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【論文】

Language MOOCs: Expectations and Reality

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語学 MOOCs（大規模公開オンライン講座）：期待と現実

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Abstract: The present study examines applications of MOOC-based pedagogy to language teaching. After an overview of the core MOOC concepts and principles, the paper provides a critical analysis of six MOOCs for learners of Spanish as a foreign language. The courses are evaluated from the learners' perspective on criteria such as target level, materials, language support, learner collaboration, and assessment. The results of the analysis show that the majority of LMOOCs are set as general beginners' courses, but their level of difficulty varies significantly. The same is true of the learners who sign up for these courses. Courses tend to be teacher-centered and rely on explicit instruction. Instructional videos often feel dry and impersonal and are sometimes difficult to follow due to the large amount of information that learners are expected to memorize. Sample dialogues come across as artificial, and example sentences used to illustrate grammar rules are often decontextualized. Practice activities tend to be rather mechanical. While lecture transcripts may be available in several languages, language support is usually provided in English. Forum interaction is limited and often superficial. Progress quizzes usually consist of multiple-choice questions or matching activities. Graded assignments rely heavily on peer feedback, which is often insufficient and sometimes unclear and even incorrect. Access to final exams is limited to paying students only. The paper ends with examples of LMOOCs that are perceived as more learner-engaging and pedagogically effective, and offers some practical suggestions for further development of LMOOCs and their possible integration into the traditional language programs.

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Key words: MOOCs, Language MOOCs, LMOOCs, online learning, open learning

要旨：本研究では、MOOCを基礎とした教授法を語学教育に応用することについて調査する。MOOCのコア概念や原理についての概要を述べ、スペイン語を外国語として学ぶ学習者向けの6つのMOOCsに関する批判的な分析を説明する。目標水準、教材、語学支援、学習者間の協力、評価といった基準に関する学習者の観点から、コースを評価する。分析の結果、LMOOCsの大部分は一般的な初心者コースとして設定されているが、その難易度には非常にばらつきがあることが判明した。これらのコースに申し込んだ学習者にも同じことが当てはまる。コースは、教師が中心のものになりがちであり、明確な指示に依存することが多い。教育用の動画は、しばしば無味乾燥で親しみを感じさせず、学習者に対して期待される情報の暗記量が多いために、動画についていくのが困難なこともある。会話例にはわざとらしい印象があり、文法上のルールを説明する例文は文脈から切り離されていることが多い。練習のアクティビティはかなり機械的なものになりがちである。講義記録は複数言語で入手可能な場合もあるが、語学支援は通常英語で行われる。フォーラムでの交流は限られており、たいてい表面的なものである。達成度を確認する小テストは通常、多肢選択問題またはマッチング形式の問題から構成される。評価対象の課題はピア・フィードバックに大きく依存しているが、それは不十分であることが多く、不明確な場合や間違っている場合さえある。最終試験を受験できる者は授業料を支払っている学生のみに限られる。本論文の最後では、学習者にとってより魅力的かつ教育的にも効果的と考えられるLMOOCsの例を取り上げ、LMOOCsのさらなる発展やそれらを対面授業と統合する可能性について実践的な提案をする。

キーワード：MOOCs　語学MOOCs　LMOOCs　オンライン学習　公開学習

Introduction

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) were first introduced in 2008 but came to public attention in 2011, when over 160,000 students registered for the “Introduction to Artificial Intelligence” course offered by Stanford University. New courses followed quickly, with millions of registered students worldwide,

prompting the New York Times to brand 2012 “The Year of the MOOC”.

The main principles of MOOC education are reflected in the acronym MOOC itself.

- MOOC courses are *massive*, with enrolment that measures in tens or even hundreds of thousands of learners.
- They are *open* to everyone, that is, they are free and unrestricted in terms of age, qualification, or geographic location.
- They are offered entirely *online*, with no required face-to-face component.
- The materials are organized as a *course* — there is a syllabus, a schedule, instructor guidance and some form of assessment.

At their inception MOOCs were expected to revolutionize education. They were seen as a way of making education more accessible, affordable, global, inclusive, and personalized. They were expected to break national, cultural, and social boundaries and bring learners across the globe together while accommodating their diversity and promoting their autonomy.

In some ways, MOOCs have exceeded expectations. According to data from Class Central, the number of MOOC learners in 2021 surpassed 220 million. They have more than 12,000 courses, 1570 mircrocredentials and 69 full degrees at their disposal (Shah, 2021). With the student body comprising millions of learners, MOOCs have become an extremely rich source of quantitative and qualitative data. Through analytic tools built into MOOC platforms, educational institutions have been able to learn about students’ learning practices, their patterns of interaction with course materials and other learners, and the challenges they face. This knowledge has been used to create more focused and more engaging learning materials and improve learning experiences for both on-campus and online

learners (Haber, 2014; Nanfito, 2013; Vasiljevic, 2020).

However, while MOOCs have been growing in popularity and have brought some clear benefits to education, their limitations have also come to light. Some of the most contentious issues have been student assessment and course accreditation. With course enrolment measuring in tens of thousands of students, traditional ways of assessing student competencies cannot be applied. Many MOOC providers have opted for computer-graded short quizzes and peer assessment. However, in both types of assessment cheating and plagiarizing remain open issues. Furthermore, not all subjects seem well-suited for computer-based assessment. Lindsey (2012) observes that science and computer courses allow students to acquire practical skills they can apply in the workplace and that these subjects lend themselves well to the *right/wrong* quiz answer format common in computer-graded tests. However, in the humanities and social sciences, where students are expected to demonstrate deep conceptual learning, answers are more flexible, and discussions and critical essays are an integral part of coursework, the limitations of automatically graded tests are more visible. Peer-grading has also been problematic. Standards of peer assessment and students' willingness to perform it can vary significantly. Kulkarni and his colleagues examined peer assessment in MOOCs across different academic disciplines and observed that, while practice improved grading accuracy, not all students were motivated to engage with peer assessment (Kulkarni et al., 2013). They also found some instances of what they labeled "patriotic grading" (Kulkarni et al., 2013, p. 16). Some students seemed to have national bias when peer grading and gave higher grades to peers from their own countries. Finally, MOOCs are also perceived as less demanding than on-campus courses due to various modifications that have to be made in course contents. Universities have different kinds of licensing agreements that allow instructors to share copyrighted materials with the students.

These licenses, however, do not extend to the global online student audience. As a result, MOOCs tend to have fewer required readings. They also tend to be shorter than standard college courses. Concerns about academic rigor have made universities wary about awarding formal college credits for MOOC completion, including for courses from their own institutions, and many employers are hesitant to recognize MOOC based qualifications (Haber, 2014; McIntyre, 2018).

A high attrition rate is another commonly cited problem. Only between 2% and 4% of the students enrolled in MOOCs make it to the finish line (Despujol, 2018). In other words, over 95% of enrollers fail to complete their courses. Any traditional on-campus course with a dropout rate that high would certainly be considered a failure. Some scholars (e.g., Devlin, 2013; Haber, 2014; Sokolik, 2014) argue that MOOCs are different from traditional education, and therefore, their impact and success cannot be measured using traditional metrics. About 35% of the registrants never access the courseware (Ho et al., 2014). MOOCs give students an opportunity to explore different educational contents without incurring extra fees or damaging their academic transcripts. Many students enrol with no intention of completing the whole course. These students are more interested in learning about topics of their interest than earning credits or any kind of formal qualification. Nevertheless, increasing student retention remains an ongoing task for MOOC developers.

