

A Comparative Study of MOOCs among Higher Education Institutions in Asian Countries: The instructor's perspectives

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ABSTRACT

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) is regraded as “educational democratic revolution,” (JMOOC, 2016) or “a new textbook in 21 century” (Kanenari, 2014), have borderless, free educational resources and materials for all learners- at all times, wherever they are, whatever they want, and whoever they are. MOOCs were started mainly in the United States in 2012 (JMOOC, 2016), and there are 101 million MOOC learners all over the world in 2018 (Shah, 2018). The implementation of MOOCs in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) class, however, was hardly known in Japan in 2014. The researcher have been utilizing the appropriate MOOCs to 1st-year students as a kind of self-directed learning in the required course at Niigata University of International and Information Studies (NUIS) since 2014. Although the potential value and effectiveness of MOOCs are clarified by the data findings and analysis of questionnaires done by NUIS students, further challenge should be done to utilize MOOCs in EFL class in Japan. In this paper, focus is put on the comparison of MOOCs called “a life-long learning model for the next generation” among four Asian countries – China, Korea, Malaysia, and Japan.

INTRODUCTION

This study reveals the effect of MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) as a method to enhance a student's motivation and self-directed learning, and to help them acquire the key skills needed in order to succeed; the study is done at Niigata University of International and Information Studies or overseas universities. We offered two types of MOOCs to first-year students majoring in International Studies at NUIS: “a University Preparation Course” at the University of East Anglia, and “A Beginner's Guide to Writing in English for University Study” at the University of Reading. These courses constitute two of the six MOOCs' platforms (Yamada, 2014) offered by Future Learn (FL). FL is a digital education provider launched in December 2012, and owned by the Open University in Milton Keynes, UK.

With the establishment of the new faculty at NUIS in 2014, 132 first-year students were required to take two compulsory CEP (Communicative English Program) courses and a BE (Basic English) course for one year. In the BE course, they learn introductory reading and writing, as well as basic English grammar. One MOOC, selected especially by the researcher, was assigned to them as a five-week self-study course in 2015 & 2016 and a six-week course

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in 2017. The aim of this MOOC is to improve fundamental academic skills for ESL/EFL students who plan to enter or transfer to universities in English-speaking countries and for ESL/EFL learners who want to brush up their writing skills for their future career. Finally, the researcher shows the positive results of a survey and the student’s feedback after the completion of MOOC.

MOOC TRENDS in 2017-2018

Udacity, established by Sebastian Thrun at Stanford University, launched the first MOOC in 2012, which is almost five years ago. Nowadays the majority of “non-native English speaker” (NNSE) users register for various courses either in English or in another language they are interested in. According to Shah’s class-central report (2017), approximately 81million people have registered for 9400 MOOCs at over 800 universities in 2018 as shown on Figure 1. Webb & Doman (2017) presented the ratio of nationalities enrolled in MOOCs in 2016 at TESOL 2017 in Seattle: 35% of the participants were from the US, 25% were Middle-East nationals, 25% came from Asian countries, and 5% were other nationalities. This shows that one fourth of users comes from mainly Asian countries, such as India, China, Korea, and Japan.

Figure 1. “The Numbers: MOOCs in 2018 by CLASS CENTRAL

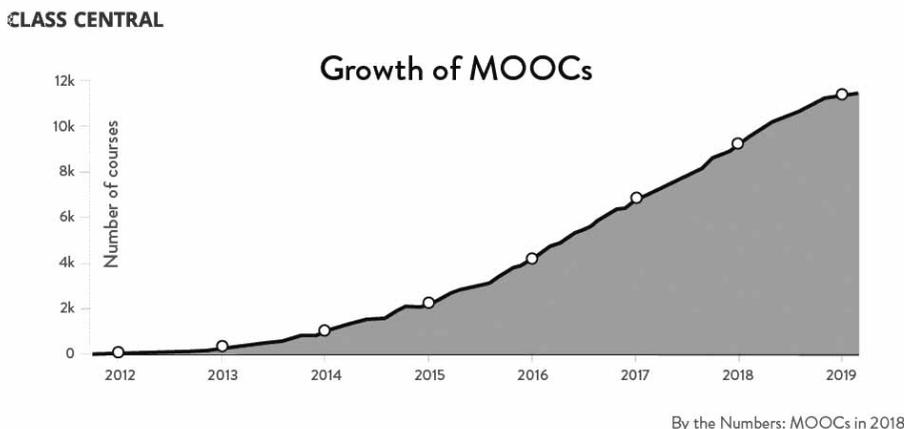


Table 1. The List of MOOC Providers Among 33 course providers in the World 2017 by CLASS CENTRAL

