

HOW MASSIVE OPEN ONLINE COURSES CONSTITUTE DIGITAL LEARNING SPACES FOR EFL TEACHERS: A NETNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDY

by **Özgehan Uştuk**

Balıkesir University, Turkey

oustuk @ balikesir.edu.tr

Abstract

Massive open online courses (MOOCs) provide digital learning spaces for individualized professional development that may create opportunities in teacher education and support language teachers. Language teachers need continuous professional development to develop their digital literacies, and further research is essential to investigate new teacher-learning modes and spaces. This netnographic study reports two case learners' MOOC experiences based on the qualitative data collected from digital learner diaries, mentoring session recordings, course assignments and forums, and semi-structured interviews. These were analyzed thematically to explore the learner experiences and behaviours. The findings revealed that MOOCs provide professional development opportunities for language teachers when these courses promote self-regulation, assessment-for-learning, and reflective practice. On the other hand, MOOCs can involve learning challenges when the content, which is generally designed for a general audience, does not match the individual needs and teaching contexts. Accordingly, several implications were drawn for language teacher educators and MOOC designers.

Keywords: CALL teacher education; Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs); online education; digital literacy

1. Introduction

The pandemic experience has shown that online teaching is very challenging for teachers in terms of their digital instructional skills (Mishra et al., 2020; Thumvichit, 2021), digital literacies (Tafazoli, 2021b), and their well-being (MacIntyre et al., 2020). As the pandemic required teachers to teach online with little or no preparation, many teachers participated in online courses/webinars (Tafazoli, 2021a) or engaged in transnational collaborations (Yi & Jang, 2020) because teachers did not feel well-prepared by their prior CALL teacher education or professional development.

CALL teacher education is not a novel field of research, and it resulted in the development of many concepts and pedagogies informing CALL teacher educators; however, teacher education programs (Tømte, 2018) and institutional practices of teacher professional

development (Tafazoli, 2021a) could not have kept up with the opportunities of technology-enhanced education and their resonances in language classrooms. This made it imperative for pre/in-service language teachers to seek further professional development activities to keep abreast.

This study explores the professional development experiences of two pre-service EFL teachers in Turkey through massive open online courses (MOOCs). This study conceptualizes MOOCs as digital learning spaces in which English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers can build up their professional skills, competencies, and digital literacies. Even though MOOCs have been found promising for complementing formal teacher education programs (Langseth & Haugsbakken, 2016; Tømte, 2018), further research is required to better understand learners' experiences and behaviors to maximize the potential of this innovative learning space on CALL teacher education.

2. Massive Open Online Courses: Individualized learning for CALL teachers

MOOCs are defined as a form of online continuous learning activities that typically address a diverse and large learner population (Rieber, 2017; Yeomans & Reich, 2017). They provide modules that help learners build up knowledge and skills in specific fields and topics. Online platforms such as Coursera, FutureLearn, or EdX host MOOCs whereas the content of MOOCs that are available on those platforms are often created by institutions such as universities, global associations, or companies. There are alternative platforms such as Canvas Network, which provides free online courses for educators that are sponsored by governmental or non-governmental organizations, and Udemy, on which freelance trainers can create and offer MOOCs.

MOOCs are innovative and flexible digital spaces that make knowledge accessible for people who do not have the means to participate in face-to-face education or training. In addition to their economic advantage, Jansen et al. (2020) concluded that MOOCs provide autonomy to learners along with the freedom to monitor their self-regulated and individualized learning and development. However, they also highlighted that MOOC learners experience difficulties in maintaining their learning on their own because MOOCs require developed learning strategies.

There are other problems reported in the prior research, such as the low completion rate (e.g. Langseth & Haugsbakken, 2016; Rieber, 2017; Shin & Kang, 2018). To illustrate, Rieber (2017) stated that most of the participants found the MOOC investigated in his study valuable; however, the dropout rate was high, and most of the participants did not complete the course

even though the initial enrollment number was high as well. Yeomans and Reich (2017) conceptualized this phenomenon as the intention-action gap; that is, learners show high interest but not sustained effort for learning. Similarly, Jansen et al. (2020) found that supporting learners' self-regulation significantly improved course completion. Second, assessment constituted another problem for MOOCs. Wei et al. (2021) conducted a systematic review on the learning outcomes of MOOCs and found that it was of critical importance for teacher educators and MOOC designers to develop assessment tools and methods that were relevant to learning outcomes. They called for exploratory studies that investigate MOOC learners' experiences to understand their cognitive, affective, and behavioral learning.

In the teacher education context, Langseth and Haugsbakken (2016) investigated a MOOC that was designed to introduce the concept of blended learning to educators. They found that learning through MOOCs helped pre-service teachers to reflect on their individualized professional learning and skills; however, they also reported low user adoption and course completion rates. These findings infer that problems such as low course completion and assessment can be overcome; however, the literature fails to provide case-based learner experiences that may help educators, MOOC designers, and online teacher education content creators to explore the root of these problems. Particularly in the Turkish context, a recent study by Yaşar and Polat (2021) investigated the use of MOOC-based flipped learning in an EFL teacher education program in Turkey; they suggested that integrating MOOC-based course design might be beneficial to educating teacher candidates as autonomous learners. They highlighted the potential of MOOCs in language teacher education, but they also called for more exploration of learner perceptions and experiences. However, the study did not directly refer to CALL teacher education through MOOCs.