The demographic background of MOOC takers has also been an area of controversy. At their inception, MOOCs were supposed to bring higher education to underprivileged young people around the world enhancing their social mobility. They started out completely free. However, as MOOC providers strive to find sustainable business models, today many MOOCs come with some kind of a paywall. Although students usually do not have to pay for the courses

themselves, obtaining a verified certificate and unlimited course access incurs a fee. Furthermore, students must have internet access, personal computers, and a certain level of computer literacy to succeed. English remains the dominant language on MOOC platforms, which poses barriers for some learners. Current data suggest that MOOCs tend to attract older, well-educated employed individuals based in developed countries who are interested in supplementing their education or advancing their careers rather than young people looking for access to higher education. Hollands and Kazi's (2018) survey of learners in six Coursera Specializations and four edX MicroMasters showed that only 6% of 3,086 survey respondents were under 21 years old. The average age was 35 and the majority of enrolees were between 22 and 44 years old (72%). Almost two thirds were White or Asian. Most were well-educated with 79% having at least an undergraduate degree and 40% holding a graduate degree. More than a half had full-time jobs and 16% ran their own businesses. Most were hoping that MOOCs would help them improve their job performance (Hollands & Kazi, 2018). Similar data were obtained from other studies (Bárcena et al., 2014; Beaven et al., 2014; Christensen et al., 2013; DeBoer et al., 2013; Rubio, 2014). These findings raise questions of whether MOOCs are really promoting social mobility and reducing social inequality in education, or possibly accelerating it (Emanuel, 2013).

In summary, the first decade of MOOCs highlights both the benefits and problems of this education model. As Haber (2014, xiii) points out, MOOCs are "neither a panacea to the 'crisis in education'… nor the terrifying threat condemned by doomsayers". While MOOCs have opened new educational opportunities, they are still far away from replacing the traditional classroom or fulfilling their social justice mission. Their future will depend, among other factors, on public perception of their value, shaped both by learners' satisfaction with their learning experience and their ability to demonstrate professional competencies acquired

via MOOCs. This leads to a question about the pedagogical effectiveness of the MOOC education model and its suitability for different subject areas. MOOCs began with STEM (science, technology, engineering, or math) courses, and these still tend to be the most popular ones (Lindsay, 2012). However, as mentioned above, for subject areas like the humanities, in which ambiguity is common and multiple answers are valued, a massive online format may be less suitable. The same can be said of skill-based subjects such as foreign languages, where interaction and performance feedback are essential for learner development. The last decade has seen an exponential growth in the number of language MOOCs (LMOOCs.) While in 2014 there were only 30 LMOOCs (Martín-Monje, 2017), in 2021 that number was estimated to be over a 1,000 (Luo & Ye, 2021). Yet research on LMOOCs is still relatively limited. The present study offers a critical review of learning experiences on six Spanish-learning MOOCs. Spanish was chosen as the focus of research because it is the second most commonly spoken language after Mandarin Chinese and one of the most popular foreign languages to learn (Transpanish, 2019). According to Instituto Cervantes 2021 report, the number of Spanish learners worldwide has exceeded 24 million (Instituto Cervantes, 2021). Spanish is also a language in which the author has high, but not native-like proficiency, making it easier to approach the courses from the learner's perspective. The paper consists of three parts: (1) a review of earlier research on LMOOCs, (2) a critical analysis of six Spanish MOOCs offered on the Future Learn, Coursera and edX platforms, and (3) a discussion of the findings and their implications.

Research on LMOOCs

Research on LMOOCs took off in 2014 when *Language MOOCs: Providing Learning, Transcending Boundaries* (Martín-Monje & Bárcena (Eds.), (2014), the first book on the subject, was published. The book consisted of ten chapters

by different authors and covered a range of topics that included a general concept of LMOOCs, educational theory, technology, the role of instructor, learner motivation, and accessibility of LMOOCs, as well ethical and aesthetic issues. These pioneering studies and the research that followed have highlighted both opportunities and challenges for the LMOOC model.

Like other MOOCs, LMOOCs are a flexible learning environment. They blend formal and informal learning by providing structured course content with unrestricted access (Read, 2014). LMOOCs allow students to acquire new knowledge and skills in an environment that is both autonomous and collaborative. LMOOCs are autonomous, as learners are expected to explore resources and complete activities on their own, reflect on their learning experiences, and demonstrate that they can apply what they have learned. LMOOCs are collaborative, as learners are supposed to support other learners and contribute to the "creation of knowledge in a shared social-context" (Moreira & Mota, 2014, p.61). Interaction with a large number of fellow-learners accelerates language learning progress (Moreira & Mota, 2014), and promotes the development of students' oral and written skills (Castrillo de Larreta-Azelain, 2014). LMOOCs also give teachers opportunities to learn more about students' learning styles and the processes involved in language acquisition (Castrillo de Larreta-Azelain, 2014).

However, the literature also identifies challenges with LMOOC instruction. Foreign language learning is associated with ability tracking, interaction and feedback, all of which pose a challenge for the MOOC model in which thousands of learners of mixed abilities may be enrolled in the same course (Moreira & Mota, 2014). Despite a worldwide pool of thousands of "classmates", experimental data show that MOOC learners are not always able to meet peers with whom they can

interact and collaborate (Beaven et al., 2014). Other challenges include the need to work in a foreign language, and the need to have the technical competences and skills necessary to work in an online environment (Beaven et al., 2014). The lack of direct contact between learners and the teacher means that new ways of knowledge transmission are needed, requiring instructors to assume new roles and acquire new competences. Simpson (2012) describes an online teacher as a curator who takes care of cognitive, intellectual, and knowledge issues, and a *facilitator* who helps learners with emotional and organizational aspects of their studies. Building on Simpson's (2012) work and Muñoz, González and Hernández's (2013) study of the pedagogic roles and competences of university instructors in e-learning environments, Castrillo de Larreta-Azelain (2014) defines the roles of an MOOC teacher at each stage of course implementation. A summary of these roles is provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Teacher roles in Massive Open Online Language Courses (Castrillo de Larreta-Azelain, 2014, p. 78)

Course stage	Teacher roles	Responsibilities*
Before	MOOC structure designer-developer/Organizer	Agenda, timeline Short subtitled videos Quizzes
	Content expert/Content creator/Content facilitator	Aids and supporting materials
	Communication tools and structure designer	Peer- and self-assessment Email, forums, question and answer tools, blogs, wikis
During	Facilitator	Facilitating discourse
	Curator	Providing direct instruction
After	Researcher	Learning analytics

*Note: For the purpose of clarity, the last column label has been changed from "MOOC Characteristics" to "Responsibilities".

As can be seen in Table 1, LMOOC teachers assume multiple roles that go beyond student tutoring. Instructors are not only expected to teach the content, but also to be actively involved in course design and elaboration and to act as course administrators, managers, and researchers. Fulfilling these multiple and diverse roles requires different kinds of competences and new forms of teacher training.

Student assessment is also a problem. Sokolik (2014) observes that more research is needed with regard to what should be assessed, how often, and by whom. As mentioned earlier, with a massive number of enrolees, it is impossible to provide MOOC takers with personalized instructors' feedback. However, the peer-assessment model, which has been widely used in MOOCs, seems unsuited for language classes. Sokolik (2014) reported that even with training some students failed to provide constructive feedback due to their limited language proficiency. Many students perceived peer feedback as unhelpful and even hurtful.

