


Can MOOCs Promote EFL Learners' English Communication Skills?

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Abstract

By replacing part of a traditionally delivered course with a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC), this study aimed to investigate the effect of a MOOC on the academic achievement of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners regarding their English communication skills, and the study also aimed to explore EFL learners' perceptions on integrating a MOOC into their traditionally delivered course. The participants were 31 freshmen students enrolled in a compulsory course at a public university in Turkey. A mixed research method was employed. Data were collected through a quantitative review of achieved test results and written interviews, benefitting from both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques. The results revealed that the use of MOOC significantly improved EFL learners' English communication skills. Moreover, the following six major themes emerged from the qualitative analysis: fun, surprise, challenge, simplicity, universality, and interactivity. The effectiveness of the MOOC on EFL learners' English communication skills, the challenges they faced, and their suggestions for improvement of the MOOC are further discussed in this study.

Keywords: English as a foreign language; MOOCs; Communication skills

Introduction

We live today in an age of astounding changes. Communication has become truly global. The progress in information and communication technologies has been so astonishing that it is difficult to imagine a world that is independent of communication technology. Therefore, individuals need to be well aware of the challenges and the opportunities that lie before them.

The tremendous growth of communication, together with the expanding globalization, has come to the point that effective communication skills, especially in the English language, have become essential skills for younger generations if they are to secure good career opportunities and socially integrated living conditions (Hashim & Yunus, 2019). Similarly, learners need to equip themselves with their own distinctive communication styles in the higher education institutions through the improvement of their presentation skills and language proficiency in the English language, which is the main medium of communication across the globe (Mee et al., 2018). Moreover, students are expected to learn how to effectively and accurately convey the essence of an idea, express their emotions, reflect their thoughts, discuss the features of a presentation, and develop techniques to improve their presentation skills (Yunus et al., 2019). However this is far from being the case for university students in Turkey, even among candidate teachers of English who are expected to be error-free, effective, accurate, and fluent speakers of English as they are studying at English Language Teaching (ELT) departments. The situation seems to require a hard bit of work, especially considering the fact that these English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, who are candidate teachers of English, also lack the skills to deliver a speech, give presentations, develop critical thinking skills, summarize facts, and use the English language in complex situations.

A practical solution to this issue might be the integration of a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) into a traditional undergraduate EFL Oral Communications course, which might help students empower their communication skills outside the classroom, as MOOCs have the potential to enhance community engagement and exchange of knowledge by opening up considerable opportunities for social interaction and learning experience (Daradoumis et al., 2013). Hashim and Yunus (2019) also

noted that “MOOCs can provide the best platform for students to improve on their collaborative learning along with their communication skills” (p. 77).

Despite being fairly recent online learning phenomena, MOOCs have attracted much attention from higher education institutions (Zhao, 2015). Due to their wide variety, large quantity, practical implementation, attractive design, and immediate availability, some components, and content of MOOCs have either accompanied or replaced traditional classes at some universities (Bralić & Divjak, 2018). Inspired by the multiple benefits and high academic progress that has been made through the implementation of MOOCs, many higher education institutions are thrilled with the idea of transforming their education system by incorporating MOOCs in their conventionally taught courses and thus turn this potential into measurable success for their learners (Griffiths et al., 2015).

To this end, a lot of research, especially over the past few years, has been done on how MOOCs contribute towards the different needs of various learning communities (Mee, et al., 2018). However, this dynamic cycle and various international research activities, regarding the empirical and comprehensive studies on MOOCs and their effect on learning come to a standstill as far as Turkey is concerned. Hence, considering the alarming findings of Kırkgöz (2011) and Şenel (2012) suggesting Turkish students’ low level of English language competency, especially in oral communication skills, partly due to lack of out of class speaking practice, an urgent need for research regarding the impact of a MOOC on Turkish EFL learners’ communication skills arises. Therefore, this study is conducted in a Turkish public university context, where a MOOC is integrated into a traditional undergraduate EFL Oral Communications course and is intended to investigate the effectiveness of a MOOC, which is specifically designed for participants who want to improve their English communication skills and offers various forms of online communication to facilitate collaborative learning, communication, and teamwork among its users. This study also explores Turkish EFL learners’ perceptions of this specific MOOC.

