

# The use of MOOC as a means of creating a collaborative learning environment in a blended CLIL course

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**Abstract.** The objective of this action research is to work out the possible ways of Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) integration in a blended Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) course to create an authentic online collaborative community. The theoretical framework of the intervention is based on current MOOC theories, connectivism, and the Substitution, Augmentation, Modification, and Redefinition (SAMR) model by Puentedura for implementing new technologies and open educational resources into teaching. Thirty bachelor students from Moscow State University, enrolled in a Methodology of English Language Teaching blended course, participated in the first cycle of the research. The analysis based on the quantitative data (questionnaire) demonstrated the learners' positive attitude to this intervention due to the following possibilities: getting familiar with the theories and terminology on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching, sharing experiences on the MOOC forums with the learners from all over the world and developing writing skills, etc.

**Keywords:** MOOC, CLIL, collaborative learning, interactive environment.

## 1. Introduction

Many educators argue today that MOOCs present new educational opportunities for face-to-face language classes. They enable instructors to create an authentic educational environment to develop learner communicative and digital skills by providing online interaction and high-quality online educational resources from top-ranking universities and colleges (Milligan, Littlejohn, & Margaryan, 2013).

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MOOCs foster high demand in digital age approaches, such as the general and the calibrated peer review, and collaborative enquiry-based and project-based methods (Dyer, 2014). They enhance learner motivation through prompt and timely feedback from course participants. Godwin-Jones (2014) outlined the three areas within language learning where MOOCs can be implemented efficiently: teaching English as a Second language (ESL), study of indigenous languages, and teaching Language for Special Purposes (LSP). The last area of integration is of particular interest for this study because MOOCs offer “a convenient vehicle for reaching professionals or trainees who need specialized language skills” (Godwin-Jones, 2014, p. 12). Unfortunately, limited research and empirical data were provided to support the effectiveness of such intervention in blended CLIL or language classrooms. The objective of this action research is twofold. First, to work out the possible ways of MOOC integration in a blended CLIL course to create an authentic online collaborative community, and second, to analyze students’ perceptions of their MOOC experience as well as the pedagogical impact of this intervention on their motivation and learning outcomes.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Research objectives

The most frequently described way of MOOC integration is their use for flipped learning or hybrid MOOC models (Bruff, Fisher, McEwen, & Smith, 2013). This study, which is based on current MOOC theories, connectivism and SAMR approaches, focuses on working out a methodological framework for MOOC implementation in a CLIL course to create an authentic interactive environment where students can collaborate with the participants from other countries and learn with authentic materials. Our model of instruction includes a blended CLIL course supported by the group blog and student participation in the MOOC forums. The MOOC is used in this model as additional learning resources for setting up an authentic online collaborative community. This educational model provides different focuses of perspective on the course content, exposes students to different ways of teaching content, and helps students develop their communicative skills.

The research includes the *enhancement* and *substitution* cycles (Puentedura, 2011). The key objective of the enhancement cycle is to analyze MOOC intervention from the perspective of students’ engagement and their attitude to the intervention. The second cycle of this action research will focus mainly on

learning outcomes. This paper is devoted to the analysis of the first cycle of research.

The first cycle target group consisted of 30 undergraduate students from Lomonosov Moscow State University enrolled in a blended CLIL 15-week course, Methodology of English Language Teaching. The language competence of the students was B2-C1 according to the common European framework of references for languages.

## **2.2. Data collection**

The enhancement cycle took place from September 2016 to January 2017. The students were asked to enroll for the MOOC *Understanding language: Learning and Teaching* (Southampton University, UK) in October 2016. They had to fulfill MOOC activities and participate in the forums every week. Student participation in the MOOC was included into the course evaluation and was assessed on the basis of the e-portfolios that reflected their participation in the MOOC forums, and the course blog peer collaboration where they could comment on each other's contributions and experience. Survey data on student perception of the MOOC experience were collected using a post-intervention questionnaire. The post-intervention questionnaire contained ten questions, out of which five questions were in the format of a four-level Likert scale, three were multiple choice questions, and two were free-text comments aiming to get student views on their attitude to MOOC integration. The questionnaire was completed by 30 students (22 female, eight male).