That said, the digital learning experience of teacher-learners in MOOCs remains unearthed in the CALL teacher education context. Based on these gaps in the literature, the current study aims to explore the digital learning experiences of two pre-service EFL teachers in a MOOC on teaching English online.

3. CALL teacher education and pre-service EFL teacher education in Turkey

The *English Language Teaching* (ELT) undergraduate programs in Turkey, which is the research setting in this study, follow a national curriculum that was introduced by the Higher Education Council in 2017. In this curriculum, the teacher candidates are required to complete courses that add up to 240 credits in total. Courses that are equivalent merely to the 8.3% of the total credit mention general instructional technologies explicitly in the course descriptions,

whereas only 3.3% of the total credit (only two field-specific courses) are directly related to the knowledge-base of foreign language education according to the course descriptions. Table 1 presents the courses that explicitly mention instructional technologies in their descriptions.

Table 1. Courses titles, credits, and excerpts from their descriptions as in the National Guide of ELT Undergraduate Programs in Turkey

Course name	Credits / Total	Description excerpts
ICT Technologies	5/240	The concepts of and approaches to ICT technologies, computational thinking, problem-solving (...) the use of the internet in education.
Instructional Technologies	3/240	Information technologies in education; classification of instructional technologies and theoretical frameworks; new trends in learning approaches; (...) instructional technologies as teaching tools and materials and material design (...)
Open and Remote Learning	4/240	(...) technologies used in online education; managing open and remote education; classroom management in open and remote education (...)
*Material Design in ELT	4/240	Using field-specific instructional technologies; software types and purposes (...)
*Novel Approaches in ELT	4/240	(...) the use of technology in language classes (...)

* Courses specified as the ELT field-specific ones rather than general education ones

It is important to note that the national curriculum allows lecturers to design the course syllabi and advises lecturers to take the course descriptions given in the national curriculum into account. Lecturers of other courses *may* intend to develop pre-service teachers' digital literacies (*if* they choose to) and design their syllabi accordingly. However, it has been seen with the pandemic that CALL skills and digital literacy are vital for foreign language educators (Cote & Milliner, 2018; Tafazoli, 2021a), and such *ifs* and *mays* can impact the quality of language education negatively. Crucially, it is argued that the existing language teacher education programs in Turkey may not suffice to prepare pre-service EFL teachers in terms of their digital literacies, and they may fail to educate teacher candidates as *CALL teachers*. This makes it common for pre-service EFL teachers to seek non-formal opportunities along with their formal studies in Turkey (e.g., Uştuk & De Costa, 2022). However, a system in which the formal and the non-formal can nurture and support each other may also be possible.

Accordingly, the MOOC learner experiences of two pre-service EFL teachers in Turkey were explored in this study. These learners intended to develop their digital literacies through a CALL-related MOOC. With this netnographic multiple case study, the following research questions were posed:

1. What motivates pre-service EFL teachers to participate in and continue MOOCs?
2. How do pre-service EFL teachers' MOOC experiences influence their professional development?
3. What affordances and disturbances can be experienced by pre-service EFL teachers during MOOCs?

3. The current study

3.1. The participants

Sevval

The first case participant, Sevval (all names are pseudonyms), was a senior student at a Turkish public university's ELT undergraduate program that participated in a teaching practicum during the 2020-2021 academic year for two semesters. She was assigned to an elementary school by the school district administration. Her mentor teacher taught second and third grades. She was required to teach a minimum of four hours in her mentor's class and compile a teaching portfolio that included the plans and materials of the lessons she taught, along with her reflections and observations. She observed her mentor for three-to-four hours per week for 12 weeks.

Sevval was a pre-service EFL teacher who was suspicious of the effectiveness of online teaching; however, her entire practicum process was moved to the online mode due to the COVID-19 lockdowns. She was concerned about her digital literacies and worried about her lack of online teaching experience. To complement her teaching portfolio, she was required to complete and report a professional development module of her choosing. She decided to participate in a MOOC on online language teaching that was available on a generic MOOC platform.

Ozan

Ozan was also a senior undergraduate student, and he went through the practicum process and completed the same practicum requirements as Sevval. However, he was appointed to a middle school, and his mentor teacher wanted Ozan to observe and teach all middle school grades in

Turkey from the 5th to 8th grades. Accordingly, he observed his mentor's classes for 12 weeks for three-to-four hours every week and taught four lessons. The lessons he taught were supervised by his mentor, just like Sevval.

Ozan had already been teaching EFL for several years at a private language school when he started the practicum to complete his formal undergraduate studies. So he was both an in-service and a pre-service teacher, and he was familiar with teaching online. He taught online for a brief period as *emergency remote teaching* when the pandemic first broke out in spring 2020. He had an understanding of what it required to teach online. However, he was also feeling insecure about his knowledge and skills in teaching EFL online. Based on his experience during emergency remote teaching, he wanted to increase his skills to teach online and decided to enrol in the same MOOC.