In short, LMOOCs are still a new and developing field, and more research is needed on what can be taught online and how specific language competencies can be developed in a flexible, student-centred, and, ideally, collaborative learning environment. The following section will describe the author's personal experience with six Spanish LMOOC courses offered on the FutureLearn, Coursera and edX platforms between October 2021 and February 2022. An attempt was made to select courses at a variety of levels and with distinct objectives. However, at the time of research most courses offered were general Spanish courses for beginner learners. An effort was made to include MOOCs developed by different institutions at different geographical locations and offered at different platforms. The following six courses were reviewed:

FutureLearn platform:

1. Foundations of Spanish for Global Communication (King's College London, UK)
2. Learn Spanish: Survival Spanish for Beginners (Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana, Columbia)

Coursera platform:

3. Spanish for Successful Communication in Healthcare Settings (Rice University, US)
4. Spanish Vocabulary Project (University of California, Davis, US)

edX platform:

5. A Travel by Spanish America: Spanish for Beginners (Universidad del Rosario, Columbia)
6. Basic Spanish 3: Getting There (Universitat Politècnica de València, Spain)

The next section provides a general outline of each course covering issues such as course objectives, methodology, peer collaboration, and learner assessment.

Learning with LMOOCs—A case study of Spanish courses

1. Foundations of Spanish for Global Communication (King's College London, UK)

Foundations of Spanish for Global Communication is an introductory general Spanish course offered by King's College London. It is set as a two-week course with an estimated study time of six hours per week. The course description states it is "ideal for anyone looking to interact with native Spanish speaker or visit

a Spanish-speaking country, or for study and exchange programme purposes". Although it is offered as an independent MOOC, the course was designed as an introduction to a 10-week tuition-based microcredential offered by the same university on the FuturuLearn platform. This purpose is reflected both in a short length of the course and its content. The lessons are designed to give learners a taste of what online language learning at King's College is like; the development of linguistic competencies seems to come second. The topics covered include greetings, self-introductions (name, nationality, profession), exchanging personal details, explaining motives for learning Spanish, and conveying intentions using the verb *querer* ('want to').

Target language is introduced through short videos which come with transcripts. Most focus on grammar, but there are also videos that cover vocabulary and the Spanish sound system. Practice activities sometimes involve external links for sites like *Vocaroo*, on which students can record themselves speaking, or *Quizlet*, on which they can work with flash cards and practice the target structures. Matching activities, gap fills and multiple-choice questions are common tasks. There is a recap test at the end of each week, allowing learners to monitor their progress. Learners are encouraged to participate in the discussion forum, and there is also an option to join a *Speaking Room* via Microsoft Teams or Zoom.

While the course does introduce some basic Spanish structures, there are too many grammar points crammed into two weeks. A real beginner could easily be overwhelmed by the sheer number of rules to remember. There are no communicative warm-up tasks. Language points are introduced in a rather mechanical way and transitions between them are often abrupt. Some videos have no clear purpose as they simply show single words in isolation. Language support is available in English only. Although learners are encouraged to participate in

the discussion forums, in the sample examined most of the postings did not lead to interaction. The longest "discussion" consisted of a comment and three replies, took place in a mixture of English and Spanish, and concerned the course structure and the fees for the microcredential. Speaking Rooms (i.e. videoconferencing on Zoom or Microsoft Teams) did not seem to work effectively either. While some learners were pro-active and tried to arrange meetings at a specific time, others logged in spontaneously and were disappointed not to find any peers to engage with. Some expressed concerns about time zones, lack of technology, and their low level of Spanish. Forum postings suggested significant differences in students' abilities. While some learners were true beginners, others already seemed to have a fairly good command of Spanish.

Overall, the course can undoubtedly help learners acquire some vocabulary and grammatical structures, but it is less clear to what extent it contributes to the development of their communicative competencies. Furthermore, it would be difficult to describe it as an engaging and enjoyable experience. Finally, the fact that the course was clearly designed as a promotion for a fee-based course raises some ethical concerns. MOOCs have been used for building and maintaining institutional brands, and it is not uncommon to find some PR materials included in the course contents. However, these materials are normally shared in the last unit or module of courses that have lasted several weeks or even months and have given learners an opportunity to learn more about the subjects they are interested in. By contrast, *Foundations of Spanish for Global Communication* lasts only two weeks, and the whole course seems to have been designed just to give learners a taste of what they could be learning if they signed up for the microcredential. Branding may be one of the primary reasons why institutions engage with MOOCs (Hollands & Tirthali, 2014), but converting MOOC students to fee-paying courses cannot be the primary objective. MOOC platforms should not be

reduced to advertising billboards.

2. Learn Spanish: Survival Spanish for Beginners (Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana, Columbia)

This is also an introductory general Spanish course. It is set as a three-week course at a pace of six study hours per week. According to the course description, no prior knowledge of Spanish is required. The course begins with a video presentation about the importance of Spanish language in the world. The presentation is delivered in Spanish at a normal speed with the subtitles in Spanish and English. Learners are informed that the course will be delivered mostly in Spanish, which is justified as an effort to maximize language exposure. They are also told that instructors will not be able to join their discussions or respond to individual comments, and are advised to take advantage of English subtitles and explanations and to form learning communities for mutual support.

Week 1 covers greetings and exchanging personal information. In week 2 learners practice asking about prices of items and services, while week 3 focuses on talking about places in a city and giving directions. While the topics selected seem appropriate for beginners, the same cannot be said of the course methodology. Exposure to the target language is certainly one of the most important factors in language learning. However, language exposure does not lead automatically to language acquisition. For learning to take place, input must be comprehensible to learners (Krashen, 1985). Providing lengthy explanations in a target language to teach basic phrases such as daily greetings does not seem like a pedagogically valid approach. Learners who can understand those videos will have already been familiar with the target phrases. For those who are trying to learn them, English translations of the videos are the only resource.

Vocabulary is taught in chunks. Learners are exposed to whole phrases that they are expected to memorize. Teaching language chunks can increase learners' fluency and the accuracy of their output. However, the course introduces a variety of chunks for the same language function. These chunks contain different language forms which are not covered in the course. Here is an excerpt from the section on asking for a bill:

La cuenta, por favor. = The check, please.
¿Podría darme la cuenta, por favor? = Could you give me the check, please?
¿Me puede dar la cuenta, por favor? = Can you give me the check, please?
Deme la cuenta, por favor. = Give me the check, please.
Me trae la cuenta, por favor. = Bring me the check, please.
Me regala la cuenta, por favor. = Give me the check, please.

A learner who is not familiar with the Spanish pronoun system and conditional and imperative verb forms will only be able to memorize the phrases above without comprehending the nuances they convey. Without knowledge of word order or verb conjugation rules, generating new phrases will also be difficult if not impossible.

The course includes several 'listen and repeat' pronunciation practice activities. However, these activities are long and monotonous. For example, in the audio file on numbers and prices, a flat male voice reads through a list of phrases and numbers for 8 minutes.