Literature Review

Based on their basic traits of being massive and open, a number of authors have held the view that MOOCs might aid learners in developing their own ideas, expressing themselves, and improving their communication skills, thereby eliminating limitations placed on them by traditional face to face classroom model (Levy & Schrire, 2012; Walker, 2013; Mee et al. 2016; Yunus, 2018; Sun et al., 2019).

For this reason, a few investigators have attempted to examine the effect of MOOCs on helping learners’ acquire basic skills necessary for the development of language learning in general and oral communication in particular. For example, Hashim and Yunus (2019) studied MOOCs and their effects on English communication skills. Similarly, Yunus et al. (2019) investigated the potential benefits of MOOCs for communication. Both studies revealed that a high degree of interaction and varied activities such as a good blend of teamwork, exercises, and discussions prove MOOCs to be one of the most effective digital tools in helping learners enhance their communication skills as well as critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Validating these findings, Sun et al. (2019) argued that in MOOC platforms, student engagement can be strengthened through commitment and trust, and trust can generally be built by the fulfillment of group tasks, which offer the group members the opportunity to get to know each other and foster their ability to work in a team, thus boosting students’ engagement and motivation. Additional findings by Günüç and Babacan (2018) also suggest that effective use of MOOCs can have a positive impact on facilitating communication between learners. In further support of these findings, Banditvilai (2016) stated that using technology-based online tools and online learning materials through blended learning offers additional help to learners who suffer from low motivational levels and autonomous learning. In their study where they investigated learning objects in MOOCs, Stöhr et al. (2019) found that as well as other learning

activities, “video lectures are an effective learning component in online learning” (p. 167). According to Rodrigues and Vethamani (2015), with regards to the productive skill of speaking, the online learning approach provides learning platforms that help learners study at their own pace by means of oral practice sessions, and do the work at convenient times. Taking a rather positive view of MOOCs in their study, Nordin et al (2015) also pointed out that with their flexible, convenient, cost-effective services, and inventive way of learning, MOOCs are accepted readily by English as a Second Language (ESL) learners. McClanahan (2014) adds on to this in her study by suggesting that the orientation to authentic spoken communication through the implementation of communication technology has the potential to increase interaction between learners from different backgrounds and diverse cultures, which can eventually strengthen ESL learners’ communicative potential. In the meantime, however, there are several other studies that identified weaknesses and challenges in MOOCs.

Verstegen et al. (2018) stated that linguistically diverse communities, with varied personal backgrounds and qualifications, such as the ability to work in a team, interest in problem-solving, readiness to take on responsibility, adjustment to change, presentation skills, etc. might pose a serious problem in communication and motivation among MOOC participants who are likely to come from heterogeneous professional backgrounds. Other researchers also reported on the highly varied social and learning skills of MOOC users (Littlejohn et al., 2016). Therefore, some authors doubt the quality of MOOCs, criticizing them because of their inadequacy in identifying the specific needs of each individual student, and addressing them by utilizing various teaching methods, strategies and materials (Bartolomé, 2013; Vázquez Cano et al., 2013; Berrocoso, 2014). According to Sanchez-Gordon and Luján-Mora (2015), non-native speakers with varying levels of proficiency and linguistic backgrounds face a range of comprehension and communication problems, which suggests that there might be a discrepancy between the actual performances and the real intellectual capacity of the learners when taking MOOCs. Approaching the matter from a different angle at an international conference, Khalil and Ebner (2013) warned against very little “student to instructor” interaction in the case of most MOOCs, although they indicated that “learner to learner”, and “learner to content” interaction is highly facilitated and encouraged through a variety of features such as social networks and discussion forums (for “learner to learner” interaction), and group projects, activities, tasks, drills, assignments, quizzes and the like (for “learner to content interaction”).