3.2. The MOOC

Both participants enrolled in the same MOOC of their choosing. According to the MOOC platform, the online language teaching MOOC included seven modules that were designed to last seven weeks. These modules included videos, supplementary readings, quizzes, peer-assessment activities, and forum discussion prompts. Upon meeting the completion criteria, the platform provided a certificate that was accredited by a US-based university that designed the content. The modules included topics such as the basics of online language teaching, theories and techniques to teach foreign/second languages online, online lesson planning and management, and providing corrective feedback on online teaching.

The MOOC was provided on a generic platform, which normally requires a subscription to enrol; however, the platform also offered financial aid to candidates who do not have the financial capacity to afford MOOCs on their expenses. Both Sevval and Ozan decided to apply for this aid and filled out a form that required applicants to explain how this particular MOOC can increase their professional capacity. Both participants applied for the aid and were awarded free enrolment for this particular MOOC.

3.3. Research design

The current study aimed to understand the experience of learners during a CALL teacher education MOOC. In tandem with this, data collection tools that may provide data throughout different phases of the MOOC process were utilized. Such artefacts were collected as the participants' digital diaries, facilitator-learner mentoring session recordings, participants'

assignments, and forum contributions. Also, semi-structured interviews were conducted with both participants upon the completion of the course and the practicum.

As a netnographic study that utilized ethnographic methods and procedures to research an online learning community in a digital space (Kessler et al., 2021; Kozinets, 2015), this study took place during two academic semesters (Fall and Spring) in the 2020-2021 academic year in an ELT undergraduate program in Turkey. Following the considerations proposed by Kessler and colleagues (2021), the classical ethnographic procedures were adopted according to the complexities of researching a digital space, such as obtaining consent, positioning oneself, and having access to and collecting the multimodal data as well as reporting findings ethically. On the other hand, the two participants' trajectories constituted two particularistic bounded contexts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), which allowed the researcher to address the research questions in a descriptive and heuristic way (Yazan, 2015). Within this methodological design, this *netnographic multiple case study* was designed and conducted as follows.

First, the researcher asked for consent. In individual online meetings, the scope and aim of this research was explained and the workload that their participation might create for them was clarified. After allowing them to ask for further explanation, it was communicated that participation in this study was not a requirement for them to complete their practicum. The professional development activity was introduced as an optional task for their teaching portfolio and they were informed that they would not fail if they did not present any proof of completion. It was made clear that they could withdraw from participating in this study anytime without any penalty or negative consequences for their formal studies. Both participants gave their full consent.

Later, the data collection started. The researcher asked participants to reflect on their experience throughout the MOOC every week and submit their reflections as voice recordings. These constituted participants' digital diaries. The digital diaries provided emic data that enabled the researcher to explore how the MOOC process unfolded for each participant from the beginning to the end. To add, both participants were encountered online twice and those mentorship sessions were recorded (once after the participants decided to enrol in a MOOC and once after the third week was completed). The participants were also asked to provide their assignments and forum contributions to observe the digital space and their interaction with the course content and other participants. This data allowed the researcher to have access to the digital learning space from an etic perspective. To complete this perspective, the researcher participated in the same MOOC as a learner and completed it to have an emic perspective on the digital learning space. Finally, a semi-structured interview was conducted with both

participants in which participants reflected on the MOOC process and their digital literacy as EFL teachers during the practicum.

Even though the MOOC platform suggested finishing all seven modules in seven weeks, it took eight weeks for both participants to complete the course; however, with the MOOC platforms introduction (one week), MOOC browsing, and application (two weeks), the waiting period for the financial aid application (two weeks) before the actual MOOC and the completion of reflective diaries and interviewing (two weeks) after the MOOC, the whole process took 15 weeks.

3.4. Researcher reflexivity and positionality

The researcher was Sevval and Ozan's academic supervisor in their teaching practicum. The official responsibility included managing communications among all practicum stakeholders and grading the teaching portfolios that included lesson plans, practicum observations, and reflections. As the supervisor, no particular MOOC was imposed; however, all the MOOC platforms mentioned in the introduction were introduced and technical assistance in creating an account, navigating through the platforms, and enrolment was provided.

As an EFL teacher and teacher educator, the researcher have participated in many MOOCs, regarding MOOCs as an accessible way to develop professionally. To promote this perspective, the pre-service teachers in the practicum groups were encouraged to participate in a MOOC on any topic; they knew that they did not have to complete a MOOC, particularly about language teaching.

In Sevval and Ozan's cases, they preferred enrolling in a MOOC on online language teaching. Their processes were facilitated by the researcher as a technical assistant helping out with the technical issues that the participants encountered (such as submitting application forms or assignments on the platform) and as a mentor, helping them reflect on their MOOC-related activities and learning experiences. Feedback was also offered when they asked for it. All in all, Sevval and Ozan were neither encouraged nor coerced to participate in this study, to choose a particular platform or MOOC, and complete it. Instead, the researcher positioned himself as a *researcher-as-digital-mentor/facilitator*.

3.5. Data analysis

The aim of this study was to explore and describe participants' perceptions, lived and perceived experiences, and what MOOCs mean for pre-service EFL teachers who intend to develop their CALL teacher knowledge and skills. Relatedly, thematic analysis was adopted to analyze

qualitative data. The thematic analysis enables researchers “to see and make sense of collective and shared meanings and experiences” (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 57). The flexibility of thematic analysis allowed to apply an inductive approach to code the qualitative data in this study. Accordingly, a bottom-up approach was utilized to code the data set to explore MOOC learners’ experiences and to understand their meaning-making and decisions.

