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**EXPLORING MOOC FACILITATED SESSIONS
FOR THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
OF SCHOOL TEACHERS**

Amidst the global pandemic, the Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) has become a widely adopted tool across different educational levels. This paper depicts the qualitative and quantitative implications of this mode of learning by assessing participant's impression of MOOC sessions. The article describes the Project, aimed at supporting a diverse group of the participants in their English language competence enhancement with the help of the Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), i.e. English for Media Literacy and English for STEM and organized by Teachers of English Association of Kazakhstan (KazTEA) with financial support of the Regional English Language Office (RELO), the U.S. Embassy in Nur-Sultan. The target group covers students at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, EFL and STEM teachers from Nur-Sultan city, Kazakhstan. Foreign language skills among the participants ranged from beginner to advanced levels.

The project was targeted at assisting participants to adjust to the Coursera platform, assimilating participants into the learning environment, raising their awareness of engaging learning and mastering new competencies in each group. To achieve this goal, a facilitator teacher, whose role was in contrast to a regular teacher, was involved. This project was the first experience in MOOC on a large scale in

Kazakhstan, in which the main responsibilities and principle of the facilitator's work were gradually clarified and defined. The experience gained helped to describe in detail the functions of the facilitator, their difference from the generally accepted ideas about a teacher-trainer. Thanks to the facilitators' interactive sessions, most of the participants successfully completed both courses. Furthermore, a good part of them implemented or embedded some MOOCs into their own teaching programs.

Kazakhstani society is undergoing tremendous changes in educational paradigm which are linked with challenges needed to be met not just by business and industry but even more by coronavirus pandemic situation at all levels. New IT approaches and technologies as tools for a multilingual classroom need to be exploited in order to initiate changes in the way we teach and learn.

Having originated in Western education, online learning is currently gaining popularity in Kazakhstan. It should be admitted that a good number of professionals still have little experience of considering Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) as a tool for life-learning education or adapting their materials into their professional activities due to low internationalization process in Kazakhstan education and the lack of MOOCs sustainability [1, p. 252–266]. At the same time, nobody argues that MOOCs open new opportunities for the national education system. Thereby, it should be an urgent task for teaching faculty to be trained on applying MOOCs and their resources into the educational process.

The first well-known top US University that started to digitize the lectures of leading professors and spread them into freely accessible platforms since the beginning of the 2000s was the Massachusetts Institute of Technology [2]. Initially its authors provided the fragments of training courses, tests, and various simulators that were not enough due to the lack of users' motivation while learning the subjects in such a way; therefore, a need to organize the process of online training gave impetus to the next stage – MOOC or Massive Open Online Courses [3, p. 309–326].

MOOCs' success is obvious: for instance, 370,000 students enrolled in the nonprofit project of Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology EDX [4] as well as 155,000 remote students enrolled for only one course “Introduction to the Basics of Artificial Intelligence” provided by Udacity company [5].

In 2012, Stanford professors founded the web platform Coursera for massive open online courses, the number of which has grown significantly until today [6, p. 223–225]. Now, Coursera MOOCs (www.coursera.org) hosts free courses from thirty-three of the most famous US universities.

Each course provides information on a particular course within a training program of a university, which includes an instructor, a syllabus, and a certificate in case of successful study. The teaching approach meets the main principles of the cognition process which is based on material presentation with further consolidation and application.

Participants are provided with regular guidance and comprehension check questions even at the presentation stage. The course materials are arranged on a weekly basis with new video lectures and corresponding quizzes to complete with the deadline set by a trainer in a quite democratic way considering workload of participants from around the world. Participants have three trials to complete a test with the possibility to achieve the maximum score as final. Random location of tasks with every new trial diminishes the possibility to guess or learn the correct. Additionally, peer-reviewed practical assignments or mini-projects designed by an instructor aim to check the knowledge gained consolidate the material learned and apply it within a local context.

Peer-review assessment is one of the greatest features of all Coursera MOOCs because it ensures that learning is both valid and relevant by providing timely and useful feedback by people who are eager to teach. Such feedback involves localizing learnt materials, identifying and correcting mistakes, assisting in structuring material, and improving the flow of presentation. MOOCs authors are free to add supplementary literature including visual and virtual instruments to facilitate the process of learning when each lesson turns into a discussion where the participants learn from peers.