Given the above findings of a few previous research studies regarding the effects of MOOCs on helping learners acquire basic language skills in general, and the very few studies intensifying on investigating their usefulness in facilitating learners’ communication skills in particular, and the lack of consensus and differences of opinion as regards the results of these research findings, it is clear that further study is needed to assess the potential of MOOCs in enhancing learners’ English communication skills. Specifically, as it has thus far only received very scant attention in the literature, if not any, a Turkish EFL classroom, where learners can find almost no chances for English input except for language classrooms, has been the context for our research. Our paper addresses a gap in the literature, possibly for the first time, investigating the role of a MOOC on Turkish EFL learners’ English communication skills. This study, however, is designed to benefit all EFL learners with varying levels of English. In particular, the aim of this paper is to investigate whether a MOOC can help EFL learners improve their English communication skills and their perceptions on the effectiveness of MOOCs. As such, the following research questions were raised:

1. Can the use of a MOOC help students achieve learning goals regarding their English communication skills?
2. What are students' perceptions of the effect of a MOOC regarding their English communication skills development?

Method

Both quantitative and qualitative approaches were used in this study. A mixed-methods Explanatory Design was used in this study, benefitting from both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques. As Johnson and Christensen (2012) noted, collecting and analyzing quantitative and qualitative data help researchers achieve in-depth insights into the topics under research. Two sources of data collection were used to investigate participants' achievement and understand their perceptions on the MOOCs and its effect on EFL learners' English communication skills development, including (1) a quantitative review of students' achieved test results, and (2) written interviews.

Participants

The participants of the study were undergraduate students in a public university in Turkey. A purposeful sampling method was applied. The respondents were 31 first-year undergraduate students and candidate teachers who were enrolled in the Oral Communication I Course in the ELT program, which is designed to train future teachers of English. All of the participants had passed the intermediate level of the General English Proficiency Test (GEPT), which was administered at the Department of Foreign Languages at the same university, so they were at the upper-intermediate level, and they were between the ages of 19 and 20. Within the participants 21 were female and 10 were male students. The face-to-face course had a total duration of 14 weeks in the first semester of the 2019-2020 academic year. Respondents were pretty well informed on the objective of the research. They were assured about the confidentiality of the information they provide and its use only for statistical and scientific purposes. Consent letters were given to the participants before they were sent interview questions.

Sample and procedure

The sample in this study consisted of undergraduate first-year students. As the aim of the study was to integrate a MOOC into a traditional classroom setting, students who were enrolled in the face-to-face Oral Communication I Course were requested to register for an online course - What Makes an Effective Presentation? - hosted on the FutureLearn MOOC platform. The course was free and it was taught in English. It aimed to improve participants' English presentation and communication skills. It was developed by Coventry University (FutureLearn, 2019). The course design on FutureLearn was functional, promoting student engagement through the many activities such as discussions, quizzes, articles, video lessons, assignments, self and peer presentation assessments and the like. It falls under the classification of an xMOOC, based on Siemens's (2013) definition. The topics covered were as such: "Delivering effective presentations", "Presenting in practice", and "How to deal with nerves". Table 1 presents the learning goals of the MOOC program.

Table 1. Learning goals of the MOOC program

By the end of the course, participants will be able to...	
Discuss the features of a great presentation	Explore the understanding of how to design and develop presentations
Develop techniques to improve your presentation skills	Evaluate a variety of techniques and strategies for presentations
Perform a mini-presentation	Assess the presentations of your peers

For the quantitative approach, before starting the course on MOOC, students were assigned the task of delivering a presentation that was administered as a pre-test to measure participants' communication and presentation skills. Then, students were required to actively participate in the course on MOOC, which started on 16 September 2019 and lasted for three weeks. The MOOC

curriculum required three hours of participation per week, totaling 9 hours altogether. After completing the course on MOOC, students delivered the same presentation which was administered as a post-test to measure the differences between their first and second performances. Thus, all 31 participants took a pre-test before their MOOC participation, and they took a post-test after their participation. An evaluation checklist was used to assess students' achievement after the completion of their course on MOOC.

For the qualitative approach, to achieve multiple diversity for sampling, based on the results of their achievement test scores (post-test), students with the highest, lowest, and the moderate test scores were divided into three groups first, and then another division was made based on their genders. Finally, there were 3 girls and 3 boys, and in total 6 participants, who met our sampling criteria (see Table 2). Then students were invited for face-to-face interviews. However, as they all had mid-term exams, they all agreed to conduct written interviews, stating that they would feel more comfortable. Then, the interview questions were sent to the respondents via emails.