Having utilized MAXQDA (VERBI Software, 2019) to analyze the qualitative data, the six-phase approach to thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2012) was followed; after familiarizing himself with the data that came from different sources, the researcher started generating the initial codes and grouped them into preliminary themes. Later, those themes were reviewed in relation to the scope and aim of the research. After creating the themes, they were reported in a way that made sense and answered research questions. During this process, no pre-defined coding scheme was used; the code system was generated tentatively and recursively throughout the entire process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), which was another advantage of inductive coding in thematic analysis.

4. Findings

Analyzing the qualitative data on MOOC learners’ experiences helped explore and describe their perceptions, understandings, and positions. At the end of the thematic analysis, four overarching themes were reached. Crucially, these themes were (1) self-regulatory impact of the MOOC, (2) provision of an online learning experience, which demystified online teaching, (3) preparing the pre-service EFL teachers for a teaching career, and (4) limitations due to the massiveness and non-situatedness in MOOC designs.

4.1. Self-regulatory impact of MOOCs

It can be understood from the pre-service EFL teachers’ experiences that digital learning through MOOCs can be associated with increased self-regulation. The MOOC experience helped the participant teachers build up self-regulation, self-directedness, and digital learning autonomy. Sevval commented in her diary on the clarity of the MOOC syllabus and stated that the syllabus design made it easy for her to keep herself motivated to learn.

Excerpt 1.

Sevval - This is my first MOOC. I really liked that the course suggests a working plan. This system helped me a lot especially this year because I was already very busy apart from this course. In fact, this working plan has made me feel included. At the beginning of every module, you see the objectives or the time it is expected to take as well as some deadlines that

motivated me to get organized... These features made me approach the course with a different mindset, I was more organized in a way.

As can be seen in Excerpt 1, the MOOC provided a clear syllabus, milestones, learning objectives, and plan for each module that supported Sevval in monitoring and regulating her learning experience. As a senior student, Sevval was too busy with concluding her studies, completing her practicum, and the national examination that is required for all teachers who intend to work in the public school system in Turkey upon completing their undergraduate studies. Sevval was so focused on this exam that she was worried about time management. Later, she elaborated on that in the interview.

Excerpt 2.

Sevval - I really liked the flexible schedule feature, I was able to learn whenever I want wherever I want. I did not feel tired of it. Actually, I enjoyed it a lot because I revised some of the content from my studies but with a particular focus on online learning. It was like reconsidering what I had already known but still felt like learning something new. That MOOC was trying to be economical time-wise, and I liked that because it respects my time as well.

Even though the course provided deadlines and a schedule, it also provided flexibility. That allowed Sevval to enjoy the content in a self-paced way and to synthesize her pedagogic knowledge into online teaching. On the other hand, Ozan was busy working part-time in a private language school in which he intended to work full time with extended administrative responsibilities after his graduation. That created additional tension for him; he felt that he had to spare more time teaching to prove himself to his superiors. Additionally, he needed to complete his practicum to conclude his studies. Thus, time was not so abundant for him either.

Excerpt 3.

Ozan - I was a bit intimidated at first because I was not so sure If I could have time for that course. Later, it did not turn out to be what I had been afraid of. It was like a package that was designed to make it easy for me. The website interface was very easy to navigate. I think it was even easier than face-to-face.

Similar to Sevval, Ozan also remarked that the design of the MOOC and the platform scaffolded him even though it was his first experience in a fully online teacher professional development course. In his diary, he elaborated on the aspects of this design that helped him self-regulate his learning during the MOOC experience.

Excerpt 4

Ozan - The videos, examples about the topics in the videos, supplementary readings about those examples... These were nice... It was also very nice to have some quizzes in the modules. There was a gradebook that summarized all your results. I could see my progress and mistakes and turn back to the content if I needed to. There were some success criteria, which

helped me understand if I need to turn back or not. Those criteria challenged me in a good way.

I needed to monitor myself, I needed to assess and see what I had learned.

In Excerpt 4, Ozan talks about the multimodal content in the MOOC and the *assessment for learning* opportunities that the MOOC provided. According to him, occasional quizzes supported him to monitor his learning by setting a set of success criteria and reflecting on his learning experience. He also mentioned how his contribution to the discussion forums provided a similar opportunity to engage in formative self-assessment. In the first mentoring meeting, it turned out that the application process afforded another reflection opportunity for Ozan at the very beginning while writing the application form for the financial aid. He remarked that this process helped him to focus on his actual needs and to decide which MOOC to apply and why.

In short, the findings demonstrated how self-regulation was sustained by certain features of the design of the MOOC, such as being able to follow the course content in clearly-designed coursework, the multimodal provision of content aiding their multiple literacies, self-paced learning style, the formative assessment that allowed self-monitoring, the process of application for the financial aid, and reflective breaks such as forums.

4.2. Providing online learning and digital literacy opportunities

When schools moved to virtual education as a result of the pandemic, teachers had little time to get prepared to be efficient CALL teachers with sufficient digital literacy. Most teachers, pre-service or in-service, did not have much understanding of teaching online because they had had little (if not no) online learning experience or CALL teacher education. That was the case for both of the participants in this study. Since they had no prior experience with online learning, they had the prejudice that online education is inefficient or intimidating.