Moreover, MOOC's surrounding permits students to revise the themes covered in practical lessons and encourages the study to occur more effectively. Another distinct characteristic of MOOC's is related to its openness to anyone and everyone with the will to learn. Aside from the specialized courses offered by universities, it also presents the opportunity to participate in courses free-of-charge. Prestigious educational institutions such as Stanford University, MIT, Pennsylvania University, Harvard University and University of Michigan highly utilize MOOC platform. These universities employ several MOOC environments such as Coursera, edx, Udacity, Code Academy and Khan Academy. Even though taught in English language, Khan Academy offers a unique advantage by having subtitles in approximately 20,000 other languages.

Currently, Coursera pursues a policy of a financial aid to those who cannot afford to purchase the certificate. For this purpose, an applicant is free to apply by sending a motivation letter with no less than 150 words explaining the reasons for being funded. The aforementioned points were only made possible from Coursera as a result of Coursera courses' support

and recognition by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan that allowed Kazakhstan educational institutions and IT resources to make the initial steps in bringing higher education online in 2016 [7].

In 2018 business structures noted the necessity of preparing the transition from traditional distance learning to online training with the full teacher's support within the student-centered approach. Then, lots of educational services and simulators appeared, but only such giants as Coursera and EdX could change the existing educational system significantly. For instance, during March–May 2020, in pandemic coronavirus quarantine the government of Kazakhstan made it possible for unemployed citizens to gain a new profession with the help of Coursera [8]. Another example that comes to mind is *The Coursera for Campus Project* that involved a number of Kazakhstani universities, where students got an opportunity to enrich their knowledge and experience from the best teachers in different fields from world renowned institutions like Harvard, Stanford, Princeton, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Yale to Hebrew University in Jerusalem and receive appropriate certificates and diplomas for free [9, p. 227–243].

However, the shortcomings of online education were evident as MOOCs revealed some obstacles for participants. Although the course participants indicated their satisfaction with availability of resources in the 24/7 mode, the university teachers hardly welcomed such an innovation due to the time-consuming process of converting papers into electronic products. Furthermore, school teachers struggled with open-ended assignments since they got used to multiple choice tests in their own teaching and assessment. Finally, efficient online work made sense only with the timely and productive feedback that teachers should have provided 24/7, but the teachers were not ready or were not sufficiently motivated to prepare high-quality educational content.

Such preliminary results proved a huge role of a facilitator in online education with the help of MOOCs and, consequently, the necessity to consolidate the efforts of Kazakhstani teachers in preparing the MOOC to create new educational resources in Kazakhstan and conduct their certification at the world level.

In December 2019, Teachers of English Association of Kazakhstan (KazTEA) and the Regional English Language Office of the U.S. Embassy in Nur-Sultan (RELO) launched the 'American English Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) Facilitated Sessions' Project, aimed at promoting such Coursera courses as 'English for Media Literacy' and 'English for STEM' from the Pennsylvania State University courses and involved EFL and STEM pre - and in-service teachers with pre-intermediate to advanced English

Language skills in 14 cities including Nur-Sultan, Almaty, Aktau, Aktobe, Atyrau, Karaganda, Kokshetau, Kyzylorda, Pavlodar, Petropavlovsk, Semey, Shymkent, Taraz and Ust-Kamenogorsk [10].

The idea of the Project was to raise awareness of a wide range of professionals and community members of MOOCs and its resources for professional and language growth. Another objective of the project was to help the participants: pre-and in-service EFL and STEM teachers not only proceed with the Coursera courses but also learn to cooperate and gain new competences from each other. A minimum number of participants in one group should have accounted for 20 people, each of them required to fill an application form where participants explained their motivation to participate in the Project, and passed the 50-min EF SET English level test [11] to prove their level of English, since reading and video materials adjusted to basic level are challenging enough for comprehension due to specific terms within the courses.