Table 2. Participants' scores

Participants	Pre-test	Post-test	Gender
P1	70	88	F
P2	65	87	M
P3	50	70	F
P4	60	69	M
P5	49	55	F
P6	47	54	M

Instrument

In response to the first research question of the study, a quantitative review of learners' achieved results was made to assess the achievement of their learning outcomes, based on their achievement test results which they took after their participation in the MOOC, incorporated into their traditional classroom. An evaluation checklist was developed and adapted from the course content on the FutureLearn MOOC platform designed by Coventry University (Appendix A). The evaluation checklist was reviewed by an assistant professor, working as an expert at the Department of Assessment and Evaluation at the same institution. The expert provided guidance on "the wording of questions, the structure of questions, the response alternatives, and the order of questions" (Groves et al., 2009, p.260). The expert affirmed that the evaluation checklist was appropriate for the aims of this study.

As for the second research question of the study, a qualitative approach was adopted, using the written interview technique for the data collection procedure. Thanks to its high degree of question standardization, which facilitates the identification of emerging themes from data, and its relative advantage in fully using the highest degree of cooperation with the participants, interview technique was used to collect data (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). As they are not strictly constructed, the interviews gave the respondents the chance to freely answer all the questions without any limitations. With a view to obtaining an expert opinion on the interview questions, two experts from the Department of Assessment and Evaluation at the same institution were consulted. On the basis of these expert opinions, some modifications were made. Hence the reliability and validity of the interview questions were established. The interview questions were aligned with the survey items and research questions (Appendix B).

Data Analysis

For quantitative data analysis, means of the pre- and post-test scores were calculated to compare the statistical differences before and after MOOC participation. Furthermore, a paired-samples *t*-test was conducted to investigate whether significant differences existed in the students' learning outcomes, comparing their pre- versus post-tests. The means of the pre- and post-tests were calculated to compare the participants' achievement test results.

As for qualitative data analysis, once data have been collected via emails, the analysis of the results was carried out based on themes and categorization process. Next, the responses of the participants were indexed, examined, and processed. To confirm the trustworthiness of the study, the member checking method was employed, which means getting feedback and confirmation from the participants on their responses. To achieve this, another joint feedback session was conducted with each respondent individually to discuss their responses to the interview questions. Some adjustments were made on the emerging themes after this session, which increased the overall validity of the study. Then, before being thematically analyzed again, the reviewed data were examined for accuracy, using the approach promoted by Braun and Clarke (2006). Then, some *vivo* codes and *lean* codes were developed to construct some sub-themes. To maximize the rigor of analysis, known as debriefing, and to assure inter-coder reliability, emerging themes were negotiated with two independent experts. After appropriateness of interpretation was checked, some codes were amended by these two experts, maintaining expert approval. Next, to assure reliability and credibility, common themes and sub-themes were clustered together by these experts.

Findings

As data derive from different sources in this study, a thorough analysis of two different data sources, including the analysis of the comparison between pre- and post-tests before and after MOOC participation and focus-group interviews were conducted. The major research findings are presented in the following section by taking account of each research question, respectively.

RQ1: Can the use of MOOCs help students achieve learning goals regarding their English communication skills?

In order to investigate whether there was a statistical difference between achievement test scores before and after MOOC participation, pre- and post-test scores were calculated. The data were analyzed, using the statistical program SPSS 24 and MS Excel. Descriptive statistics comparing the pre- and post-tests (see Table 5) before and after MOOC participation revealed that the mean score of the post-test ($\bar{x}=70.22$) was higher than that of the pre-test ($\bar{x}=59.77$). Similarly, while the maximum scores of both tests were about the same (post-test: $\bar{x}=86.00$ / pre-test: $\bar{x}=80.00$), the minimum score of the post-tests ($M = 54.00$) was considerably higher than that of the pre-tests ($M = 40.00$).

In addition, a paired-samples *t*-test was run to examine if there was a significant difference between the two scores. However, before running a paired-samples *t*-test, a normality test was run to check if the data set is normally distributed (see Table 6). Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests showed data to be normally distributed [$p = .114$ (Kolmogorov-Smirnov), $p = .067$ (Shapiro-Wilk)], so parametric tests were used.