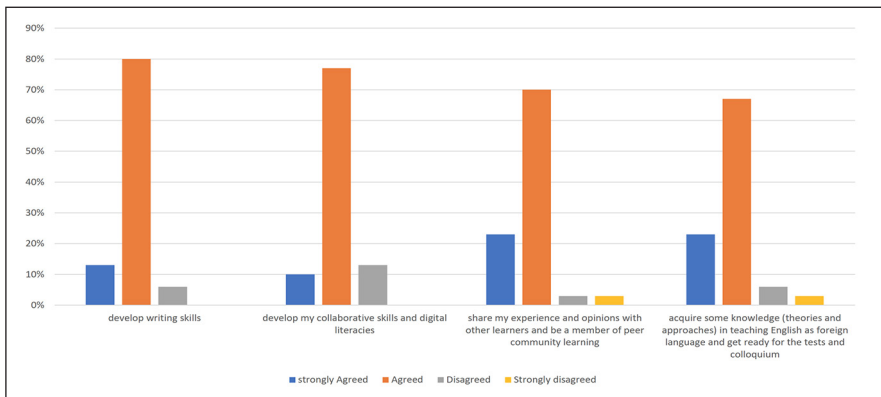
## **3. Discussion**

Our data analysis demonstrated the overall positive attitude (87%) of the learners to the MOOC integration. The students agreed that this integration helped them: develop writing skills (80%); develop collaborative skills and digital literacies (77%); share experiences and opinions with other learners and be a member of peer community learning (70%); and acquire some knowledge in ESL teaching and get ready for the tests and colloquium (67%); see [Figure 1](#).

Some free-text comments provided additional insight into learner experiences and revealed their positive attitude to the MOOC intervention. Answering the question *What did you like best about taking part in the MOOC?*, almost 70% of the participants mentioned the opportunity to communicate with other people via forum discussions. There were other benefits resulting from the use of MOOCs:

43% of the students indicated the opportunity to learn more about teaching approaches, and 27% of the students liked the way video content was presented. Our findings suggest that the students place heavy emphasis on the value of the lectures showing and demonstrating some practical approaches.

Figure 1. Results of the post-study questionnaire

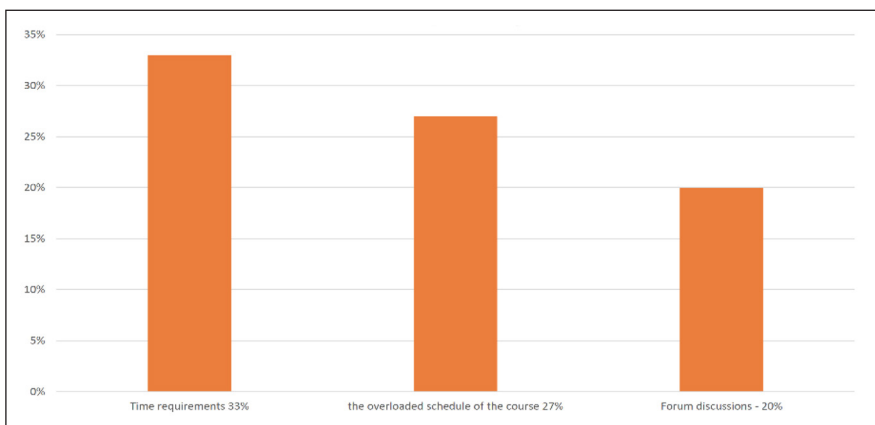


The most frequently mentioned negative impact on the MOOC experience identified by the students was the time requirement (33% of the students) and the overloaded schedule of the course (27% of the students) due to MOOC intervention (Figure 2). They complained that task completion required an extensive amount of time. This may be because some students did not have an appropriate language level, so they had to spend more time on listening and reading tasks, although none of the students mentioned that it had a negative impact on their experience. In order to solve the problems of the language barrier, the instructors have to adjust the content of on-campus language or CLIL courses to integrate MOOC materials in the learning process efficiently. Teachers have to provide language support through glossaries and tasks designed on MOOC materials. One more way to support knowledge development is through participant forums or blogs of on-campus courses, due to “a lack of familiarity among students with online learning and with the teaching and learning method used in a MOOC” (Godwin-Jones, 2014, p. 11). It is possible to “improve learners’ performance by providing personalized planning, tips and hints for time management” (Gutiérrez-Rojas et al., 2017, p. 44, cited in Godwin-Jones, 2014, p. 11).

Surprisingly enough, although 70% of the students mentioned the opportunity to communicate with other people via forums as their positive experience, still, some (20%) argued that they did not like collaborative tasks where they had to

give arguments or counter arguments. This can be explained by the lack of student experience with online discussion participation. It seems to have been the biggest challenge encountered by the students.

Figure 2. The negative impacts on the MOOC experience identified by the students



#### 4. Conclusions

MOOCs in education represent a new stage not only in distance learning and self-directed learning, as many authors assert, but also in a traditional face-to-face classroom (Israel, 2015).

Integration of the MOOC in the course syllabus helped the instructor enhance learner motivation by means of creating an authentic interactive online environment that enabled students to be engaged in collaborative activities and develop communication skills. The data analysis demonstrated that the learners' positive attitude to this integration may be due to the following possibilities: sharing ideas and experiences on the MOOC forums with learners from all over the world, getting familiar with the theories on EFL teaching and learning, improving EFL terminology knowledge, and developing writing skills.

Our future research steps will be devoted to the investigation of the relationships between the students' use of MOOC and their learning outcomes. During the fall semester 2017, we are going to compare the learning outcomes in the hybrid group and in the traditional face-to-face group.

## 5. Acknowledgements

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