# English Language MOOC to Improve Speaking Skills: A Strategic Partnership Project in the Field of Adult Education-A Proposal

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## Abstract

The advent of Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs) has opened up a whole new world of language learning opportunities. It helps to boost access to language instruction for individuals outside of regular classrooms. Language MOOCs (LMOOCs) are online courses that are generated with the purpose of providing free and accessible content for those who are interested in language learning and who come from various backgrounds. Albeit its potential to improve interaction, most of the LMOOCs have not been designed focusing on individuals' communicative skills in English. Therefore, the current project presented a language MOOC on speaking English for A2/B1 learners in English as a Foreign/Second Language (EFL/ESL) contexts. The content of the speaking lessons was based on a framework for teaching speaking, which reflected the ideas of current SLA research (e.g. the information processing, noticing hypothesis, skill learning theory, transfer appropriate processing) from an interactionist perspective. Within this framework, the lessons were shaped in four stages: identifying the learning outcomes, creating awareness on the target speaking function(s), appropriating the identified function(s) via various activities and tasks, and giving an opportunity for autonomous use of the target function(s). The activities and materials designed were built upon tasks that reflected everyday situations and interactive contexts to guide learners communicate in the target language. Situations similar to real life contexts also helped learners transfer information and expressions they used in these situations into the actual speaking contexts in the outside world. The design and content of the suggested MOOC described here can be helpful for language educators, practitioners, and course designers to integrate technology into classrooms via MOOCs to foster speaking skills in EFL/ESL contexts. Several implications were drawn to shed light on the role of MOOCs for language instruction.

Keywords: MOOC, L-MOOC, language learning, teaching speaking.

## Konuşma Becerilerini Geliştirmek İçin İngilizce KAÇD: Yetişkin Eğitimi Alanında Stratejik Bir Ortaklık Projesi-Bir Öneri
### Öz

Kitlesel Çevrimiçi Açık Kursların (KAÇD'ler) ortaya çıkışı, dil öğrenme olasılıklarında yepyeni bir dünyanın kapılarını açtı. Normal sınıfların dışındaki bireyler için dil eğitimine ulaşma şansını artırmaya yardımcı olur. Dil KAÇD'leri (D-KAÇD 'ler), dil öğrenmeye ilgi duyan ve çeşitli geçmişlerden gelen kişiler için ücretsiz ve erişilebilir içerik sağlamak amacıyla oluşturulmuş çevrimiçi kurslardır. Etkileşimi geliştirme potansiyeline rağmen, D-KAÇD 'lerin çoğunun bireylerin İngilizce iletişim becerilerine odaklanarak tasarlanmadığı görülmektedir. Bu nedenle, mevcut proje Yabancı/İkinci Dil Olarak İngilizce öğretimi bağlamlarında A2/B1 öğrencileri için İngilizce konuşmaya yönelik bir KAÇD sunmuştur. Konuşma derslerinin içeriği, mevcut Yabancı dil öğretimi araştırmasının fikirlerini (örneğin, bilgi işleme, fark etme hipotezi, beceri öğrenme teorisi, uygun işlemeyi aktarma) etkileşimci bir bakış açısıyla yansıtan bir konuşma öğretimi çerçevesine dayanıyordu. Bu çerçevede dersler, kazanımların belirlenmesi, hedef konuşma işlev(ler)i hakkında farkındalık yaratılması, belirlenen işlev/işlevlerin çeşitli etkinlik ve görevlerle sahiplenilmesi ve dilin özerk kullanımına olanak sağlanması olmak üzere dört aşamada şekillenmiştir. Tasarlanan etkinlikler ve materyaller, öğrencilerin hedef dilde iletişim kurmasına rehberlik etmek için günlük durumları ve etkileşimli bağlamları yansıtan görevler üzerine inşa edilmiştir. Gerçek yaşam bağlamlarına benzer durumlar, öğrencilerin bu durumlarda kullandıkları bilgi ve ifadeleri dış dünyadaki gerçek konuşma bağlamlarına aktarmalarına da yardımcı olmuştur. Burada açıklanan önerilen KAÇD 'nin tasarımı ve içeriği, dil eğitimcilerine, uygulayıcılara ve kurs tasarımcılarına, İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğreticilerin bağlamlarında konuşma becerilerini geliştirmek için teknolojiyi D-KAÇD 'ler aracılığıyla sınıflara entegre etme konusunda yardımcı olabilir. KAÇD'lerin dil öğretimindeki rolüne ışık tutmak için çeşitli çıkarımlar yapılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: KAÇD, D-KAÇD, dil öğrenimi, konuşma öğretimi.