Forum writing activities at the end of each unit consist of two tasks: one in which learners are "communicating" with the character from the course video and

another in which they are supposed to imagine they are in a Spanish speaking country and need to perform communicative acts specified in the task instructions. For example, in week 2, learners are asked to imagine they are about to return to their countries from their trip to Latin America. They want to buy some gifts for their families and friends. Their task is to ask for the prices of at least five different items. In week 3 task they are in a taxi. They should greet the driver, ask him to take them to a place of interest and give him the necessary directions. Learners are instructed to repeat the task with three different locations. The problem is that while these tasks make learners use the target language, they do not promote interaction. Each learner is writing an imaginary dialogue individually on which they never receive any kind of feedback from the course instructor or other learners. Although the responses are shared in the forum, their pedagogical value is the same as if they were written in a learner's diary.

In short, the course does not provide enough support for learners to acquire grammatical structures in a meaningful way. Practice activities lack basic elements of communicative language tasks such as information gap and performance feedback.

3. Spanish for Successful Communication in Healthcare Settings (Rice University, US)

This is an intermediate level Spanish course for healthcare practitioners. The course consists of four modules which focus on doctor-patient interactions. Each module is divided into four lessons: grammar, vocabulary, the dynamics of spoken interaction, and sociocultural aspects of communication. After each module there is a 10-question quiz, and after the last module there is also a final exam. Learners are advised to complete the lessons sequentially, as they build upon each other.

The course is self-paced and the time needed for completion is estimated at 168 hours.

Each lesson consists of four parts:

(1) *Introduction* – with activities designed to activate learners' background and linguistic knowledge,

(2) *Analysis* – in which learners work with authentic samples of doctor-patient interaction,

(3) *Review* – in which learners can practice the target structures, and

(4) *Homework* – which includes open-ended tasks designed to extend learners' knowledge and encourage them to relate what they have learned to their professional and social contexts.

This structure is followed in the videos and *Student Handouts* (activity sheets), which learners can complete online or print out. All videos are instructor-led and include PowerPoint slides and at least one recording of authentic healthcare provider consultation. The videos are not monotonous, pre-recorded lectures; rather, they feel like private lessons developed around a dialogue with the teacher, who offers support and encouragement. Explanations and clarifications are provided throughout the lesson, and the course is designed in a way that makes learners feel the teacher's presence. The lectures also contain some tips on learning strategies. For example, learners are advised to plan their learning pace, write down new words and example sentences in their vocabulary book, and review them regularly.

Audio recordings use authentic language samples, with incomplete sentences, hesitations, idiomatic language, overlapping speech and sometimes background noise. The speakers are of different origins and come from a range of age groups, giving learners exposure to different accents and speaking rates. Full transcripts

of the lectures and recordings (with English translations) are provided to facilitate learners' comprehension. Learners are encouraged to reflect both on the linguistic and socio-cultural aspects of communication, make predictions, and record their observations. For example, in warm-up tasks, learners are invited to recall what they already know about the topic or a particular L2 structure, to reflect on their work contexts or on communication patterns used in a particular situation in their native language. During the *Analysis* stage they may be asked to compare the language of an authentic doctor-patient interaction with that of a scripted textbook dialogue. Grammar is always presented in context, and visual aids on the slides and *Student Handouts* have a clear pedagogical purpose. At the end of each unit there is an *Answer Key* with the solutions to the exercises, additional explanations and notes, model answers, and scripts for the speaking activities. Learners are advised to analyze their errors and learn from them. Exposure to authentic materials and a critical analysis approach promote learners' communicative competence as well as their engagement in the learning process. The course also has a forum where learners can post their questions and ask for clarification and confirmation. The forum is regularly reviewed by the course instructor and TAs.

In summary, *Spanish for Successful Communication in Healthcare Settings* is a well-designed course that could serve as a model for how MOOC teaching can be combined with the principles of active, communicative language learning.

4. Spanish Vocabulary Project (University of California, Davis, US)

Spanish Vocabulary Project is offered as the fifth and final part of *Learn Spanish: Basic Spanish Vocabulary Specialization*, a combination of shorter courses upon whose completion learners can receive a Coursera certificate. It is set as a seven-week beginners' course consisting of three modules and a final project.

The estimated study time for the course is 21 hours. The course has a real-life project as an objective. Learners are asked to imagine they are applying for an all-expenses paid, educational trip to a Spanish-speaking nation of their choice. They need to introduce themselves to their host families, research the culture and history of the country they are planning to visit, make an itinerary of places they want to see, and plan activities they want to take part in. As a final assessment, learners are asked to summarize the results of their research in a written report and prepare an oral presentation.

The course is offered by the University of California (Davis) and follows the structure of on-campus courses. It adopts a traditional teacher-centred approach. Grammar is taught explicitly and deductively. Vocabulary slides contain Spanish-English word lists which learners are expected to memorize. All information and instructions are provided in English. While this approach makes the course more accessible to some learners, it excludes those who do not have a good command of English. It also limits learners' exposure to Spanish.

In the sample reviewed, interaction between learners was also marked by limited use of Spanish. Not many students joined forum discussions, and among those who did quite a few opted to make their contributions in English.

Problems were also observed with respect to the assignments and assessment. In each module learners were asked to write a short essay. These essays provided a basis for the final report and oral presentation. Learners were encouraged to share their first essay drafts with their peers. However, as this was an optional task, not many students uploaded their assignments, and even fewer were willing to engage in peer assessment.

Peer feedback is also used in assessment of final essay drafts, with the difference that at that point learners work with full scoring rubrics. As the purpose of the first draft is to help learners improve their assignments and give them some practice in peer reviewing, it is not clear why rubrics have not been made available for the first drafts as well. Making rubric access and final draft assessment available only to learners who have opted to purchase the course certificates raises some questions about what 'an *open* course' really means.

It should also be noted that even with the rubrics and detailed guidelines about the assignments, many learners seemed to struggle with peer assessment. One reason may be their low proficiency, which made it difficult to judge the grammatical accuracy of their peers. Another problem is the grading criteria. Learners who want to obtain a course certificate are asked to write three research-based 400~700-word essays and prepare one 3~5-minute presentation over a course of seven weeks. The target length of 400 to 700 words seems a much broader range than is common in face-to-face courses. While it can be assumed that flexible guidelines were introduced to make assessment more sensitive to the range of abilities of MOOC takers, it is not clear how these differences should be accommodated at the grading stage. Interpreting learners' feedback also proved difficult. Here is an example of the rubric-based peer feedback that the author of this study received on one of the assignments:

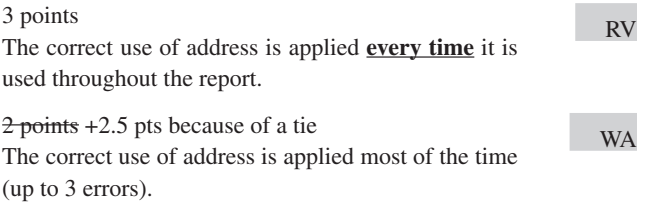

Image 1. Sample of rubric-based peer feedback on the use of formal/informal address pronouns (usted vs tú) in the assignment

It is difficult to tell what '*because of a tie*' means in this context and what segments of the text the other learner considers to be errors. If learners cannot understand their feedback, they will not be able to learn from their errors and make improvement. Furthermore, the assignment in question did not contain any errors in the use of formal and informal address pronoun use, which means that peer feedback was not only confusing but also erroneous.

Coursera lists *Spanish Vocabulary Project* as in independent course, and only after clicking on the course page do learners find out it is a part of a Specialization (Image 2). However, it is clearly not a course to be taken independently of other components that form Basic Spanish Vocabulary Specialization. Taken on its own, the course feels more like a test in which learners are supposed to demonstrate what they know than an opportunity to learn and build language skills.