Table 3. Descriptives for the pre-test and post-test

Test	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pre-test	31	40	80	59.77	9.50
Post-test	31	54	86	70.22	9.41

Table 4. Tests of normality

Compared Test Results	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
	.142	31	.114	.937	31	.067

**p > .001.

Moreover, a paired-samples *t*-test was conducted to compare pre- and post-test scores. The paired-samples *t*-test shown in Table 5 revealed that the participants performed significantly better on the post-test ($p < .001$) compared to the pre-test. These results indicated that the use of MOOCs significantly contributed to learning outcomes. Then, based on the data gained from the *t*-test, the effect size was also calculated (Cohen, 1988). The effect size calculation found to be 1.68. This suggests a very large effect, indicating that our means are likely very different, so the answer to research question one, therefore, is that the use of MOOCs can help students achieve their learning goals regarding their English communication skills.

Table 5. Paired-samples *t*-test

Post-test to pre-test	Paired Differences						t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference					
				Lower	Upper				
	10.45	6.22	1.11	8.16	12.73	9.352	30	.00	

**p < .001.

RQ2: What are students' perceptions of the effectiveness of developing their English communication skills through MOOCs?

The principal method of data collection for this study was written interviews. After written interviews were conducted, data were gathered based on the reflections of the interviewees. The evaluation process involved participants' written reflections about the effectiveness of the MOOC on the development of their English communication and presentation skills, the challenges they faced, and their suggestions for improvement of the MOOC. The data were analyzed for themes and categories. The most recurrent themes were identified and categorized into the following six common themes: fun, surprise, challenge, simplicity, universality, and interactivity.

Fun

Most of the students thought that MOOC can be instrumental in boosting communication skills in a fun manner. They focused on their comments on the key importance of fun in ensuring effective communication among MOOC users, as it facilitates their engagement in activities and their involvement in tasks and projects. "I really like the course and it was useful. It was not like a class or homework, so I had fun while doing the tasks", commented one student. Another stated that

“Thanks to the MOOC application it was not only instructive and permanent but also enjoyable and fun. I developed my speaking and writing skills.” Another student also highlighted that “I liked the quizzes because they were fun, and I also liked the lecture videos where they taught us how to record our self-video presentation. It was so enjoyable that I was not bored when I fulfilled my duties.”

With reference to the challenges they faced, a few students emphasized that it was not appropriate to have students read long articles or write texts for instructional purposes if the aim of the MOOC is to improve participants’ communication skills, one of them commenting that, “Long essays did not draw my attention. Because they are too long and after a long time, they started to be so boring.” And, another student also agreed that “I think nobody enjoys doing lots of reading about something at which they want to get better. Therefore, instead of plain texts, information about a subject can be given in a more remarkable way, for instance, with a noticeable table.”, adding that, “I liked the part where we had to rewrite a composition correctly the least because it was boring.”

Closely related to fun, students often mentioned the potential of games as great stimulants to increase communication between learners, suggesting that MOOC developers should supplement the instructional design of MOOCs by exploiting games as a new form of delivery thanks to their communication-oriented features, which boost interaction and enjoyment between learners. In this regard, when talking about the instructional design of the MOOC, one of the students stressed that “It was exactly effective and enjoyable. If some games are added it could be even funnier.” Another student also emphasized the point by stressing that, “... studying on a MOOC platform is like playing a game. You just have to complete the levels.” Another two students also added that, “... There can be quiz games to make us learn while having fun”, and “I would like some little games are integrated into MOOC platform.”

Surprise

Interestingly enough, there were some statements uttered by some of the interviewees, hinting at the positive role of surprise in uplifting moods, and understandably enough, its effect on the improvement of communication skills. Some students even implied that moments of surprise can create a special bond with learners through a wide range of activities that can take various forms, making the process of learning more attractive and motivating for MOOC users. One participant noted analytically on developing English oral communication skills through a MOOC stating that, “... is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you are going to learn next and how you are going to learn.” Talking about this issue, another interviewee also said, “You should use different teaching styles because everybody has different learning styles.” Rather than a repetitious process of sequences and exposure, lacking in variety and interest, “There should be different materials which give us a chance to improve ourselves”, said one student, adding that “As you cannot predict what will happen after climbing, studying on MOOC should be like climbing to a mountain whose top cannot be seen, or it should be like finding a pot full of gold at the end of a rainbow.”