| Ranking | Course provider | Country | Background |
|---------|-----------------|----------------|---|
| 1 | Coursera | United States | It launched in January 2012, and was started by 2 Stanford professors. There are over 25 million students registered. |
| 2 | edX | United States | It was founded by Harvard University and MIT in 2012, edX is a non-profit organization. It’s the second largest MOOC provider in the world with over 10 million students, and now offers over 1,500 courses. |
| 3 | FutureLearn | United Kingdom | It is a UK-based MOOC provider and is wholly owned by Open University at the end of 2012, and now has more than 6 million registered learners. |
| 4 | XuetangX | China | It was founded in 2013 by the Tsinghua University under the supervision of the China Ministry of Education Research. In October '16, the platform had over 400 courses, and the number has crossed 7 million registered learners. |

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|---|---------|---------------|--|
| 5 | Udacity | United States | It is a tech unicorn and it partners with technology companies like Mercedes Benz, BMW, and McLaren to create Nanodegrees that train students for a particular job. There are more than 4,000 students enrolled in the Master's program. |
|---|---------|---------------|--|

Asian Country

| | | | |
|----|---|----------|---|
| 13 | ThaiMOOC | Thailand | It is the official MOOC platform for Thailand launched early in March 2017. This platform is built on Open edX and currently lists around 50 courses. |
| 15 | SWAYAM | India | It is the official MOOC platform for India. SWAYAM means "Study Webs of Active-learning for Young Aspiring Minds. The platform hosts 350 free online courses. |
| 16 | NPTEL | India | It stands for "The National Program on Technology Enhanced Learning" and is a project funded by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) of India. It offers hundreds of free online courses, mainly in the field of engineering. |
| 17 | CNMOOC | China | It is the official website of China's university Muji Union, which is an open cooperative education platform for some high-level universities in China. The platform offers more than 400 courses from 70+ universities. |
| 18 | Chinese MOOCs | China | CNMOOC is the official website of China's high-level university Muji Union, which is an open cooperative education platform for some high-level universities in China. The platform has more than 400 courses from 70 universities. |
| 19 | University of China MOOC-icourse163.org | China | It is an online education platform launched by Netease and Higher Education Society. It offers more than 700 courses from 130 Chinese universities. |
| 20 | ewant(Education you want) | Taiwan | It is a MOOC platform that was launched by National Chiao Tung University in 2013. This univ. is one of Taiwan's leading public research universities. It offers more than 500 courses from 80 different universities. Its aim is to educate the global Chinese population. |
| 25 | gacco | Japan | It is a MOOC provider which partners with universities in Japan to offer online courses in Japanese. Gacco has over 350,000 students registered on its platform. The platform has other features such as peer assessment and a premium interactive learning service. |

METHOD

Participants

126 students registered for MOOC and 120 of them who have completed the course (over 95% of the registered students). They were all Japanese university students at the Faculty of International Studies. After their completion, they provided their feedback in a survey.

Procedure

As part of self-directed learning, one of the MOOCs that a researcher chose, which was "A Beginner's Guide to Writing in English for University Study" at the University of Reading in the UK, implemented in the 2nd semester from January to March in 2018. The duration of the free online course is 5 weeks, which with a 3-hour study section in a week. Anyone who completed 100% of the course can be eligible to pay £42 and attain a Certificate of Achievement from the University of Reading.