Excerpt 5.

Ozan - When I first started searching for a suitable course, I visited one of the platforms. The whole experience was a bit intimidating: many options, many tabs, and it took many clicks to learn how to navigate... [The application form] asked why I needed to take this course and my expectations from this course. This was something that I was not used to. I wasn't even sure which course to choose. It was very exhausting at first to figure out how to decide and fill out this form.

Ozan's statement in Excerpt 5 showed that it was an unfamiliar learner experience for him, and it brought many uncertainties at first. The application process also helped Ozan to justify the whole professional activity in tandem with his professional needs and expectations. Excerpt 5 was from Ozan's digital diary. In the interview, Ozan elaborated on his experience further in the following excerpt:

Excerpt 6.

Ozan - *I watched videos, took quizzes, participated in forum discussions, provided feedback to my peers. This certainly showed me how it feels like to be an online learner. The interaction is not the same. In my online teaching, there is a simultaneous interaction but it does not mean that an asynchronous one is not an interaction. I experienced the value of that one as a learner, too.*

Ozan's experience throughout the MOOC showed that the process supported him to understand the practical dynamics of online learning. As his experience demystified how online *learning* works, he reconsidered his perspective of how online *teaching* works. Sevval, on the other hand, raised a very similar awareness by the end of her MOOC experience. In the mentoring meeting, she said she got more interested when her "skeptical views towards online education" (her own words) were addressed by the introductory module of the course. As an EFL teacher with zero prior online learning or teaching experience before the MOOC and her practicum, she remarked in the interview that she experienced tension.

Excerpt 7.

Sevval – I was overwhelmed when I browsed the platforms but I was also a bit stressed because I was not so sure if I could handle those courses. This was new to me, and I was already very preoccupied that semester. I pushed myself not to see it as an extra workload and tried to see this as an opportunity for development. But it took some effort. Once it started, it just flew. It was fun. I wish all the courses at the university were like that.

The learner experiences illustrated that the MOOC had a demystifying impact on the participant teachers, who had little or no prior experience of online learning and teaching. Coming from a background with limited CALL or online learning experience, they had doubts about how online teaching might be put into practice. The findings demonstrated that it is very important to provide online learning experiences to CALL teachers to grow an understanding of online education from the learner's perspective, and the focal MOOC in this study provided a convenient learning opportunity.

4.3. Preparing pre-service EFL teachers for the profession

One of the main objectives of teacher education programs is to prepare teachers to deal with the challenges of their everyday practices once they start working. However, it was argued earlier that the current ELT programs in Turkey provide little content regarding CALL teacher education. Findings demonstrated that both cases in this current study supported the earlier argument. The participant teachers felt unprepared for performing their profession after they would graduate in two distinctive ways, which also constituted the subthemes of this overarching theme.

First of all, the findings showed that the pre-service EFL teachers felt unprepared in terms of their digital literacies (Darvin, 2017; Tafazoli, 2021b) and technological pedagogical content knowledge (Nami et al., 2016; Tafazoli, 2021a). The analysis of the qualitative underlined their perceived unpreparedness in terms of online language teaching and how the MOOC was perceived as an opportunity in that regard. For instance, Ozan taught online for a brief period in the 2020 spring in the private language school where he worked. However, the practicum in his formal studies had not started then yet. In the interview, he explained how he felt inefficient as an online teacher.

Excerpt 8.

Ozan – At the beginning of the year, I saw that my friends in the practicum group were relaxed, or not stressed enough. I think I was the only one feeling stressed about teaching online in the practicum (...) because when the pandemic broke out, I experienced many difficulties. As for the practicum, there was an additional ambiguity because we did not know if we would continue online, face-to-face, or hybrid. I wished it had been face-to-face because I felt and I saw I was inefficient teaching online before [the practicum].

Ozan explained his feeling of insecurity (which can be understood as a perceived lack of *self-efficacy* (Güngör & Yaylı, 2012) due to his online teaching experiences before practicum. He remarked that we were challenged by the intermittent connection, leaving the actual whiteboard and colorful markers and using the virtual ones, having no or limited access to learners' eyes and gestures, which was vital for him to assess learning while teaching. The situation was quite similar for Sevval even though she had no prior online teaching experience; however, once the practicum required her to plan and teach lessons, she started having problems adapting her existing teaching skills to online teaching.

Excerpt 9.

Sevval - My biggest problem about teaching online was the issue of finding materials that would fit my teaching plan. It was almost always impossible to find open-access materials that met my needs so I had to develop materials mostly from scratch. That was the issue I suffered the most from my lack of computer skills. I found that very stressful because I did not want to adopt materials that I was not 100% content with.

Designing online materials or developing materials online was challenging for Sevval, as can be seen in Excerpt 9. She attributed this to her “lack of computer skills”. It may show that her previous teacher education failed in preparing her for CALL, or in the pandemic context, teaching online.

Second, the CALL teacher education activity by the MOOC supported the participant teachers' affect positively. As can be seen in certain excerpts given thus far (e.g., Excerpts 3, 5, 7, and 8), the teachers highlighted the reality that surrounded them in their senior year. The

situation made them feel “intimidated”, “exhausted”, “stressed”, and “tense” in different ways. Both participants remarked that they had not been prepared for their prospective teaching careers psychologically. At this point, the CALL teacher education that was provided by the MOOC concept turned out to be a supporting experience not only in terms of learners’ teaching skills but also in terms of their emotions and well-being.