Challenge

The majority of those interviewed suggested that challenge could initiate co-operation and help learners remain competitive while at the same time encourage them to exchange ideas and gain new learning experiences as they fulfill their MOOC tasks. The participants also felt that thanks to the high degree of integration with the information and among users themselves, the challenge can be turned into an advantage that promotes effective communication among learners. “Although filming ourselves during the presentation looks scary, it is the best way to defeat stage fear for us”, emphasized one respondent. Another two with a similar thought highlighted that “I liked quizzes least in the MOOC platform because I think they were very short and they were easy”, and “I think

quizzes part of the MOOC should be compelling and instructive to be useful.” Partly, as a way of supporting these ideas, another student also said, “When you are preparing for presentations you have to make sure that you can speak clearly, you use intonation, you make eye contact, etc. You need these things when you are communicating with others too.” Still, another similar view came from another interviewee, stressing that, “Developing English oral communication skills through a MOOC Platform should be like bungee jumping into a pool full of information.”

Simplicity

Commenting on their MOOC experience, some of the interviewees noted that much of MOOC’s charm lies in its simplicity. For example, one respondent stated that “The MOOC schedule was minimalist, so I enjoyed every step. It helped me to learn more effectively.” The same respondent added, “I think it was like what it should be like. Because it was teaching step by step and there was no unnecessary information.” Another individual stated that “I think all the activities had their points and they were not boring and materials were also useful.” And another commented, “It wasn’t complicated that much. Besides, in such a short time, I learned to make a presentation in an accurate way. It was helpful and not heavy. It was an overall pleasant experience.” And perhaps one of the most interesting comments came from another respondent, referring to his MOOC experience, saying that, “It is like having Nikola Tesla teach you electric systems from scratch.”

Universality

Some participants considered that the massive digital availability of the MOOC, its accessibility, affordability, openness, and convenience are all based on the notion of universality, which makes it possible for a person’s message to make its way around the globe to eventually end up back to the same person after being responded and commented by innumerable participants across borders. The universality of MOOC allows rapid exchange of knowledge, facilitating the universality of communication between people regardless of their cultures, regions, or nationalities. One of the interviewees pointed out that, “MOOC platform is a place where everyone can learn something. It should be told to everyone in the world so that they can learn too. The only thing you need is an internet connection.” An interviewee argued that “The MOOC is a worldwide platform. Whoever wants, it can be easily reached and used and it is free, too”, while another reported that, “I can define it (MOOC) as a useful, interactive and universal. I learned a lot of things and implemented them while I was sitting at my home. Anyone who doesn’t have opportunities to improve his/her English can reach this platform. Because of this, it is very useful and universal.” Referring to MOOC as the best way of using technology, another participant commented that, “It made me realize it is the internet era and all the information is reachable and yes learning via MOOC is so cool and helpful.” There were also some students, expressing their wishes upon their MOOC experience, suggesting that MOOCs should be widely publicized so that larger groups of people can gain some benefit from them. Two of such comments were as such: “I can suggest that you advertise of MOOC on streets or on a billboard”, and the other, “It (MOOC) should be advertised since it is more helpful compared with the nonsense that is on TV, social media, etc.”

Interactivity

The final theme was based on the increased interpersonal communication and collaboration of the participants' thanks to the interactivity of the MOOC, which facilitates social integration and self-awareness. Most participants noted that interactivity promotes the social involvement of MOOC users and thereby boosts communication and interaction. “Thanks to discussions, I learned my peers’ thoughts and I realized my faults. I also liked discussions and self-video presentations most in the MOOC because they were useful for me”, explained one student. Another with a similar view, stated, “I think when we see others' opinions and their presentations, our ability to understand ‘what should

(not) we do' improves." Another one also said, "It was good I enjoyed it also seeing people commenting on your post makes the experience even greater."

In most cases, however, students shared their belief that a higher degree of interactivity is needed, and this could be the moving power of communication and interaction that makes it possible for the MOOC users to meet their needs in the learning process, and satisfy their spontaneously arising interests while engaging in an open dialogue, which could only be achieved by the development of a live video call feature or synchronous online video chat rooms. Commenting on this, one of the interviewees said, "... perhaps there could be a feature enabling us to video call each other, watch each other's presentations (or anything that is being studied) and give live feedback and criticism about one another's presentation so that we can actually give a presentation to a real audience rather than to a video recorded through a phone." Supporting this view, another two participants highlighted that, "I think an interactive class would be really good. It can be live and we can talk to others while we are watching. There should be a space where we can talk in English through face to face videos. It can help me improve my skills because I lack fluency", and "I think the MOOC should include live videos. It can be more enjoyable for users." Another student adding, "Live video chat or online voice channels would be golden."