We both facilitated the new two-hour session of the AE Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) “English for English for Science, Technology, Math and Engineering (STEM)” that was launched on 11th of March, 2020 at the American Corner of the L. N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University in Nur-Sultan city administered by the Regional English Language Office (RELO) and the Teachers of English Association of the RK (KazTEA).

The STEM Session was for 28 participants during March, 2020 till May, 2020.

Unfortunately the global education system is undergoing major transformations, adapting to new, challenging conditions, which deprive the learning process of human interaction and transfer it to a forced virtualization in account of the coronavirus pandemic situation. So the sessions were facilitated and organized by us in ZOOM, What’s up conferencing with Gobrunch, Kahoot, Quizlet applications so that to investigate the question of “Climate change”, “Greenhouse effect” by observing a global warming experiment. After looking at the data from the experiment, the participants had guessed about why the world is getting warmer and developed a definition for the term climate change, fossil fuel, and evaporation, emit emission and other terms. In addition, they previewed texts and practiced some of the language used to make comparisons when talking about global warming and climate change [12].

The STEM sessions provided School Teachers specific knowledge and skills as preparation for their working needs. Every session was on every Wednesday for a period of 3 months. Each lesson is conducted for two hours. We carried out the Project work assigned by different lecturers on STEM and the School Teachers gave language input and practice particularly for the Integrated Project Oral Presentation skills.

In this AE MOOC Project, learners were able to develop their oral skills in a critical and creative manner using the multimodal approach in three ways.

First, learners were able to develop awareness of the language of presentation during the Input stage as Information Search & Self-learning level. We uploaded materials as Coursera video notes, YouTube links, and guideline and information checklist.

Next, students searched and analyzed relevant information from various sources; printed, digital media or from their professional experiences. The Input Stage allowed learners to gather multimodal texts or materials on relevant language use for presentations or projects.

Second, School teachers were also able to develop familiarization with the necessary oral skills during the Socialization Stage where learners were familiarized with the language of presentation through team discussion or Zoom Session by exploring and comparing the Language use, grammar phenomena and its impact for both informative and persuasive presentations based on multimodal texts.

During the Socializing stage, we mainly divided the class into several small teams and learners discussed criteria of effective presentation skills and team discussion.

Third, learners were able to develop their oral skills in Stage Four, the Self-Inventory Output Stage where learners came up with self-inventory checklist of oral presentation skills based on their team discussions.

School teachers came up with self-inventory output using the checklist of oral presentation skills based on students' team discussion.

The fourth, learners were also able to develop their oral skills by applying their knowledge of the language of presentation by practicing delivery of team presentations and conducting final individual presentations using multimodal texts like PowerPoint or Prezi applications.

Fifth, School teachers discussed their professional development and growth in teaching experiences on our Facebook page; MOOC Facilitators Group as Feedback/Reflective Stage [13]. Here they were able to develop their writing skills particularly in the Reflective Stage.

In conclusion, we would like to propose some strategies of working online with a diverse group of learners:

- Choosing a platform that participants feel comfortable with and that involves interaction.

- Choosing quality over quantity: it is better to plan fewer activities catering for technical/internet connectivity problems, as well as a slower pace of discussions.

– Scaffolding via applying effective visuals and graphic organizers. We recommend using various tools such as Wordle, diagrams, drawings (Google Draw), pictures in order to check and reinforce comprehension of content, and help participants prepare for a key communicative activity.

– Employing interactive games and web platforms (*Kahoot, Quizlet, Youglish*, etc) as a basis for learning both content and language.

– Making participants create various instructional activities / tasks themselves with the help of such tools as *LearningApps, Quizlet, EdPuzzle, StoryBoardThat, Buncee, Kahoot!, Trello, Movie Maker, Active Presenter, Zoom, GoConq, Genially, Canva*, etc. that resulted in more meaningful processing of course materials.

– Working in collaboration with other facilitators via the Google drive/classroom and whatsapp group/email messaging.

– Formulating precise instructions for breakout sessions in various format: visual, auditory and with a model.

Thus, this Project showed a teacher from a different angle: any teacher can turn from a transmitter of information into a facilitator, who will support his/her students' autonomous lifelong learning.

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