Excerpt 10.

Sevval – I don’t feel that I am confident enough yet. I have always had doubts about it when I was a student, and now with the practicum, I saw this: teaching is not about learning theories too much. Of course, a good teacher should know these theories but [teaching] is mostly about practice. My university [studies] did not prepare me for that practice. I liked this MOOC thing. I will continue participating in MOOCs, which can give the gist of the theory, and the rest is up to me to project my new learning in my practice throughout my career.

Excerpt 10 showed that Sevval expected more from her teacher education program in terms of preparing her for learning about teaching practically. That mismatch between theory and practice created tension for her. That said, she perceived MOOCs as a continuing teacher education practice and intended to keep participating in MOOCs to fill the gap between theory and her practice, which disturbed her well-being. Likewise, Ozan remarked that he had to deal with various ambiguities and had no one around to find answers to his questions while teaching online, but he stated that “[the MOOC] was the first time when the answers were told before [he] asked for them”. Positioning MOOCs as a career-long resource, the MOOC experience prepared both participant teachers in terms of perceived CALL teacher skills and well-being.

4.4. The other side of the coin: Massiveness and non-situatedness of MOOCs

The qualitative data provided participants with an insight into their learning experience during a MOOC on online language teaching. As presented above, the findings demonstrated several affordances that were provided by the MOOC experience. However, the participants also mentioned some limitations that made the CALL teacher education harder for them in the MOOC context. The most frequently repeated one was the mismatch between the teaching conditions that were showcased in the MOOC and the participant teachers’ practicum contexts. This contextual mismatch constituted a problem of situatedness regarding the MOOC.

Excerpt 11.

Ozan - The module suggested using authentic materials to fill this gap. I think it is not so sustainable. This creates a big workload for the teacher to find authentic materials for everything every time. These materials also need to be appropriate to the class needs. Our online classes are much more crowded than the example classes in the videos.

In Excerpt 11, for instance, Ozan pointed out this mismatch. He stated that using authentic materials in his teaching context might constitute problems with practicality and implementation in crowded (online) classes, which is often the case in Ozan's everyday teaching. However, constant mentorship and reflection on the MOOC learning experience in light of the ongoing practicum supported Ozan in terms of making sense of the mismatch. He understood the course content contextually after reflecting on the practices that were suggested in the MOOC and his teaching needs.

Excerpt 12.

Ozan - There were some practices that I found hard to implement and a bit irrelevant in my country context, and also in the context of my practicum. But when I think about it, I believe [the MOOC] was still beneficial because I am now able to point out this irrelevancy.

Sevval pointed out the same issue in her diary. According to her, it was normal that the MOOC offered what can be called best practices and general solutions to general problems. She believed it was up to her agency to apply those in her contexts.

Excerpt 13.

Sevval - Some of the content was not fully relevant. I think this is normal because it cannot tell me anything I want or anything I need. In terms of online teaching in my practicum, it was not fully relevant. [the MOOC] developed me as an online teacher because it provided a basis. It gave me an understanding of how it is to teach online but it didn't develop me in terms of materials that I need.

At this juncture, it was critical for both participant teachers to reflect on the MOOC, which was a non-formal professional development activity, in light of their practicum experience, which was a part of their formal studies. In both cases, the effect of constant mentorship supported teachers to reflect on the course content and, more importantly, to engage in reflexive professional development (Uştuk & Çomoğlu, 2021). Sevval's and Ozan's reflexivity, which was constituted by the use of learner diaries and mentoring sessions, minimized the MOOC's limitation due to its non-situated design that appeals to a general audience.

5. Discussion

In this netnographic multiple case study, the experiences of two MOOC learners who intended to develop their online language teaching skills were investigated. The findings revealed that the MOOC learning process provided certain affordances in terms of the self-regulated online learning experience, digital literacies, and teacher well-being. It also appeared that the design of the MOOCs that targeted a general audience created problems with relevancy and situatedness.

Firstly, the experiences of the case participants demonstrated that learning on digital platforms in the MOOC contexts helps learners to monitor their learning trajectory and makes them self-directed learners. Self-directedness, as a self-regulation concept, refers to the increased amount of responsibility that the learner takes for her/his learning activities (Fisher & King, 2010). Lokita Purnamika Utami and Prestridge (2018) suggested that teachers' professional learning is more effective when it is self-directed online learning, which "opens up great opportunities for gaining new knowledge, keeping abreast of innovations and collaborating with like-minded colleagues from around the world" (p. 260). Our findings supported Lokita Purnamika Utami and Prestridge's argument that when the learners were allowed to make decisions and take responsibility for their learning trajectories, the results were positive. The MOOC provided the support system and the learning style (e.g., being self-paced, providing milestones, self-assessment) that facilitated learners to regulate their learning experiences. These findings are also in line with Jansen et al.'s study (2020), in which they claimed that when teacher educators facilitate the self-regulation of MOOC learners, their success rate increases. In addition to those results, our findings provided exploratory insight into how that relationship works.

