom, and approach English education from a global point of view that is also authentic. Due to development in Web technologies, it has become possible for learning to occur on a global scale, allowing for collaboration and sharing of knowledge and bringing about great changes in classroom structure [1]. The purpose of this paper is to report EFL instructional designs with open learning, and explores its potentiality.

Open Education's history can be classified into three generations, the first being about 40 years ago in Britain's Open University, which was introduced in print, radio, and television, the second being the impact of the Web (1.0 and 2.0) on the exchange of information across the world, and finally the Open Education of the 21st century- that is, the rise of the Open Educational Resources movement [2]. We can consider MOOCs to be a part of this. Bonk defines Open Education as something that anyone at any place and any time can undertake [3]. For example, Japanese students in Tokyo are able to listen to a lecture by a professor in the

US in real time, using the internet. With variety of learning designs such as mobile learning and collaborative learning, Bonk outlines 10 main learning trends in education, describing them as 'openers' of education. The instruction in this paper was designed using one or more of these openers.

In Section 1, this study introduces how MOOCs can be integrated in a regular EFL classroom. In Section 2, the study introduces International exchange via ICT. These are the examples of EFL instructional designs which expanded opportunities for learning getting over the limitation of time and space. Realizing authentic language learning in global perspective without spending much money is a novel part of these EFL instructional designs.

II. CASE STUDIES

This section introduces two case studies, Project based language learning with MOOCs, and International exchange with ICT.

2.1. Project based language learning with MOOCs

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) have its roots in a lecture delivered by Athabasca University's George Siemens and Canada's National Research Council's Stephen Downes's in 2008 titled 'Connectivism and Connective Knowledge' [4]. Now many of America's leading universities like Stanford and Harvard have been participating in MOOCs' platforms like Coursera and edX, and a dynamic Web technology-based educational environment enables students to participate in an online community synchronously or asynchronously. There is interaction between the instructor and the students, and among the students [5].

It is thought that one of the best ways to improve one's English is to study abroad, however that is not a realistic path for everyone to take. Furthermore, while texts like current affairs, essays, and stories are being used as teaching materials in textbooks, there are not many textbooks that deal with lectures from foreign universities. Subsequently, there has not been much exploration into how effective that material is for English education. So, this paper investigated

the potential of the EFL instructional design with MOOCs as English teaching materials.

A pilot study was conducted in the first semester of 2013 at a Japanese university using a CALL. Their majors were International Economics and Politics. According to the results of a survey administered to the students, over 90% were unaware of MOOCs, so they were first introduced what MOOCs were. To help deepen the students' understanding, a statistics course offered by Princeton University through the popular platform Coursera was introduced, together with a discussion of Bonk's 'Instructional Ideas and Technology Tools for Online Success' that was delivered to an audience of over 4000 people in May 2012, and his articles about MOOCs [6][7]. The students were then split into groups of 3-4 people to complete the 'One Week Group Project'. They were asked to participate in a course of their choice for a minimum of one week, analyze the MOOC, and create a 20 minute presentation on their findings as it is seen Fig. 1.

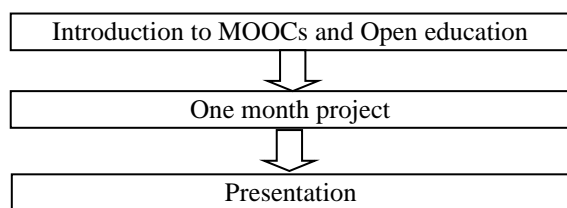


Figure 1. Structure of the EFL instruction

As a result, the students recognized usefulness of MOOCs to enhance English proficiency. This is reflected in responses to the question "Was MOOCs beneficial to improving your grasp of English?" as shown in Fig. 2 which details results of a survey conducted post-experiment. Positive responses were recorded across the board.

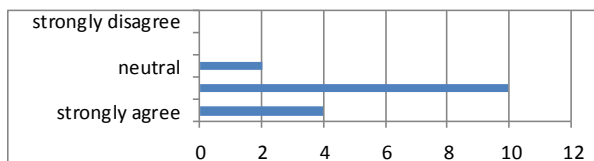


Figure 2. "Do you think MOOCs will enhance English proficiency?"