Discussion

The present study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of a MOOC on helping EFL students achieve their learning goals regarding their English communication and presentation skills, and it was also designed to gain insight into their perceptions regarding the effect of a MOOC on their English communication skills.

Consistent with the literature, this study found that the use of MOOC can help students achieve their learning goals regarding their English communication and presentation skills, as they performed incomparably better on the post-test than they had on the pre-tests of presentation skills. These findings are on the same track with the findings of Zhao (2015) revealing that the MOOC raises interest in English learning, and with the skills they acquire on MOOC, learners can gain confidence which is necessary for them to develop their speaking abilities. The findings of the study are also in parallel with the findings of some other researchers on the benefit of MOOCs in helping learners improve their communication skills (Mee et al. 2016; Yunus, 2018; Sun et al. (2019). Gunuç & Babacan (2018) and Hashim & Yunus (2019) found that MOOCs are highly effective in providing support for communication skills.

In accordance with the present results, previous studies have demonstrated that with high levels of interaction, MOOCs promote fruitful cooperation and improved coordination between learners (Levy & Schrire, 2012; Walker, 2013; Mee et al. 2016; Yunus, 2018). However, this study also revealed that even higher levels of interaction are needed to contribute to the interpersonal communication and collaboration between EFL learners, which could partly be achieved through the integration of online games, interactive online contests, and live video chat rooms. To this end, the development of new technologies is necessary to maximize the power of interactivity and multimedia communication, which will increase active involvement, foster direct engagement, and enhance strategic cooperation between learners in the learning process.

The findings of the current study also revealed that the students are appreciative of their MOOC experience and find it to be beneficial for the improvement of their English presentation and communication skills. It was found that participation in group activities reinforces solidarity and engagement between learners and thereby enhances social development and interaction. This finding is consistent with the findings of Sun et al. (2019) which suggest that sharing of tasks between various MOOC learners builds mutual trust and facilitates direct engagement and open

communication between participants. It was also found that diversification of learning activities in MOOC is helpful to suit various types of students. This finding is also in line with the findings of Stöhr et al. (2019) arguing that along with other learning tools, features, and activities, video-learning is a powerful learning component in MOOCs. These findings seem to agree with the findings of the current study which demonstrated that EFL learners acquire communicative competence when they are assigned to prepare factual and audience-oriented video presentations and share them on a MOOC platform.

Another important finding was that a clearer and more minimalist approach was favored over a complex and chaotic one as far as the system and the instructional design of a MOOC is concerned. These results reflect those of Rodrigues and Vethamani (2015) and Nordin, Norman, and Embi (2015) who also found that MOOCs were accepted readily by ESL learners due to their simple design, easy access, and the freedom they give learners to choose their own time and place to study. Additionally, in accordance with the present results, previous studies have demonstrated that simple forms of communication technology have the potential to enhance the exchange of information and close cooperation between learners of varied cultures, which ultimately help ESL learners acquire communicative competence (McClanahan, 2014; Yunus, Hashim, & Hashim, 2019). In this study, MOOCs were found to improve the presentation and communication skills of EFL learners too, possibly due to their easy access, simple design, and intensity of cultural and communicative activities.

Another interesting finding was that although they expressed their desire to have a more “student to instructor” interaction, learners did not seem to mind having a somewhat limited “student to instructor” contact as long as they feel they are part of a big and active learning community. These results differ from the findings of Khalil and Ebner (2013) who had cautioned MOOC learners against very little interaction with instructors. A possible explanation for this might be that language learning is not just about the transfer of knowledge, rather it is about developing skills, which in this case seems to be accomplished through higher levels of interaction between learners of various nationalities. Another surprising finding was that no complaint was noted referring to a lack of cross-communication between learners who had contact with various non-native speakers with varying levels of linguistic backgrounds and proficiency. This outcome is contrary to that of Sanchez-Gordon and Luján-Mora (2015) who revealed that non-native speakers with varying levels of proficiency face a range of problems in making use of their intellectual capacity when taking MOOCs. This discrepancy could be attributed to the moderate challenges they faced during their MOOC participation, as a few participants had expressed their wish for somewhat more demanding tasks, which they believed would boost effective communication. Considering the fact that the participants of the current study were all upper-intermediate level EFL learners, however, a note of caution is due here since this finding cannot be generalized and extrapolated to students with lower levels of English proficiency.