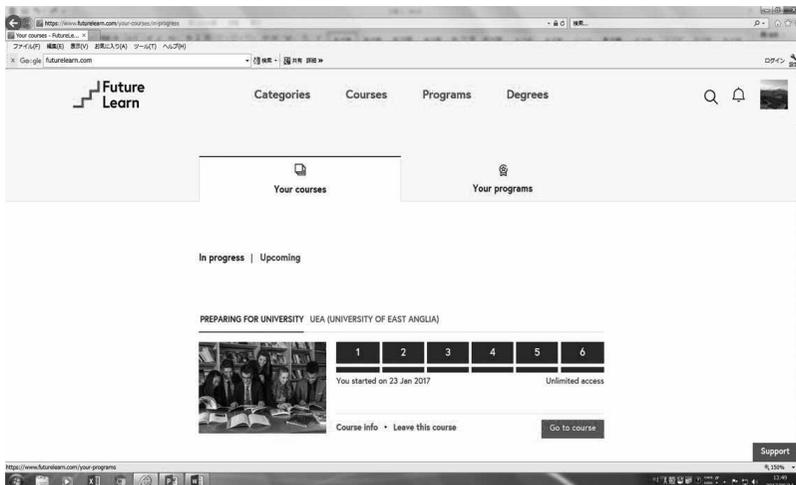
The content of the course is for students to acquire academic English writing skills as a preparatory course for university because academic writing differs from other kinds of

writing. This MOOC has been developed to guide students to study the basics of academic writing and brush up their English language skills. In this program, prof. Steve Thomas, who is the Director of the Academic English Program at University of Reading, helps overseas students to acquire their full academic potential. He also says in the course,

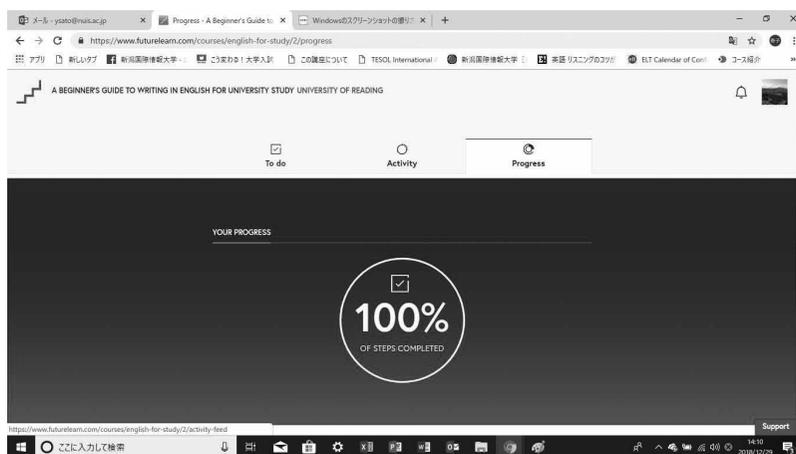
“You’ll develop some proficiency in the key areas of ‘academic’ grammar, learn about the stages in essay writing, and produce an essay of your own. You’ll also explore how to organise an essay, write in an academic style, and use tools to evaluate your own writing and other learners’ writing, so that by the end of the course you’re able to write good, basic academic essays.” (In-text: FutureLearn, 2017)

How to study MOOC in/outside classroom

- STEP1 A student completed the registration and is assigned to a MOOC in the computer lab together with a TA.
- STEP2 After registration, each student completed 3-hour study per week using his/her own device such as PC/tablet/smartphone for about 6 weeks, as his/her self-directed study on/outside campus.
- STEP3 His/her essay was read with feedback given interactively from another students over the world as part of assignment, while he/she also gave feedback to another student.
- STEP4 His/her understanding and progressing were able to be checked in his/her own device every week, as a weekly-quiz was assigned and marked.
- STEP5 The student completed the 6-week program, and saw the blue bars underlined just below each week. It meant the completion of all weeks. The example is seen in Picture 1-1. After the completion of the 6th-week, the 100% completion is shown in Picture 1-2.
- STEP6 Finally, the feedback sheet which he/she completed must be sent to the researcher.



Picture 1-1. A Site of “Your Courses” (FutureLearn)



Picture 1-2. A Site of Your Progress (FutureLearn)

Topics of each week

Week 1

- Key features of academic writing
- Developing essay ideas
- Organizing your ideas effectively

Week 2

- Essay structure and organization
- Choosing a title
- Writing in an impersonal style

Week 3

- Using academic language
- Writing about facts and activities
- Writing about groups of people
- Writing longer sentences: linking words and subordinators

Week 4

- The stages of writing an essay
- Analyzing an essay title
- Deciding what evidence to use
- Writing a first draft of an essay

Week 5

- Evaluating a first draft of an essay
- Reflecting on feedback on your first draft of the essay
- Responding to feedback on your first draft of the essay

(Future Learn, Univ. of Reading, 2017)

DISCUSSION

In the end of the 2nd semester, this MOOC for five weeks was introduced to 126 first-

year students at NUIS and was completed by more than 95% of them with their own devices on/off-campus. As the result of the survey done by NUIS students, 71% of them responded they mainly used their own mobile phones to study the program, while completing the final essay in the 5th week with their or their family's personal computer (PC) at home. During spring break, the majority utilized their own mobile phones off-campus rather than on-campus since only less than 20% of them owned their own PC, and additionally it was easy for them to access the MOOC by mobile phone wherever they were, they responded in the feedback sheet.