# MOOCS AND ONLINE LANGUAGE LEARNING

With the current emphasis on technological advancements (i.e. learning management systems, online learning tools and platforms, flipped classrooms, etc.) and their integration into educational environments, how to use such advancements in foreign language (FL) environments have attracted increasing attention. Thus, it becomes inevitable to consider new pedagogical approaches at the dawn of the digital era to foster enriched FL learning and overcome technological challenges (Beetham & Sharpe, 2013). Integration of technology in FL contexts has brought forward many innovations such as computer-assisted language learning, augmented reality, mobile-assisted language learning, and Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs) into various FL teaching and learning contexts. Among these, MOOCs and their integration into teaching language skills is a new venue for research and a growing interest remarks the importance of this novel FL teaching/learning tool to develop more enhanced FL practices for the teachers, teacher educators, and the learners alike.

In simplest terms, MOOCs aim to make pedagogical content and learning opportunities accessible to various learners regardless of physical and time boundaries. MOOCs are practical tools that provide versatile opportunities for learning on different topics, they are cost-effective, and offer the flexibility to learn in a ubiquitous fashion surpassing the boundaries of classroom environments; and thus, making learning a more long-lasting experience for all (Godwin-Jones, 2014; Martin-Monje & Barcena, 2014; Beirne, Mhichil &Cleircin,2017). When it comes to FL environments, there are many effective internal and external factors in FL learning process, which has a complex structure that includes many interrelated factors (Ellis, 1986). While internal factors such as student readiness, motivation and cognition form the basic structure for acquisition, external factors such as learning environment, material design and curriculum determine the effectiveness of the process. In this regard, it is crucial to design motivating and innovative learning environments which are tailored to the changing needs of FL learners in the digitally enriched world of learning. It is also obvious that a successful FL learning process depends on the effective use of appropriate language learning strategies and FL learners need to use various strategies to cope with the challenges of educational technologies. Since language learning strategies are specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques that students often consciously use to improve their progress in comprehension, internalization, and use of L2 (Oxford, 1994), students select and use certain behaviors within appropriate strategies to learn a new language. In recent times, learners need to develop more effective strategies to regulate their learning in the digital realms which offer various opportunities for learning. The choice of strategy is related to a number of variables such as background, experience, motivation, goals and age (Dörnyei, 1990). At this point, a meaningful FL learning process should be designed within the strategies suitable for learner characteristics. Hence, MOOC applications, which can be seen as an extension of online learning approaches for designing foreign language learning environments within the strategies suitable for learner characteristics, have the potential to make a significant contribution to the FL learning process and use of effective learning strategies.

MOOC applications for FL teaching can create an interactive language learning environment that provides unlimited access and a large number of participants. MOOC applications for FL teaching, which can be defined as structured interactive language environments, are capable of promoting autonomous learning within strategies suitable for learner characteristics with the meaningful authentic educational materials they contain. Thus, MOOCs are quite suitable for adult learners who have no formal links to any educational classroom and who are keen on improving their FL skills with accessible and up-to-date content that can be helpful for their FL use in their daily endeavours. The basic principles of the learning process of adult learners are simply and clearly different from the learning process of younger learners. In this regard, the priorities, needs, interests and approaches of instructional designers are extremely important in order to create a meaningful learning environment. At this point, the work of Malcolm Knowles (1978) provides an outline to go further in adult learning in various aspects. According to Knowles, adults are autonomous, goal-oriented, practical and intrinsically motivated learners. In light of this outline, MOOC applications for FL teaching can be defined as an excellent choice for an adult learner who wants to learn a foreign language. As autonomous learners, adults should actively participate in the learning process, in which they take responsibility for their own learning in a self-directed manner. In this respect, efficiently designed MOOC applications for FL teaching offer autonomous learning environments filled with highly authentic educational materials. Moreover, these interactive language environments provide learners with a clear plan with a structured basis for learning objectives, directions, and practical implications. Thus, adult learners can recognize the goals they will set at the initial stage, follow them and evaluate their learning processes. MOOC applications for FL teaching constitute an effective alternative to overcoming the main obstacles such as lack of time and

motivation or the problem of accessing the material that adult learners encounter in their autonomous learning processes.