Second, this study demonstrated that CALL teacher education could be more effective in country contexts where the teacher education practices have limited focus on technology-enriched pedagogies and teachers' digital literacies. Darwin (2016, 2017) underscores the importance of developing language learners' digital literacy skills for supporting their critical language practices such as language identities and ideologies. Similarly, Tafazoli (2021b) suggests in his review study that the concept of digital literacy stands out as an increasingly important one among the (new) literacies of teachers. The current study supported these studies because when the participant teachers gained digital knowledge about MOOCs and built up their skills to navigate through MOOC platforms, they also obtained the opportunity to develop their digital literacies both as online learners and teachers. Moreover, they perceived MOOC platforms as digital spaces to broker professional capital by obtaining credentials. Considering that MOOCs often provide content and credentials from prestigious global universities, the findings supported Tømte's (2018) earlier suggestions in that the participant teachers were motivated by such courses' global standing.

Third, the findings revealed that the current teacher education might fail in preparing EFL teachers for online teaching psychologically. Studies show that teaching languages as a foreign language speaker is already an affectively-challenging process (see Aydın & Uştuk, 2020; Gkonou et al., 2020; Mercer & Gregersen, 2020). In Sevval's case, this constituted a

“prejudice” (her coinage) because she had no prior experience in learning and teaching online, but she felt stressed due to her low digital literacy. The findings also revealed that the pandemic situation created many ambiguities for the teachers, which resulted in negative emotions such as stress and tension. Likewise, it was shown in prior research that the pandemic increased these negative emotions for language teachers (MacIntyre et al., 2020). The current study illustrated how the participant teachers found non-formal teacher education practices such as MOOCs as resources to cope with the ambiguities in their practicum and to get ready for their prospective teaching careers psychologically.

Finally, this study showed some limitations that might jeopardize CALL teacher education through MOOCs. “M” in the abbreviation “MOOC” stands for “massive”. Understandably, these courses are designed for a broad audience. Tømte (2018) argues that this characteristic of MOOCs could be even advantageous in delivering in-service teacher education and reaching out to teachers all around the world. However, when the MOOC content addressed the default challenges of online teaching in this study, it created the problem of situatedness due to contextual mismatches. Situatedness was proposed as one of the key characteristics of effective CALL teacher professional learning in previous studies (e.g. Lokita Purnamika Utami & Prestridge, 2018; Nami et al., 2016).

Mentoring the MOOC learners throughout the process and supporting them to reflect on the course content in light of their teaching context proved effective in minimizing the problem of (non)situatedness. That finding is in alignment with Jansen et al. (2020), who found the self-regulatory impact of learner reflections in MOOCs, or with Langseth and Haugsbakken (2016), who stated the importance of mentoring to help pre-service teachers to reflect on the MOOC experience. Finally, Shin and Kang (2018) also underlined the imperativeness of comprehensive reflection in online teacher education programs.

6. Conclusion

This netnographic case study explored two teacher-learners’ experiences during a MOOC on online language teaching. These learners were pre-service EFL teachers, and they enrolled in the MOOC besides their formal studies and teaching practicum. The findings highlighted the potential of MOOCs in CALL teacher education and professional development.

That said, MOOCs may not replace formal teacher education even in the CALL teacher education context. However, they may inform CALL teacher education with their affordances. Non-formal activities such as MOOCs help learners individualize their professional learning trajectories and support their pedagogic/non-pedagogic digital literacies in this day and age.

However, the importance of formal mentoring is also very important to transform the MOOC experience into a reflective learning activity. This way, non-formal and continuous learning through MOOCs can develop formal CALL teacher education, which may fall behind due to the slow adaptation of formal teacher education programs and policies.

Several implications can be drawn from these findings. Teacher education programs need to take precautions and promote CALL and online teaching more in the language teaching programs. MOOCs can be used as valuable resources to complement formal programs. On the other hand, the MOOC designers need to foster online learning affordances and highlight self-regulation, formative self and peer assessment, and reflection while designing MOOCs for teachers. Teacher educators, on the other hand, should provide effective mentoring to facilitate the teachers' learning trajectories in different phases of MOOCs. They need to promote these teachers' reflective learning to maintain situated learning. Further research needs to investigate MOOCs as digital learning spaces and apply various frameworks to understand learners' experiences from different theoretical perspectives.

References

- Aydın, S., & Uştuk, Ö. (2020). A descriptive study on foreign language teaching anxiety. *International Online Journal of Education and Teaching*, 7(3), 860-878.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2012). Thematic analysis. In H. Cooper (Ed.), *APA handbook of research methods in psychology Vol 2: Research designs* (Vol. 2, pp. 57-71). American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/13620-004>
- Cote, T., & Milliner, B. (2018). A survey of EFL teachers' digital literacy: A report from a Japanese university. *Teaching English with Technology*, 18(4), 71-89.
- Darvin, R. (2016). Language and identity in the digital age. In S. Preece (Ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Identity* (pp. 523-540). Routledge.
- Darvin, R. (2017). Language, ideology, and critical digital literacy. In S. Thorne & S. May (Eds.), *Language, education and technology* (3rd ed., pp. 1-14). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-02328-1_35-1
- Fisher, M., & King, J. (2010). The self-directed learning readiness scale for nursing education revisited: A confirmatory factor analysis. *Nurse Education Today*, 30(1), 44-48. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2009.05.020>
- Gkonou, C., Dewaele, J.-M., & King, J. (2020). Introduction to the emotional rollercoaster of language teaching. In C. Gkonou, J.-M. Dewaele, & J. King (Eds.), *The emotional rollercoaster of language teaching* (pp. 1-8). Multilingual Matters.
- Güngör, F., & Yaylı, D. (2012). Self-efficacy and anxiety perceptions of pre-service EFL teachers. In A. Akbarov & V. Cook (Eds.), *Self-efficacy and anxiety perceptions of pre-service EFL teachers* (pp. 227-236). IBU Publications.
- Jansen, R. S., van Leeuwen, A., Janssen, J., Conijn, R., & Kester, L. (2020). Supporting learners' self-regulated