Conclusion and Implications

In today’s rapidly changing and interconnected world, which appears to be heavily dependent on communication technology, it has become necessary for all EFL learners to adapt to these rapidly changing global developments. And it has become equally necessary for higher education institutions to incorporate a global communication platform in their curricula, which will enable EFL instructors to improve their students’ language communication skills by increasing their possibilities for intercultural exchange through active cooperation and social networking. The findings from the current study revealed that MOOCs can serve as a global communication and education platform for EFL learners, who have so little language input and limited exposure to authentic language in their traditional classroom environment. With its massive and open nature, a MOOC can provide learners with increased possibilities for intercultural communication, diversifying their external linguistic resources, thus encouraging them to speak a common foreign language, which in our case is English.

Hence, the current study further revealed that the academic performance of EFL learners with limited opportunities to access input and linguistic resources is enhanced through the use of MOOC. And finally, the current study highlighted factors that are associated with higher levels of interaction, suggesting that MOOC providers should work on new technologies that could maximize the levels of interaction between MOOC users, which will further develop MOOCs into becoming a global multimedia communication platform for EFL learners.

Based on the findings and discussion it presented, this study provides all EFL learners with useful information on how the use of a MOOC can affect their academic performance, and help them achieve their learning goals regarding their English communication skills. The study also provides EFL instructors and higher education institutions with direct insights into the MOOC integrated curriculum and delivery to support their face to face traditional classroom teaching model. This study is also beneficial for MOOC providers and online course designers with its findings regarding the instructional design and curriculum development, especially for those who seek to gain new perspectives and fresh insights into the improvement of English communication skills through MOOCs.

Despite having useful findings, the current study has some limitations. First, the experiment time is only one semester, future research can be spread over longer terms to verify the effectiveness of the MOOC. Second, the subjects are limited to the same local university and are only made out of undergraduate students with an upper-intermediate level of English. Thus, implementing cross-cultural research to gain a more global perspective, using a sampling of different levels, ages, and context could be the focus of future studies. In addition, the findings of this study are primarily based on written reflections. Future research studies could integrate some other qualitative tools such as classroom observation and face-to-face interviews to triangulate the findings, or could use some statistical data from a quantitative tool to increase the reliability of the research findings.

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Appendix A. Performance Evaluation Checklist

(0 to 5 points each)

Name:

Part 1 - Introduction

Did the presenter;

1. greet the audience?

Yes No

2. express his/her purpose?

Yes No

3. give the structure?

Yes No

4. give the timing?

Yes No

5. handle questions?

Yes No

Part 2 - The main body

Did the presenter;

1. share the details of his/her main message and any other important matters?

Yes No

3. refer to visual aids appropriately?

Yes No

4. use some useful transition phrases?

Yes No

5. summarize a point or section?

Yes No

5. capture the attention of the audience?

Yes No

Part 3 - Conclusion

Did the presenter;

1. sum up important points?

Yes No

2. repeat the main message?

Yes No

3. conclude (by giving a 'take-away' message)?

Yes No

4. close (by thanking the audience)?

Yes No

6. invite questions?

Yes No

Part 4 – Overall

1. Did the presenter address the task fully?

Yes No

2. Was the delivery clear and at an appropriate pace/volume?

Yes No

3. Did it interest/engage the audience?

Yes No

4. Was the language used appropriate and accurate?

Yes No

5. Was the body language evident?

Yes No

Appendix B. Interview Questions

1. Do you believe that integrating a **MOOC on presentation skills** contributed to your English communication skills? How?
2. What other features, characteristics, or activities would you like to be integrated into the MOOC platform that will help you improve your English communication skills? Why? (You can push the limits of your imagination.)
3. How can you define your experience with the MOOC platform?
4. Is there something else you would like to add about the MOOC Platform?