Image 2. Sample of Spanish course listings on the Coursera platform (https://www.coursera.org/search?query=Spanish&)

More attention is needed to the layout of MOOC websites and course descriptions, so that potential learners have a clear understanding of the nature of the course they are signing up for.

5. A Travel by Spanish America: Spanish for Beginners (Universidad del Rosario, Columbia)

A Travel by Spanish America is classified as a beginner level course. It lasts four weeks with estimated study time of 4~6 hours per week. It aims to prepare learners for a trip to a Spanish-speaking country and introduces some aspects of Spanish American culture. The course consists of four units, each divided into seven parts named to evoke a travel experience:

1. Tarjeta de embarque (*a boarding pass* to start the journey through reading comprehension)
2. El mapa (*a map* to locate and get around in Spanish grammar)
3. El despegue (*the take off* on the way to oral comprehension)
4. El equipaje de mano (*the carry-on luggage* to place the vocabulary)
5. El aterrizaje (*the landing* to share what has been learned with other 'travellers')
6. La guía turística (*a tourist guidebook* to get to know some places in Hispanic America)
7. El seguro de viaje (*a travel insurance* to reinforce learning)

While the unit structure suggests a gradual build-up of language skills, the course is well beyond beginners' level. Instruction is conducted almost entirely in Spanish, and the language used to explain the target structures is far more complex than the structures themselves. Too many grammar points are crammed in one unit. Vocabulary sections often include language nuances that may be overwhelming for a beginner learner. For example, learners are taught colloquial expressions used to refer to money in different Spanish speaking countries just after they have learned to say numbers from 1 to 100. In addition, transitions between the sections are not very smooth and the course as a whole lacks coherence.

Images in some activities are not very clear. Furthermore, due to the page design, learners have to scroll up and down several times in order to be able to see the images and complete the activities. Some pages do not open in Safari. Section headings can also be confusing at times as can be seen in the example below where the header suggests vocabulary work, but the unit focus is on grammar.

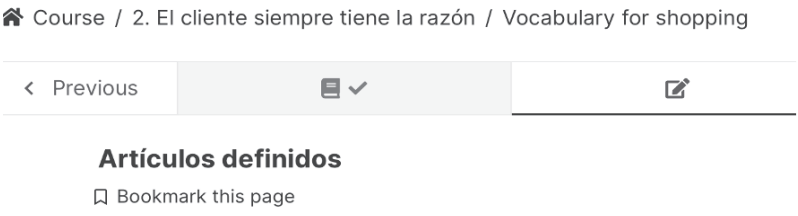

Image 3. A mismatch between section headers and unit contents in *A Travel by Spanish America*: Spanish for Beginners course (Universidad del Rosario, Columbia)

Clear labelling of sections and sub-sections is very important for MOOC learners so they can find and review the content as necessary.

Possibly in attempt to help learners relate to the situations in the videos, one of the characters was made to speak Spanish with a very strong American accent. Not only is it annoying, but it is also a pedagogically questionable approach considering that the course is designed for beginners and that not all MOOC takers have English as their L1. Audio recordings in the 'tourist guidebook' section are at an intermediate level and are far too complex for beginning learners.

Learner autonomy is promoted through forum interactions and self-assessment tasks. However, not much activity was observed in the forum. Sometimes a lapse of several months occurred between assessment posting and peer feedback. Although encouraged to record their responses, most learners made contributions

in writing. Some learners did not take the tasks seriously and responded with one word or an irrelevant comment as can be seen in the example below:

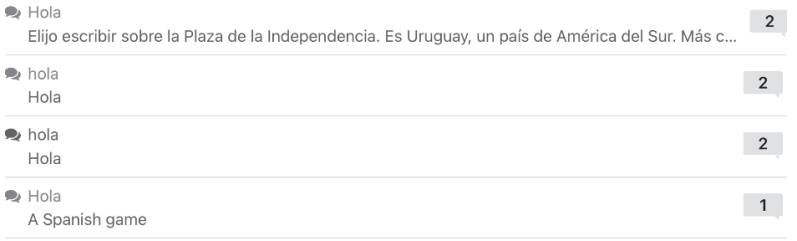

Image 4. Learners' responses to the question about a place they would like to visit (*A Travel by Spanish America: Spanish for Beginners*, Universidad del Rosario, Columbia)

On a positive note, learners are invited to reflect on their learning by using bilingual (Spanish/English) self-evaluation sheets in which they are asked to rate their acquired competencies on a scale of 1 to 5. Self-assessment encourages learners to think about the language as well as their learning practices and can be a powerful learning tool.

In summary, although individual portions of the course can contribute to learning, the course as a whole is not suitable for beginners. Revisions are needed with respect to the selection of the target language, task sequencing and course unity.

6. Basic Spanish 3: Getting There (Universitat Politècnica de València, Spain)

This is also a 4-week general Spanish course for beginners with an estimated study time of 3~4 hours per week. The course stands out for its clear level descriptions. It is set at A2 level on the CEFR scale with a prerequisite of 60 hours of language instruction. Potential learners are warned that the course is specifically designed for English speakers.

In terms of content, the course covers basic vocabulary related to daily routines at home and at work, leisure activities and life in the city. Grammar points include articles, nouns, adjectives, and present, future and past tenses of regular and irregular verbs.

The course begins in a somewhat abrupt manner — in the opening activity learners are asked to order words that describe moments in time according to how close or far away they are in relation to the present. Lack of warm-up activities and sudden switching between vocabulary and grammar activities can be observed throughout the course. As can be seen in the image below, the Table of Contents is very general and does not really tell learners whether the subsection will focus on grammar or vocabulary.

Image 5. Sample of Table of Contents in *Basic Spanish 3* course (Universitat Politècnica de València, Spain)

Target vocabulary and grammar structures are practiced through numerous activities with multiple-choice questions, matching, and reordering tasks being the most common. Dictation and gap fill tasks are also used. Some audio files focus on pronunciation. Task instructions are provided in Spanish and English. The layout of some pages requires learners to keep scrolling up and down in order to complete the activities. There are short videos that mimic real life situations

which help learners practice listening comprehension and consolidate vocabulary and grammar. Comprehension is facilitated through Spanish transcripts and English translations. Videos are followed by multiple-choice questions through which learners can confirm their understanding. There are only two options for each question, making the tasks quite easy. There are no reading activities beyond the sentence level. Learners can take advantage of the Discussion Forum. The topics have been pre-grouped into the following threads: *Certificates, General, Good-bye and farewell, Platform problems, Schedule and dates*, and *Suggestions, congratulations, and complaints*. Learners can also add new threads. The forum is monitored by the staff and students' inquiries are answered. However, in the sample observed most postings were made in English and concerned practical questions about the course. There was hardly any interaction between the learners.

Overall, the course content matches the level described. Frequent recycling of the phrases facilitates their memorization and consolidation of the target structures. However, the presentation of the material feels rather dry and practice activities are somewhat mechanical. There are no warm-up tasks or questions that invite learners to reflect on the language or provide extended answers. Transitions between activities are also sometimes very abrupt —within the same unit the topic may switch from body parts to answering the phone, for example. The course also fails to convey instructor presence. While the activities can be completed through self-study, the course falls short of engaging students. As such, it seems better suited to be a supplement to a face-to-face class than the main learning resource.