**MOOCs for Language Learning**

According to Kasch, Van Rosmalen, and Kalz (2017), Grechushkina (2018), and Paulsen (2002), open online courses are services and tools made available online for educational purposes, such as the provision of learning or teaching materials and facilitating communication between instructors and students. Due to the widespread usage of information and communication technology, online, open, and flexible learning has established itself as the standard in the field of education (Zawacki-Richter, Bozkurt, Alturki, & Aldraiweesh, 2018). In 2008, MOOCs made their debut and quickly became popular. Massive Open Online Courses, or MOOCs, are open and free digital resources for teachers, students, and self-learners to use for research, teaching, and learning (Hew & Cheung, 2014; Zawacki-Richter & Naidu, 2016). Everyone can participate in MOOCs, have access to useful learning resources, interact with other students, and use the Internet to reflect on and share what they have learned with others (Hu, 2013). According to Comer, Clark, and Canelas (2014), open online courses and MOOCs have similar qualities in that they are both online courses accessible to all types of learners. As a result, MOOCs have emerged as the most recent development in online education, attracting more and more language students and courses.

In terms of the application field, researchers have distinguished between two forms of language learning: native language (L1) learning and nonnative language (L2) learning (Hung, Yang, Hwang, Chu, & Wang, 2018). In recent years, some academics have explored online L1 learning. For instance, Sari (2018) studied a group of English instructors who participated in teacher training courses and looked at their perceptions of MOOCs. According to Kwak's (2017) investigation on MOOCs for academic writing, writing may be seen as a form of skill development for enhancing grammatical accuracy and article surface structure. English as a second language has received the most attention from academics who have studied L2 learning in MOOCs (Cimermanová, 2018; Martn-Monje, Castrillo, & Maana-Rodrguez, 2018; Mohamed & Hammond, 2018). For instance, Comer (2013) examined the review procedure for developing MOOCs. The study found that writing MOOCs with both quantitative and qualitative analysis benefited greatly from well-structured and efficient peer assessment. Chacón-Beltrán (2018) taught adult learners how to self-create vocabulary learning strategies through MOOCs; the findings demonstrated that adult learners may successfully study vocabulary anywhere with the use of relevant materials and MOOCs. Additionally, numerous specific languages have drawn interest in L2 learning, including online Tatar (Gimaletdinova & Khalitova, 2016), Portuguese (Zancanaro & Domingues, 2018), and Japanese courses (Fang, 2018).

## THE RATIONALE BEHIND SPEAK ENGLISH MOOC- ENGLISH LANGUAGE MOOC TO IMPROVE SPEAKING SKILLS PROJECT

We live in a world that has proven to continuously transform especially with the affects of external factors, such as COVID-19. Such factors have implications on education as they do with most areas of life which, in turn, necessitates the continuous development of existing skills as well as the development new ones. The COVID-19 pandemic we experienced globally has transitioned us to a new era. Even before the pandemic, the significance of language skills, particularly of English as lingua franca, was emphasized in several policy documents. People, in many fields use English as their primary working language. F.e., 98% of German physicists, 83% of chemists and 81% of biologists and psychologists use English as the main language of communication (Graddol, 1997). English has thus become vital for communication in our world today. However, despite the undeniable status of English and importance of foreign language skills, still in very recent reports such as EU's Council Recommendation of 22 May 2019 on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages, it is stated that almost half of Europeans say that they are unable to hold a conversation in any foreign language. Therefore, there is an obvious need to improve foreign language skills, particularly English. However, with the emergence of COVID-19, like in any other field, more flexible, non-traditional programs have risen to the forefront and have proved to be significant. MOOCs (Massive Online Open Courses) are one of them. However, subject-wise, of all courses in 2018, %19,9 were offered in the field of technology, %18,5 were offered in business, %10,6 in the field of social sciences and %10 in the field of science (Werl, 2019). On the other hand, Barcena & Martin-Monje (2015) indicate that language MOOCs (L-MOOCs) are in the very early stage of development. Hsu (2021) reports that there are only 143 L-MOOCs available (out of which 94 are for learning English) so there is definitely a requirement for more L-MOOCs in different areas. With this at hand, Speak English MOOC- English Language MOOC to Improve Speaking skills project (*Project no: 2019-1-TR01-KA204-074155*), an Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership Project in

Adult Education, was developed by Bartin University in Turkey in partnership with Universidad Politécnica de Madrid in Spain, BEST Institut für Berufsbezogene Weiterbildung und Personaltraining GmbH from Austria and Anadolu University in Turkey between 2019-2022.