- learning in massive open online courses. *Computers & Education*, 146, 103771. <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.COMPEDU.2019.103771>
- Kessler, M., De Costa, P., Isbell, D., & Gajasinghe, K. (2021). Conducting a netnography in second language acquisition research. *Language Learning*, 71(4), 1122-1148. <https://doi.org/10.1111/lang.12456>
- Kozinets, R. V. (2015). *Netnography: Redefined* (2nd ed.). Sage.
- Langseth, I., & Haugsbakken, H. (2016). Introducing blended learning MOOC – A study of one bMOOC in Norwegian teacher education. *IFIP Advances in Information and Communication Technology*, 493, 59-71. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-54687-2_6
- Lokita Purnamika Utami, I. G. A., & Prestridge, S. (2018). How English teachers learn in Indonesia: Tension between policy-driven and self-driven professional development. *TEFLIN Journal*, 29(2), 245-265. <https://doi.org/10.15639/teflinjournal.v29i2/245-265>
- MacIntyre, P. D., Gregersen, T., & Mercer, S. (2020). Language teachers' coping strategies during the Covid-19 conversion to online teaching: Correlations with stress, wellbeing and negative emotions. *System*, 94, 102352. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2020.102352>
- Mercer, S., & Gregersen, T. (2020). *Teacher wellbeing*. Oxford University Press.
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Mishra, L., Gupta, T., & Shree, A. (2020). Online teaching-learning in higher education during lockdown period of COVID-19 pandemic. *International Journal of Educational Research Open*, 1, 100012. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedro.2020.100012>
- Nami, F., Marandi, S., & Sotoudehnama, E. (2016). CALL teacher professional growth through lesson study practice: an investigation into EFL teachers' perceptions. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 29(4), 658–682. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2015.1016439>
- Rieber, L. P. (2017). Participation patterns in a massive open online course (MOOC) about statistics. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 48(6), 1295-1304. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjet.12504>
- Shin, D. S., & Kang, H. S. (2018). Online language teacher education: Practices and possibilities. *RELC Journal*, 49(3), 369-380. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688217716535>
- Tafazoli, D. (2021a). CALL teachers' professional development amid the covid-19 outbreak: A qualitative study. *CALL-EJ*, 22(2), 4-13.
- Tafazoli, D. (2021b). Language teachers' professional development and new literacies: An integrative review. *Aula Abierta*, 50(2), 603-614. <https://doi.org/10.17811/RIFIE.50.2.2021.603-614>
- Thumvichit, A. (2021). English Language Teaching in times of crisis: Teacher agency in response to the pandemic-forced online education. *Teaching English with Technology*, 21(2), 14-37.
- Tømte, C. E. (2018). MOOCs in teacher education: Institutional and pedagogical change? *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 42(1), 65-81. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2018.1529752>
- Uştuk, Ö., & Çomoğlu, İ. (2021). Reflexive professional development in reflective practice: What lesson study can offer. *International Journal for Lesson & Learning Studies*, 10(3), 260-273. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJLLS-12-2020-0092>
- Uştuk, Ö., & De Costa, P. (2022). 'Started working as a global volunteer ...': Developing professional transnational habitus through Erasmus+. In R. Jain, B. Yazan, & S. Canagarajah (Eds.), *Transnational*

- research in English language teaching: Critical practices and identities* (pp. 85-105). Multilingual Matters.
- VERBI Software. (2019). MAXQDA 2020.
- Wei, X., Saab, N., & Admiraal, W. (2021). Assessment of cognitive, behavioral, and affective learning outcomes in massive open online courses: A systematic literature review. *Computers & Education, 163*, 104097. <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.COMPEDU.2020.104097>
- Yaşar, M. Ö., & Polat, M. (2021). A MOOC-based flipped classroom model: Reflecting on pre-service English language teachers' experience and perceptions. *Participatory Educational Research, 8*(4), 103-123. <https://doi.org/10.17275/per.21.81.8.4>
- Yazan, B. (2015). Three approaches to case study methods in education: Yin, Merriam, and Stake. *The Qualitative Report, 20*(2), 134-152.
- Yeomans, M., & Reich, J. (2017). Planning prompts increase and forecast course completion in massive open online courses. *Proceedings of the Seventh International Learning Analytics & Knowledge Conference*, 464-473. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3027385.3027416>
- Yi, Y., & Jang, J. (2020). Envisioning possibilities amid the COVID-19 pandemic: Implications from English language teaching in South Korea. *TESOL Journal, 11*, 543. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesj.543>