Discussion

Before entering discussion about the LMOOC design and pedagogy, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the present study. First, although efforts were made to select courses that varied in their objectives and were offered by different universities on different platforms, the small scope of the study limits generalizability of the results. Furthermore, considering that MOOCs are constantly being added and archived, observations made with regard to the course offerings may have limited validity. It is possible that course sampling at another time would have produced different results. Third, although an attempt was made to review the courses from the learner's point of view, the fact that the author is a trained language instructor, a researcher, and an advanced speaker of Spanish limits to some extent the intended authenticity of this perspective. Finally, there is a subjectivity factor. Learners, teachers, and researchers all hold beliefs about the nature of language learning, effectiveness of different learning tasks, the roles of a teacher, value of peer collaboration, etc. Therefore, not everyone may agree with the evaluation of the course designs and learning activities made in this study. While acknowledging these limitations, an effort was made to support all claims and observations with evidence and make the evaluation as objective as possible.

The first thing that becomes clear to anybody who engages with LMOOCs is that courses are not uniform. While this may not come as a surprise, there is a tendency in the literature to discuss LMOOCs as one entity that is then juxtaposed with traditional face-to-face language classes. In reality, LMOOCs differ significantly in terms of their structure, tasks, expected level of learner engagement, peer collaboration, and feedback. Therefore, specific course characteristics must be taken into account in discussions of their effectiveness and possible applications. The discussion should not centre on whether MOOCs can be used to teach foreign languages, but rather on what can be taught online and what kind of tasks

and teaching practices are effective in building specific language competencies. Course methodology and the nature of the learning activities must be explicitly outlined to potential learners. Currently, prospective students can find information about course objectives, estimated number of study hours and certificate upgrades. However, they also need to know whether there are any compulsory course components, how their progress will be evaluated, and how, when and by whom feedback will be provided. Course descriptions should also clarify the expected amount and nature of peer interaction, so that learners can choose the courses that best match their learning styles and preferences. MOOC takers differ immensely in their needs, backgrounds, and expectations. A one-size-fits-all approach is both illusionary and counterproductive. Instead of trying to create a universal "panacea" course that can respond to the heterogeneity of learners' needs and preferences, MOOCs themselves should be diversified so that learners have more options to choose from.

More detailed level descriptions are also needed. Currently, LMOOCs carry general level descriptions like "Beginner" or "Intermediate". However, these labels are not specific enough to let potential learners know what to expect. Although they are both beginners, there is a big difference between somebody who is starting a new language for the first time and somebody who has been studying it for six months. A lack of clear level guidelines means that LMOOCs are often taken by learners of very different abilities, which creates problems when it comes to task completion and peer feedback. For somebody who has been learning a new language for just a couple of months, writing a 400-word paragraph or preparing a 5-minute presentation is a formidable task. Giving students clear guidance on what to expect can increase their satisfaction and reduce course attrition rates. Level descriptions should be provided with reference to internationally recognized proficiency scales such as CEFR, and potential learners should have an option

of taking a computer-graded proficiency test to determine whether the course is right for them. If any prior knowledge or competences are presumed, course descriptions must make that clear.

Another issue of concern is a lack of level variety. Most Spanish courses found on the three MOOC platforms targeted beginners. The situation is similar for other languages. Chong, Khan and Reinders (2022) conducted a comprehensive review of 100 LMOOCs offered on the Coursera and edX platforms between mid-August 2020 and mid-September 2020 and found that 62% of the courses were aimed at beginners, 32% were for intermediate learners, and only 6% were designed for advanced learners. Focusing courses on the beginner learner limits the options in terms of course content. Beginner courses tend to centre on greetings, self-introductions, numbers, and basic questions. A limited offer of courses for intermediate and advanced learners also means that learners who complete initial courses cannot continue their studies. Language learning requires time and dedication, and even with a best-designed course and highly motivated learners, what can be in achieved in a couple of weeks or months is limited.

Course materials also require further attention. LMOOCs tend to rely on short instructional videos which highlight the target vocabulary and grammar points. However, in many cases the videos embrace a traditional, teacher-centred lecture style. They often feel dry and impersonal, and sometimes may be difficult to follow due to the large amount of information that learners are expected to memorize. Furthermore, while transcripts may be provided in multiple languages, instruction is generally only offered in the target language or English. Having the target language used as the medium of instruction increases language exposure and can benefit intermediate and advanced level learners. However, it may prove overwhelming for those at lower levels of proficiency. Grammatical and

lexical explanations in English make courses more accessible for some but not all learners. Discussion questions often fail to foster productive exchanges of ideas. They are ambiguous and lack clear purpose. This is reflected in students' answers, which are often isolated comments that do not build on other learners' contributions. Learners seem more interested in completing the task requirements than engaging in communication with their peers. Practice activities and progress quizzes often seem rather mechanical and tend to involve scripted, somewhat artificial dialogues, matching activities, and multiple-choice questions. Some activities include ludic elements. For example, learners may be invited to compete on task completion speed. However, more research is needed to determine the pedagogical value of these activities. While trying to "beat" my peers on speed, the author found herself paying little attention to the form of the target words. Recognizing the first couple of letters was enough to find a matching word, and after all, it was the speed that mattered most.

Although there is no doubt that the online environment imposes some limitations on the ways knowledge can be transmitted, it does not mean that courses have to be built on inauthentic materials, rote memorization of rules and mechanical drills with decontextualized language. LMOOCs should give learners opportunities to engage with the language in meaningful and authentic ways. Like in a traditional classroom, instructional videos should be accompanied by pre-viewing, while-viewing and post-viewing activities. The three-stage activity model should help learners to activate their knowledge schemata, make and test language hypotheses, reflect on the learning outcomes, and consolidate the content (Williams, 2013). The aforementioned *Spanish for Successful Communication in Healthcare Settings* (Rice University) is a positive example how these principles can be implemented in a MOOC. Learners are provided with authentic linguistic input and encouraged to engage in the learning process. Practice activities are not limited to gap fills and

matching exercises; learners are expected to think about language use in a context and try to infer usage patterns and rules. Although there is no spoken interaction in real time, the course helps learners build all aspects of communicative competence identified by Canale and Swain (1980): linguistic competence (grammar and vocabulary knowledge), sociolinguistic competence (ability to produce language of appropriate register and style), discourse competence (ability to produce coherent and cohesive utterances) and strategic competence (ability to solve communication problems in an effective way). Opportunities for language output are certainly important for language acquisition. They help learners improve their fluency (Mitchell & Myles, 2004) and move from semantics-based language processing (comprehension) to the syntactic processing required for accurate production (Swain, 1995). However, language output is not limited to speaking. A learner who is responding to comprehension questions or completing a dialogue in writing is clearly imposing syntactic structure on utterances. *Spanish for Successful Communication in Healthcare Settings* contains many activities which push learners to pay attention to linguistic forms in the input. For example, when learners are asked to complete the doctor's lines in a fictional dialogue with a patient based on the principles of collaborative interaction, they can refer to the authentic language models to identify language resources that will help them convey empathy, offer treatment alternatives, and include the patient in decision making. The need to handle complex structures beyond their current level of competence pushes learning forward. By comparing their output with the model answers learners can receive feedback on their language hypotheses that is not less valuable than feedback received through the negotiation of meaning that takes place during learner–learner interaction.