Speaking is by far the most challenging of the four language skills—reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Even though there is currently a seemingly infinite amount of online courses available, there aren't as many Language MOOCs as there are students. Also, the Speak English-MOOC's content is likely to be novel for our target audiences because the existing L-MOOCs are typically not focused on enhancing practical speaking abilities. The Speak English-MOOC material offers the target groups a relevant instructional design to present stronger self-efficacy beliefs in terms of speaking competence to build confidence among English language learners while speaking in English and using the suggested pragmatic phrases. The following exercises are proposed to build the linguistic content (recommended as a 6-week course): Target population needs analysis to inform the content, framework definition, instructional design, pilot testing, and final content change based on piloting findings.

## SPEAK ENGLISH MOOC FRAMEWORK AND DESIGN

The suggested MOOC described here was designed following the ideas of Thornbury's (2005) model for teaching speaking. The framework of the MOOC reflects the outcomes of current SLA research (e.g., the information processing, noticing hypothesis, skill learning theory, transfer appropriate processing) from an interactionist perspective. Accordingly, the aims are to;

· take the attention of learners to speech functions by activating their existing schema, leading them into the use of speech functions used in daily life via various audio-visual materials

· help learners notice useful expressions for the identified speech functions by implementing various tasks such as listing, sorting, ordering etc.

· check learners' understanding of speech functions within comprehension-based processing activities prior to practice

· guide learners practice the given speech functions and use them autonomously through various activities based on real life situations

· provide contextual dialogues, conversations or materials in which learners can be exposed to the features of the target speech function(s)

In accordance with these aims, each MOOC unit was designed following the framework given in stages below:

**Stage 1-Learning Outcomes**

At the beginning of each unit, learning outcomes were clearly stated and listed. While stating the outcomes, specific attention was given to use observable action verbs such as 'identify, ask, answer, use, etc.' This way, learners were able to (self)check whether they achieved these outcomes or not. A sample outcome was: "*At the end of this unit, you will be able to identify common expressions used in expressing preferences/likes/dislikes*".

**Stage 2-Creating Awareness**

Learners need to be aware of the features of target speech function(s). That is, they gain awareness on where and how the selected speech function is used and in what kind of situations the target function occurs. For this purpose, dialogues, conversations or other kinds of audio-visual materials (e.g., cartoons, videos, advertisements, reading passages) were used as models to expose learners to samples of the target speech function(s). This introductory stage included the following components for an effective awareness raising:

*Attention:* The aim was to take attention to the target speech function via audio/visual materials.

· Lead-in questions, brainstorming or chart filling activities based on eliciting general world knowledge related to speech function were used here. In this way, learners' existing schemas were activated to boost their curiosity about how to express speech events in daily life.

· Learners listened to/watched or read sample dialogues/conversations or other materials exemplifying the use of speech functions. Simple questions or activities were used to draw their attention to the gist of these materials before they noticed formulaic expressions related to the speech events.

*Noticing:* Learners were guided to notice the useful expressions in the sample texts and the knowledge gaps in expressing and using speech functions.

· An activity for comparing and contrasting/identifying/counting/classifying etc. was used here to help learners notice the identified speech functions. Sample dialogue scripts were used here to work on the expressions related to the target function.

· Questions were asked to elicit what other expressions learners know/remember (self-noticing)

· At the end of noticing, a comprehensive table or chart was provided to show learners various expressions used for the target speech functions. Hence, learners had a chance to refer to this table/chart throughout the unit via a link on the MOOC platform.

*Understanding:* The aim was to check learners' understanding of the features of the target speech function(s).

· Dialogues/conversations/ materials rich with the samples of formulaic expressions related to the target speech function were used to check understanding via comprehension-based types of activities.

· Jumbled dialogues, matching, sorting, fill in the blanks, choosing the right option etc. were used to check whether the learners recognized a general principle of pattern regarding the target function.

### Stage 3-Appropriation

In this stage, learners were guided to use/practice the useful formulaic expressions and language features related to the target function(s). Various practice activities (involving listening, reading, writing, and speaking) appropriate for a MOOC platform were used here. Since it was not possible to design interactive activities due to the nature of the MOOC, activities at this stage aimed at developing progressive control over the use of speech function(s).

Sample activities used to appropriate the use of target speech function(s) included:

· *Drilling:* It focused on imitating and repeating words, phrases and even the whole utterance where possible. It was advantageous as it helped with gaining control over language. Drilling was used to fine tune for articulation.