More concretely, firstly, there seems to be potential as preparation for study abroad. Since MOOCs broadcasts lectures from different universities, it is possible to use them to get used to American lecture styles, identify important vocabulary, practice reasoning, note-taking, and so on. Secondly, thanks to the learning communities around MOOCs, classes can move beyond being passive experiences to ones where students can provide their output. Students were surprisingly active in posting questions in an online community. The Internet, as a platform to get one's voice out into the world, would be good for improving one's courage and confidence in using English. It is important to consider that being able to get one's voice out online is vital for today's increasingly global society. Thirdly, students were not found to have technical issues with the introduction

of MOOCs. The lesson was conducted in the CALL classroom, so the students, as "digital natives" [9] of the modern world who had been using computers and the Internet since birth, were already used to e-learning, which may have been a reason for the lack of stress. Fourthly, the students did not seem to experience any major language difficulties while participating in their MOOC. This may have been due to the fact that this class was targeted at students with intermediate to advanced English ability, and the subjects chosen in the MOOCs were easily understood subjects like music, health, and food. In addition, the lectures delivered were fairly visual. Fifth, it was observed that the final One Week Group Project presentations promoted critical thinking. As opposed to just reporting their findings in their presentations, some students had moved beyond that to evaluate the course structure and the pros and cons of learning with MOOCs. As such, this educational activity was a means to get the students to integrate their learning and think critically. This study's results unveiled the possibilities of MOOCs for English learning. MOOCs promises to be a new, appealing type of English study, in addition to stories, essays, news, songs etc.

2.2 International Exchange with ICT

A case study in using Web technologies for international exchange will be introduced in this section. In this class, Japanese and American university students conducted international exchange via writing. On the Japanese side, warm up activities were performed during the first semester of 2013. The aim of this class was to experience using English, a global language, as a communication tool. Our partner was the University of Kansas's English as a Second Language (ESL) class, consisting of students from China, South Korea, South-East Asia and the Middle East. Together, the classes jointly aimed to conduct an asynchronous international exchange, and utilize English as a communication tool.

Voicethread was the chosen tool for this exchange. The students from the University of Kansas's ESL class introduced the cities they would like to visit, and the Japanese students made comments and asked questions in English, to which the University of Kansas students responded. Fig. 3 is a screenshot from the international exchange. The students at the University of Kansas posted pictures of their favorite places together with their descriptions. Fig. 4 illustrates examples of this interaction. "Hi, I am A. I'm going to tell you about my hometown. My home town is a famous place in Saudi Arabia..." This student introduced his hometown, to which the Japanese student replied, "Hi, I am B from Japan. I have a friend from Saudi Arabia, so I want to visit there someday..." They read and responded with their own impressions.



Figure 3. Greetings of an American and Japanese EFL instructors



Figure 4. An example of the students' writing

English educators that employ ICT often desire international exchange as a means of crafting an authentic experience. Nowadays, there are many tools like Skype that can facilitate this. The Web tool used in this case is not complex either, being very simple to operate and requiring little set up before being able to be used in a class. Also in this type of international exchange, the difference in time zones are an issue, but the asynchronous style of contact meant that collaborative work was still able to be achieved. Both sides of the exchange could feel the presence of the other as they communicated. Due to concerns over student privacy, the students used icons instead of actual photos to represent themselves. That said, there is a gap between knowing that using English on the Web would allow one to communicate with people around the world, and actually being able to communicate with people around the world on the Web—in other words, having the awareness about something vs. actually experiencing something. Beyond studying English, it is also important to experience what it means to communicate in English.

III. CONCLUSION

These two case studies illustrate how ICT expanded opportunities for authentic English language learning. By using MOOCs, EFL learners can get access to quality educational contents as well as having interactions with learners around the globe. The same hold true for the

International exchange. This interaction among learners is the strong characteristic of language learning with current technologies.

Taking into account second-languages and spoken foreign languages, it is estimated that 1.4-1.5 billion people in the world are English speakers [8]. In addition, the number of people who use English on the Internet are thought to be even higher, highlighting the importance of being able to communicate in the language. The English educators of today now face a world where technology they would not have dreamed of as a child is available, and they are aiming for a more authentic classroom experience by introducing technology into the classroom. As is seen, the incorporation of ICT in English education in universities has the possibility to traverse the boundaries of time and physical distance created by the walls of the traditional classroom, and allow participation, interaction, and collaboration in a global community. We can open the English classroom to the world with computers and mobile technologies. How this is incorporated into each English class will depend on the aims and curriculum design of each individual class, as well as creativity of the EFL teachers.

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