The role of peer collaboration should be approached with particular care and caution. Most LMOOCs have been designed around the idea of learners

collaborating either in discussion forums or through audio and video messages. There is no doubt that learning takes place in social context and that interaction is an essential component of language learning (Vygotsky, 1978; 1988). However, it is questionable whether peer exchanges made on LMOOC platforms can really be described as interaction. LMOOCs are different from disciplinary content-based MOOCs in which learners can engage in rich discussions and constructive feedback based on their prior knowledge and experiences. LMOOC takers are language learners, and their postings are often limited in scope and quality by their language proficiency. Forum contributions tend to be short and are often made to practice the language studied in the lesson rather than to engage in real communication. For example, when asked what they were going to do when they got to the country they planned to visit, many students answered in just one or two words: “comer” (eat), “dormir” (sleep). Peer comments were also short and often made in English rather than Spanish (e.g., “Very good”, “Nice” or “Me too”). Some postings did not receive any response at all. Similar observations were made in other studies. Chong et al. (2022), for example, estimated an average learner forum participation rate at only 10%. The option of collaborating through videoconferencing systems also seemed to have a limited effect. Some learners reported not being able to find any peers when they logged in, while others expressed their concerns about “socializing online” with their limited language proficiency. When vocabulary consists of few basic phrases, peer conferencing becomes a 2-minute activity. In short, with the current course design, “communication” on LMOOC platforms often seems to be a one-way street. It is devoid of interpersonal and intercultural relationships, and therefore has a limited pedagogical value. In addition, it may be demotivating for the learners.

The future may be different. With the rapid progress of AI technology, it may not be long before MOOC platforms are equipped with chatbots as “conversation

partners". Chatbots are computer programs that use artificial intelligence and natural language processing to simulate human conversation. This technology is already being tested, and while chatbots are still inferior to human partners (Thompson, Gallacher, & Howarth, 2018), AI is poised to bring big changes in the field of language education. It can individualize learning, give learners an opportunity to experiment with language in a judgment-free environment and help them receive targeted feedback (TeachThought Staff, 2014, rpt. in 2022). However, for the time being, LMOOCs should be designed in a way that makes peer collaboration an option rather than a basis for successful course completion. MOOCs are different not only from face-to-face classes but also from standard online courses. Online language courses do not have the constraints imposed by massive cohorts. They are usually teacher-paced and often involve live sessions at designated times, which give learners an opportunity to meet and build interpersonal relationships. Teacher feedback is regular, and learners' errors are highlighted and corrected. In this kind of environment, peer-collaboration becomes a natural extension of teacher-led activities and individual study. However, in LMOOCs where learning is self-paced, where learners are scattered around the world, and where there is no direct teacher-learner interaction, peer tutoring is both logistically difficult and arguably of limited value when it comes to the development of second language skills.

LMOOCs designed around the premise that learners will work with materials individually are more likely to lead to fulfilment of the learning objectives. For the author of this paper, enrolment in *Spanish for Successful Communication in Healthcare Settings* was an enjoyable and rewarding experience despite a lack of medical background or a need for medical Spanish. The course gives learners a sense of progress. They can work on the materials at their own pace, analyze input and experiment with language, and receive clear and immediate feedback on the

accuracy of their hypotheses. There are frequent opportunities for self-assessment. At the end of each unit learners can access a file with the model answers which help them check their understanding. Progress tests also include a variety of questions that cover vocabulary, grammar, and metacognitive strategies. Some questions ask learners not just to select the correct answer but to produce the language. The course platform included a forum where learners can post questions or share their opinions or experiences. However, at no stage is learners' progress or the feedback they receive dependent on other students and their level of course engagement or language proficiency.

Reservations expressed about the pedagogical effect of peer collaboration do not mean that it has no value or that it should be eliminated from LMOOCs. Like learners in a physical classroom, LMOOC learners vary in their learning styles and course preferences. There are learners who enjoy and actively engage in interaction with their peers despite the fact they may not receive comprehensive, systematic feedback. They should have an opportunity to make individual contributions and communicate with their peers in both oral and written form through forum discussions and in real time through video conferencing systems. LMOOC platforms should be equipped with a more refined set of the communication tools that would allow learners to indicate the activity they are working on and their interest in collaborating on it. Motivated learners could then meet on open web-conferencing platforms such as Zoom, Skype or Google Meet. However, independent study is at the core of LMOOC learning experience, and that should be reflected in their course design and methodology. Successful MOOC learners are autodidacts, self-motivated and self-disciplined individuals with well-developed study skills, good work habits, and technological competencies. They may engage in peer collaboration but are not dependent on peer support and are not necessarily looking for it or expecting to receive it on a

MOOC platform.

Assessment is another area of concern. Like in the case of other MOOCs, learners' progress and achievement in LMOOCs are often measured through peer-graded assignments and computer-graded tests and quizzes. However, peer-assessment practices in LMOOCs are problematic for a number of reasons. To begin with, access to peer assignments is often restricted to learners who have paid an upgrade fee, a pre-requisite for a course certificate. This means that only a portion of MOOC students can view work or receive feedback from their peers. This restriction seems difficult to justify on either pedagogical or ethical grounds. Peer evaluation can give students exposure to new ideas and strategies (Chinn, 2005) and encourage them to reflect on their understanding of the materials, promoting their autonomy (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2001), problem-solving skills, and productive language abilities (Castrillo de Larreta-Azelain, 2014). Therefore, an opportunity to view and review the work of their peers can be a valuable learning experience for participants. Furthermore, the idea that knowledge should be shared freely to benefit the global society is inherent in the MOOC concept. Charging a fee to provide access to peer work seems to go against the fundamental principles of the MOOC movement.

While peer grading opportunities should be incorporated into coursework for learning purposes, peer assessment cannot be a basis for course certification. In on-campus classes peer feedback has become a standard component of writing courses, but few instructors would rely on peer feedback alone when assigning the final grade. In LMOOCs, learners are often required to assess the work of their peers based on the criteria in rubrics provided by the course instructor. However, even with these guidelines, assessment is often difficult and arbitrary. It is questionable to what extent the language in the rubrics is comprehensible to the

learners. Furthermore, not all students have knowledge and skills to distinguish between poor, average, or exemplary work. They are also less likely to detect instances of plagiarism. Furthermore, the rubric criteria do not only specify the content that should be included in the assignment, but also asks learners to evaluate the grammatical accuracy of their peers. This may be difficult since LMOOC takers are language learners themselves. Due to their lack of expertise, learners frequently provide feedback that is insufficient, confusing, and even erroneous (Gilliland, Oyama, & Stacey, 2018). The present study confirmed these observations. Research evidence suggests that learners themselves seem are aware of these problems and are often reluctant to engage with peer assessment. Garcia Alonso and Samy (2018) surveyed a group of Egyptian students enrolled in a Spanish MOOC and found that as many as 72% did not take part in the peer assessment tasks. In addition to time constraints, the main reasons reported were uncertainty about how to approach assessment and low confidence in ability to correct others.

Interpreting peers' comments may also be difficult. Rubrics only indicate areas that need improvement, but do not tell students how to improve or correct their work. Language learners want and expect to be corrected. If they feel they have not received adequate feedback they may feel frustrated and lose their motivation, and even withdraw from the course.