A survey about MOOCs conducted among NUIS first-year students shows that approximately 95% of them completed the entire MOOC and more than 80% recognized the effectiveness of it due to the following reasons (See Figure 2): First, more than 5.7 million people gained access to high quality and free online education from top universities and specialist organizations (Marszal, 2012). Second, NUIS students realized that MOOCs were not as difficult as they had previously expected. Merely by staying connected to the Internet, they were able to study at any time and in anywhere for the credits from among more than 100 academic courses in FL throughout a year (futurelearn.com, 2018). According to the outcome of Q2, more than 20% of the students responded that three skills including listening, writing, and reading were respectively acquired with well-balanced, because the aim of this MOOC at University of Reading is to learn how to use English for overseas study at higher institution and develop English skills such as writing, vocabulary, and grammar (See Figure 3). In Q3, more than 60% of students responded positively that they were able to develop their language skills by MOOC (See Figure 4). Some students pinpointed the effectiveness and higher expectation towards MOOCs including high quality and costless online education from prestigious and top institutions without any limitation of their location, the device they are using. Yet, the others negatively indicated the reality of the digital device that more than half of students completed their final essay by mobile phone because they did not have their own PC at home, and they found it difficult to be concentrated and devolving to the course throughout the whole 5 weeks.

The outcome of the feedback sheet in 2017 (Respondents=126 名)

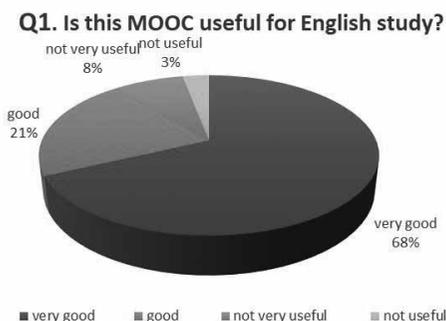


Figure 2. This figure shows how the students assessed the MOOC in terms of English study.

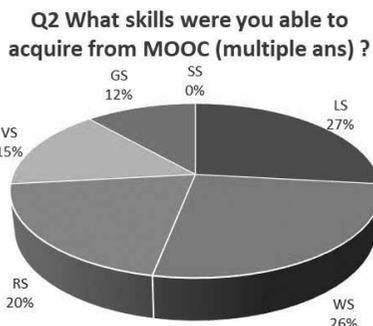


Figure 3. This figure shows how the students rated 5 English skills (listening, writing, reading, vocabulary, grammar, and speaking skills) acquired from MOOC.

Q3 On the whole, do you think you could improve your language skills?

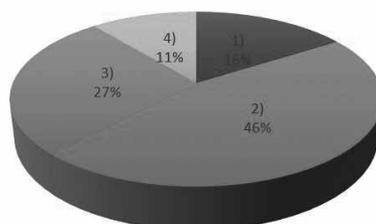


Figure 4. This figure shows how the students reported the improvement of their language skills through the MOOC. There are 4 responses: 1) Strongly agree, 2) Agree, 3) Neither agree nor disagree; 4) Disagree.

CONCLUSIONS

The implication of MOOCs indicates a primary limitation in this research that a student's progress had to be assessed only after the completion of the course. The photo of the progressing achievement with his/her final essay enables the researcher to check and evaluate. The MOOC in the required course introduced by the researcher is a part of self-directed learning, and the main goal is to ensure a student as English as a foreign language (EFL) to experience the effectiveness of MOOCs and infinite possibility of MOOC study, as well as acquisition of English language skills. As this point, anyone, who cannot study suitable courses either in a domestic or foreign country economically and environmentally, can make use of MOOCs in the world and take free online courses as a lifelong education at any time. Additionally, upgraded course at \$59 - allow learners to get unlimited access to MOOCs by FutureLearn, and a Certificate of Achievement as a proof of success.

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