· *Dialogues:* Recorded dialogues were provided to learners. They were able to perform the roles in the dialogues by recording their own productions and comparing them to the given dialogues. Learners also checked whether their pronunciation was closer to the sample or not. Incomplete dialogues, choosing the right option within the dialogues, or matching type of activities were also used.

· *One-sided choice cue-cards:* Dialogues given in cue cards which included information gap between the interlocutors were given here. Learners were able to choose among the options regarding formulaic expressions appropriate for the context. One side of the cue card was given, and the other side of the cue card involved options so that the users could make choices.

· *Manipulation Drills:* Parts of a sentence in the dialogues was given and learners were expected to form sentences using good intonation. In this way, they compared their productions with the given samples.

· *Substitution:* Within dialogues, target phrases were underlined, and users were asked to replace these phrases with another one with similar function.

· *Casting Conversations:* Learners were expected to form parts of conversations based on the given context. They had the opportunity to talk about their choices with other users on the discussion board embedded on the MOOC platform. Talking about their choices helped them better understand the register.

· *Language Games:* Language games where appropriate for the target speech function(s) designed. For instance, users were able to drag and drop certain phrases or expressions within the game, accomplish certain tasks and proceed in the game accordingly.

· *Downloadable Materials:* Downloadable study materials and activities were provided to help learners study on the target function on their own.

### Stage 4-Autonomy

In this last stage of each unit, learners were expected to experience autonomous use of the target speech functions in a more free and communicative way. On the MOOC platform, they were able to record their productions and share them with each other on the discussion board. Alternatively, they could compare their productions with the given samples.

Sample activities used in the autonomy stage included:

· *Functional/Visual Cue Cards:* Role playing activities with appropriate purposes and contexts that were presented in the form of cue cards. These cue cards involved guided cues to help learners produce target speech functions. One side of the cue card was given in a recorded fashion and the other part was performed by the learners. They recorded their own productions and shared them on the discussion board.

· *Narrations:* Learners were given chances to narrate events/stories or talk about their own experiences. They listened to sample narrations and compared their own talk.

· *Links to Online Sources:* Links to various sources were provided where possible.

## IMPLICATIONS

A vast variety of conceptual and pedagogical approaches are utilized in a wide variety of techniques when language acquisition is considered today. They all coexist in current practices and are frequently combined by people switching between various approaches, from traditional drill-and-practice grammar-based learning to notional functional syllabus, from more cognitive stances to sociocultural perspectives, focused on communicative skills and real-world interactions in context. Since they allow for very wide communities of practice—one of the essential elements of a successful language learning experience—MOOCs currently offer exciting possibilities for language instruction. Unfortunately, the majority of L-MOOCs do not expressly highlight the communicative abilities of students. If you're interested in LMOOCs as a language learner, teacher, or designer, you are welcome to check out the following tips:

1. Increase participation and interaction

Think about the ways that students can participate in MOOCs. If students can interact with one another, they will be more motivated to use language. Instead of only memorizing course materials, interaction should be the main focus of learning.

2. Help to facilitate self-organized learning, but do not manage it

When possible, provide options for students to self-organize through social media or in-person gatherings, but avoid managing these organizations. In reality, it is highly likely that students will form these groups without any help from the instructor.

3. Establish a presence for the teacher

Students need to be aware that a real instructor is taking part in the LMOOC. Create a Facebook page or Twitter feed to support the class, make regular updates, and take the time to respond to student conversations in the MOOC.

4. Make video engaging

Consider using video as a source of real language materials rather than just as a lecture delivery medium. Use video to provide pupils the chance to learn about culture in addition to the language.

5. Specify success.

Consider what course completion will entail as you create a Language MOOC. Students should be encouraged to consider their own objectives and how they will use the course to attain them.

6. Align the assessment's objectives with its format.

Analyze what kind of assessment best satisfies the course's objectives as you consider its objectives. Assessment methods should evaluate writing in a meaningful way, such as through peer and self-assessment rather than through multiple-choice questions, if the course's focus is on writing, for instance.

In brief:

-The content should be based on learners' needs.

-It is important to engage the learners with communicative and meaningful real-life activities and tasks.

-It is important to facilitate learners to be autonomous in their own learning process.

-The materials should be engaging, goal-oriented and stimulating.

-Learners should know the outcomes of the process and they should be able to assess their own learning.

**Author Contributions**

All of the authors contributed equally in the article.

**Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare no conflict of interest in the research.

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