Computer-based tests have been widely used to assess students' reading and listening comprehension, grammar, and vocabulary knowledge. Some studies suggest that learners prefer computer-based assessment to peer evaluation. Sánchez and Escribano (2014) reported that learners were more likely to choose and complete the courses which used computer grading than those that involved peer evaluation or a combination of the two methods. Martín-Monje, Castrillo, and

Mañana-Rodríguez (2018) reported that videos and automated grading activities were the most frequently used content in LMOOCs. However, despite the progress made in the fields of natural language processing and information retrieval, none of the courses examined in this study deployed automated scoring technologies to assess learners' compositions or speech. Automated text and speech scoring technologies are already being used to evaluate millions of students' responses on standardized tests every year, including high-stake exams such as GMAT. These deploy systems which have proved effective in both formative and summative assessment (Ramesh & Sanampudi, 2021). Rather than pushing learners to form artificial and often dysfunctional "online learning communities", technology should be given a more prominent role on MOOC platforms. While computer-generated feedback may not be perfect, it is likely to be more comprehensive, accurate, systematic, and consistent than rubric-based peer assessment.

Intrinsic problems in the MOOC assessment model raise concerns about credibility and value of MOOC certificates. Identity verification technology is not a safeguard against academic dishonesty or a guarantee of fair assessment. However, academic dishonesty becomes an issue only when MOOC assessment is linked to course certification. Many learners see MOOCs as an opportunity for personal enrichment rather than a shortcut to obtaining a formal qualification. In a small-scale but illustrative survey of a group of Egyptian students taking a Spanish MOOC, Garcia Alonso and Samy (2018) found that 39% of those enrolled were interested in improving their language skills. Only 2% were interested in obtaining a certificate. The focus of MOOC assessment should be learning rather than certification. Progress quizzes and tests should be made available to learners so they can monitor their progress and identify possible gaps in their understanding. Peer feedback should not be a prerequisite for course completion or certification but rather an opportunity for learners to engage in a meaningful

formative assessment dialogue. Research on collaborative learning shows that group work is most beneficial when learners engage in rich interaction such as conceptual explanations rather than when they are expected to provide specific answers (Kizlicec, 2013). Peer feedback on open-ended tasks should focus on the content and give learners an opportunity to share their ideas and build their oral and written fluency. Identification of grammatical, lexical, and spelling errors could be practiced by having learners work on the texts specifically designed for that purpose. Like in face-to-face classes, learners could work on these tasks individually, then compare their answers with their peers, and finally compare their answers against model answers provided by the instructor. This kind of practice should help them improve their language skills as well as acquire editing skills that will help them critically review and improve their own work. These activities should be made available to all learners.

More emphasis should also be placed on self-assessment. Self-awareness and judgment are valuable life-skills (Swift & Steers, 2006). Self-grading was found to bring greater learning benefits than peer-grading (Sadler & Good, 2006), and to promote development of students' analytical and problem-solving skills (Sluijsmans, Dochy, & Moerkerke, 1998). Summarizing the relevant research, Kulkarni et al. (2013, p. 3) assert that self-assessment "helps students reflect on gaps in their understanding, making them more resourceful, confident, and higher achievers… and provides learning gains not seen with external evaluation." In the field of language learning, self-assessment can help learners understand their errors, and error awareness was found to be an important factor in treatment of language fossilization (Dodigovic, 2005). Courses should be designed in a way that encourages learners to engage in the learning process, evaluate their progress, and reflect on their learning practices. *Spanish for Successful Communication in Healthcare Settings* is again a good example of how this can be achieved in

practice. The course provides many opportunities for self-assessment, and, thanks to the comprehensive answer keys, learners can identify and correct their errors and build their language competencies.

In short, LMOOC assessment should be primarily formative in nature. Learners interested in course certification should be examined in testing facilities linked to embassies or partner institutions, with their knowledge and competencies formally evaluated by the instructor or a staff member, for which they should be charged an examination fee.

Conclusion

LMOOCs represent a new learning format with enormous potential for both formal and lifelong learning. Yet, despite their rapid growth and the global demand for language skills, their impact in foreign language education has remained marginal. The results of this study suggest that the main obstacle may be methodology. With the current course design, it would seem unrealistic to assume that a new language can be acquired solely via a MOOC platform. Language learning requires hundreds of hours of exposure, expert guidance, opportunities to practice, and regular and targeted feedback, conditions which are difficult to sustain in a global, massive online classroom.

Making LMOOCs effective requires a rethinking of the ways knowledge can be structured and transmitted. It also requires willingness to acknowledge the limitations of the MOOC modality and realistic expectations about what MOOCs can deliver. Rather than mimicking full-fledged traditional language programmes, LMOOCs should target specific skills or competencies such as pronunciation, business correspondence, or communication in health care. Courses should be modular and self-contained, so that learners can focus on the specific aspects of

the language they want to work on. Levels should also be diversified. Each module should contain warm-up activities, direct teaching with modelling, practice activities, and assessment with ongoing feedback. Practice activities should use authentic language and resemble real-life situations, so that learners can work with the language in a meaningful way. Tasks should be varied to match different learning styles and sustain learners' motivation. Feedback must be incorporated into the coursework in forms of computer-graded tests or model answers for open ended tasks, so that learners can see their errors. Courses must be designed in a way that will allow learners to structure their studies and give them control over their learning pace and the amount of interaction they have with their peers. A blended learning model, which combines online and face-to-face learning, could also help address some of the challenges of the current LMOOCs. However, the hybrid model would require licenses with more flexible terms of use. A truly *open* MOOC should make it possible for teachers not only to use materials, but also to adapt them, mix them, and redistribute them freely. In addition, if MOOCs are to honour the principle of free education, learners should not be required to pay an upgrade fee in order to gain access to peer work or maintain access to the courses they have taken, as is the case now.

Learning with LMOOCs also requires different teaching and learning strategies and consequently new types of teacher and learner training. Teachers must have ICT skills as well as knowledge of the constraints and possibilities of the online medium. They must be able to prepare video lectures, guide students to the resources, and design practice activities and quizzes. They must know how to foster linguistic and communicative competencies, and provide feedback in an environment where there is no direct teacher–learner interaction. Learners must develop adequate technical skills and get used to an online learning environment. They must have confidence, self-determination, and self-motivation, as well as

abilities to plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning.

Learning platforms should also be improved. Most MOOCs are content-based courses, and current MOOC platforms do not support interaction in real time. However, for language learners real time interactions are an opportunity to use the target language. Although learner–learner interaction is not sufficient for language acquisition, it can have a positive effect on learners' motivation and their language development. Platforms should also be made more intuitive, so that less experienced users can navigate them more easily and switch smoothly between synchronous and asynchronous learning tools. To increase accessibility, instructions and demonstrational videos for platform tools should be made available in multiple languages.

Education in general, and language teaching in particular, will always be open to improvement, and should therefore be a process of constant evaluation and re-engineering on the basis of practical experience and theory. For the time being, LMOOCs are unlikely to replace traditional language classrooms. Yet they can supplement it and strengthen it. Research evidence suggests that they are a viable option when it comes to the acquisition of at least some aspects of language proficiency. Integration of LMOOCs into on-campus courses could enrich learning opportunities for the students. In traditional school settings, students often take courses because they are required. Integration of MOOCs into college programmes would allow students to make more authentic choices that match their true interests, goals, and needs. The success of LMOOCs will depend on the extent learners feel these courses help them to fulfil their objectives. To that end, course contents, teaching methodology, and evaluation practices must be reviewed regularly and systematically. It is hoped that the observations and suggestions made in this study will provide direction for future courses and make LMOOC

platforms a more fertile learning environment.

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