Digital Learning with Massive Open Online Courses (Moocs): English for Communication

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of 4th Industrial Revolution has driven the youngers' generation, specifically Gen Z to equip themselves with the ability to think critically and communicate well in English language. University students especially need to master a few skills in order to reserve themselves a good work spot in the future. Good communication skills, critical thinking skills, presentation skills, and problem solving skills are very much needed to be nurtured in today's youngers generation. In conjunction to the rise of 4th IR Revolution, digital learning is no longer a stranger to education world. Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are making its waves in today's education environment and has been said as one of the best digital tools to provide learners with good platform for collaborative learning and communication skills. Hence, in relation to that, this paper intended to investigate the use of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) of English for Communication as a platform for developing learners' English communication skills. Discussions and recommendations are further discussed in this study.

1. Introduction

ESL studies have found that in recent years, most graduates are critically lacking in speaking and communication skills, especially among Malaysia graduates (Sabri & Qin, 2014). In today's world, it is undeniably important for learners to acquire good English communication skills in order for them to be able to secure good futures and chances of getting good jobs. Juhary (2014) agreed on that by mentioning in her paper on the reflective practice of an oral communication class on how Malaysia has come to a point where English language has become part of the requirements to be employed, unfortunately one one the biggest challenges in today's education sector is that younger generation lacks English language competency. In a study done by Sabri and Qin (2014), their findings on communication apprehension among Nilai College students have found that there are many issues emerging in relation to the challenges ESL learners face in the process of ESL learning.

One of of the emerging worrying issues is the issue of learners lacking in critical and creative thinking skills. Samira Al Hosni (2014) in her paper mentioned on a few factors and reasonings that caused towards the speaking difficulties encountered by young EFL learners. She stated that some of the reasons for that are because learners are so used to their mother tongues causing them to lack of necessary vocabulary items and grammar structure. Other than that, learners also encounter the issue of inhibition where they are afraid of making mistakes and feeling embarrassed if they were to make mistakes in speaking in front of the classmates. These

findings are later agreed by Ansari (2015) in his findings on speaking anxiety in ESL/EFL classrooms. He agreed on how anxious students often attribute to unwillingness to participate in speaking tasks to factors such as lack of motivation or low performance.

It is believed that Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) can provide the best platform for students to improve on their collaborative learning along with their communication skills. Past researchers such as Hashim et al, 2018, Yunus et al 2018 and Nordin et al 2018 have done them researches on the waves Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) have created in the world of education. Hence, the purpose of this study is to discuss on the usefulness of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) to cater to the leaners' development specifically for English communication skills. Further discussions are categorised into a few sections namely, 1) The ability to communicate well, 2) Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and the era of digital learning, and 3) MOOCs as the digital learning in developing learners' English Communication Skills.

2. The Ability to Communicate Well

Communication skills is one of the most crucial aspects an individual should acquire from an early age. Being able to think critically and communicate well especially in English language helps individuals to survive in today's era of fourth industrial revolution. As for university students, it is crucial for them to acquire good communication skills to prepare them for work and industry environment in the future. The ability to think critically, communicate well in English language, and even do amazing presentations are very much needed to be nurtured within today's younger generations. Malaysia's public universities have taken recent initiatives of building formal curriculum soft skills to produce graduates with a healthy combination of a diverse abilities (Devadason, et. al, 2010).

3. Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and The Era of Digital Learning

The existence of technology and e-learning has caused the routine of digital learning to reform. Digital learning is basically the use of Internet to help students to gain more knowledge freely and students are not constrained or limited to only the knowledge given by the lecturers in the classroom during the lecture sessions. With the help of digital learning as the platform, students will be able to develop self-paced learning with the help of the specific course modules and tasks given by the lecturers to help probing them with their learning process and enhance student-centred learning. Technology and students are inseparable in today's world. Students prefer technology as part of their learning as it is more handy for the them to access the information using technology wherever and whenever they want. Advantages of using ICT and technology in learning and teaching session were reported to be beneficial in attracting students' attention, facilitating students' learning process, helping to improve students' vocabulary and also promoting meaningful learning to students. (Yunus et. al, 2013). Digital learning has also become part of the common intervention in teaching and learning process. It is believed that "one of the main bridges between the physical and digital applications enabled by the fourth industrial revolution is the internet of things (IoT) or is also known as "internet of all things" (Schwab, p.18, 2017). Internet of all things can be described in simpler words as a relationship between things and people that made it possible by connected technologies and also various platforms.

The digital revolution is inventing new approaches in which individuals and institutions engage and collaborate. With the existence of technology and ICT and the rapid use of it in teaching and learning process, MOOC that stands for massive open online course is a web-based course available for free to any participant from all around the world (Cormier, & Siemens, 2010; Kop & Caroll, 2011; Abeer & Miri, 2014) started to arise. MOOC provides free access to high-quality learning materials, offered by elite universities and they are

conceptualised as online learning environments in which participants worldwide can create, research and share open educational resources (Kop & Caroll, 2011; Abeer & Miri, 2014). Mooc is one of the most recent innovations in education and has represent a current trend in online education (Almahdi & Sulfeeza, 2017). Since 2014, more than 400 universities around the world has started to be using MOOC and more than 73 universities have combined two styles of education: traditional class with advanced MOOC in addition to the teaching and learning session (Liu, 2016).

In today's era of fourth industrial revolution, being very proficient in English language can be an advantage. Companies and industries in this era of fourth industrial revolution are expecting employees with good communication skills, high proficiency of English language, and the ability to think critically along with good problem solving skills. It is true to say that in today's world, only good grades with no soft skills brings you nowhere. The ability to communicate well, especially in English language helps an individual to stand out among the others. Mostly university students in Malaysia encounter troubles in communicating well, especially using English language. They also struggle in presentations, speeches and sometimes lack of critical thinking and problem solving skills (Sabri & Qin, 2014).

5. Conclusion and Implications

In today's generation of education 4.0, ESL classrooms especially in the tertiary level of education have shifted from teacher-centred to student-centred, thus most language educators and instructors nowadays employed various resources to equip learners with the knowledge and skills that can make them to more autonomous and independent in their learning. The innovations and advancements of today's ICT has provided students with tools in the form of computer-based or Internet-based resources to help them to take charge of their own learning. The use of digital learning in teaching and learning session with the use of MOOCs has created a new and different opportunities for teachers and instructors to provide a medium of learning environment that will help students to explore the knowledge on their own providing that MOOC plays as a tool in acquiring and encouraging learners' dependence and self-discovery skills. Students can discuss, evaluate, interact with one another that makes MOOC as a mixture of learning (Liu, 2016).

Thus, it is believed that the findings of this research will acknowledge the authorities as in the management of universities and also the teachers and educators of university courses; especially ESL and English communication skills related courses on the impact of using digital learning as part of the teaching and learning process, also helps to figure out students' perceptions on the intervention of MOOCs in their learning process. ESL learners and future ESL learners can also benefit from this study as the findings of this study might help them to gain an insight on how the use of MOOC can be one of the tools that might possibly help them to develop their ESL learning for education. Hence, the findings of this study have proven that Massive Open Online Courses can be one of the best digital tools in providing learners with the platform for them to improve on their communication skills.

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