Chapter 9

MOOCs in the Language Classroom:
Using MOOCs as Complementary Materials to Support Self-Regulated Language Learning

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the author discusses the role of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) in the field of foreign language education. It examines the relationship between MOOCs and self-regulated learning, and goes on to explore the repurposing of content-based MOOCs as complementary materials to foster students' self-regulated behaviour and practice of the target language inside and out the language classroom. A research project that has explored self-regulated language learning in a blended context with content-based MOOCs is also discussed here, with particular reference to the self-regulatory strategies employed by a group of language students at University level. A series of recommendations that supports the use of content-based MOOCs as part of face-to-face language courses are provided at the end of this chapter.

INTRODUCTION

Learning a foreign language in this digital era has been engendered by the increasing number of open educational resources and technological developments available online. Massive Open Online Courses (henceforth, MOOCs) represent the development of online learning at a massive scale (Daniel, 2012). They are designed for large numbers of participants who can access the courses anytime, anywhere as long as they have an internet connection (Mcauley, Stewart, Siemens, & Cormier, 2010). The enrolment process in MOOCs tends to differ from other types of online learning programmes offered by academic

institutions, since anyone can enrol in MOOCs regardless of their prior academic achievement (Wiley, 2015), which means that no formal qualifications or entry tests are required to study in these courses.

The term MOOC was coined by Dave Cormier to explain a way of learning in the networked world (Cormier, 2010), which started in 2008 with an online course called *Connectivism and Connective Knowledge (CCK08)* that George Siemens, Stephen Downes and Dave Cormier facilitated at the University of Manitoba in Canada (Cormier, 2008). The open distance course attracted a total of 2,200 enrolled and non-enrolled students worldwide (Downes, 2009) who instead of receiving organisational scaffolding, they were provided with a digital network to enable them to share ideas, connect with people and co-create knowledge with the groups of people they were interested in within the course. This innovative course reinforced the principles of connectivist pedagogy, in which many people and their ideas are connected in an online network to learn and collaboratively construct knowledge (Sharples, 2019). This pedagogy of connectivist learning (Siemens, 2005) subsequently underpinned the development of connectivist MOOCs.

Although the pedagogical approaches of MOOCs have varied since 2008 (McLoughlin & Magnoni, 2017), the format of these courses usually requires people to regulate their own learning to successfully engage with them (Littlejohn & Hood 2018). As explained by Downes (2012), "one big difference between a MOOC and a traditional course is that a MOOC is completely voluntary. You decide that you want to participate, you choose how to participate, then you participate" (para. 9, emphasis in original). Although Downes (2012) was referring specifically to participation in connectivist MOOCs, participants in content-based MOOCs can also choose the content and activities they engage with, decide how to interact with the course and when to do so (Milligan & Littlejohn, 2016). However, students who have not dealt with the flexible instructional design of these courses before can be challenged by what appears to be a free choice in the way they approach their learning.

Within the field of foreign language education, content-based MOOCs can potentially provide students with flexible learning opportunities to engender their self-regulated behaviour and practise their target language while accessing knowledge that may be relevant to their personal or academic interests. These type of courses often present well-structured and engaging audio-visual content (Margaryan, Bianco, & Littlejohn, 2015), which can become useful resources for language students to practise or improve their language skills. Nevertheless, there is little research in this field that examines the self-regulated learning behaviour of foreign language students while engaging with content-based MOOCs as part of their instructional language courses. Accordingly, the focus of this chapter is on the integration of content-based MOOCs as blended elements in classroom-based language courses, with particular reference to the affordances of such integration in regards to students' self-regulated learning and the practice of the target language inside and out the classroom.

This chapter therefore addresses four main questions:

- How MOOCs can contribute to students' self-regulated learning?
- What features of MOOCs are useful for language education?
- How language educators have integrated MOOCs as part of their instructional language courses?
- What self-regulatory strategies do university students employ when working with MOOCs as part of an academic English course?

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