Global Chinese Language Pedagogy in the Era of MOOCs

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Abstract

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) have shown to be a disruptive innovation in that people who can access the internet can access education anytime, anywhere (Lee, 2017; Simpson, 2017). This presentation features MandarinX, an organization providing a premier Chinese language learning experience online in partnership with edX, a MOOC provider founded by Harvard and MIT. As of January 2018, MandarinX has experienced high demand with an enrollment of over 220,000 learners across five in-house designed and developed MOOC courses: Basic Mandarin Series: First Steps, Level One, Two, Three and Business Chinese Series: Mandarin Chinese for Business. This presentation introduces the collaboration between MandarinX and the presenter with a focus on its pedagogical design, including print, audio, video, and digital. The presenter will introduce each of the components in detail and how these components facilitate the learning cycle of learners. Additionally, the presenter will address the following questions: (1) how effective is online language learning? (2) the role of social media in MOOCs, (3) the production of MOOCs, including materials development and video production, (4) topic selections and pedagogical manifestation of MOOCs, and (5) the evaluation of learners of MOOCs. Lastly, the presenter aims to combine MandarinX courses and an online speech recognition and immediate feedback tool that provides the learners with immediate and quantitative feedback about accuracy on pronunciations, tones and intonations. This tool also assists learners in identifying and focusing on their actual deficiencies and based on their individual performance, guides them in real time through individualized training, drills and a road to improvement. The presenter argues that while language MOOCs have taken learning opportunities far beyond the traditional limitations of classrooms, the next frontier of innovations in teaching foreign languages lays in providing immediate and tailor-made feedback for individual learners.

Keywords: *Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), materials design, speech recognition*

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) have shown to be a disruptive innovation in that people who can access the Internet can access education anytime, anywhere (Lee, 2017 [4]; Simpson, 2017 [7]). MandarinX, founded in 2015, is an organization providing a premier Chinese language learning experience online in partnership with edX, a MOOC provider founded by Harvard and MIT. As of March 2018, MandarinX has experienced high demand with an enrollment of over 220,000 learners across five in-house designed and developed MOOC courses: Basic Mandarin Series: First Steps, Level One, Two, Three and Business Chinese Series: Mandarin Chinese for Business (Figure 1):

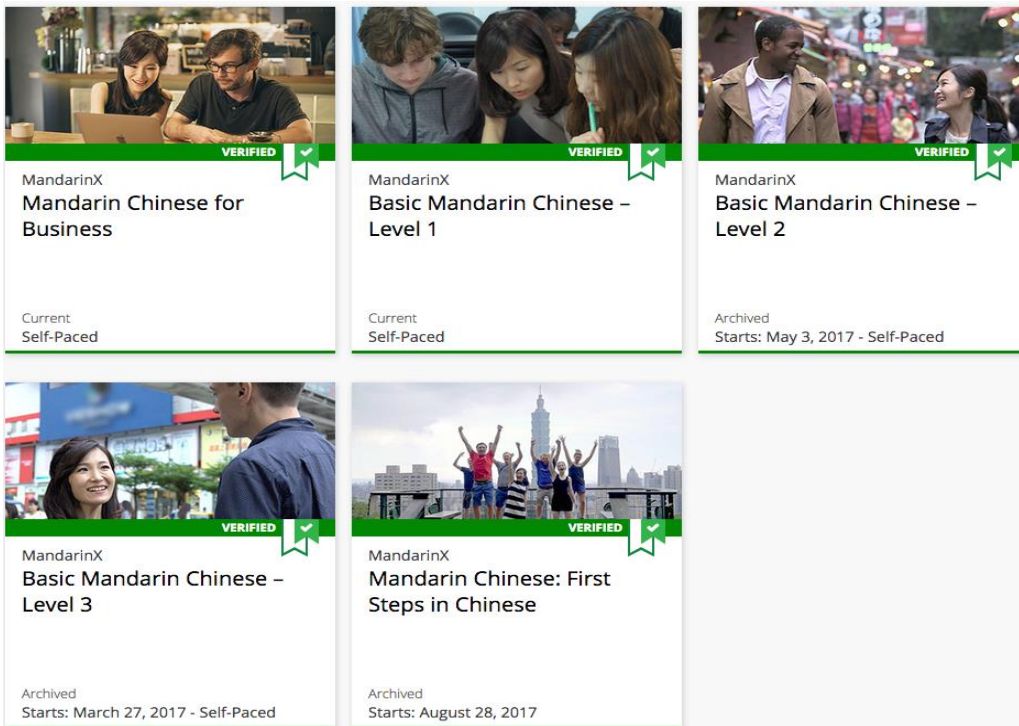---

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Figure 1: Five Courses of MandarinX

The diverse background of MandarinX learners is represented from all age groups and 198 countries around the world (Figure 2), with one quarter of them being from the U.S.. The median age of MandarinX learners is 28 and almost 70% of them have a college or advanced degree (Figure 3):
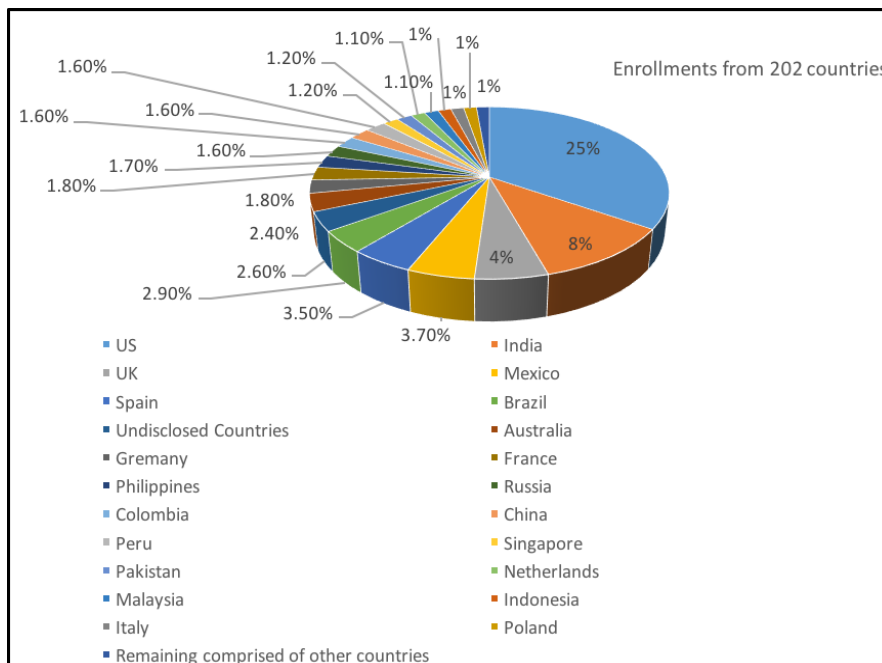

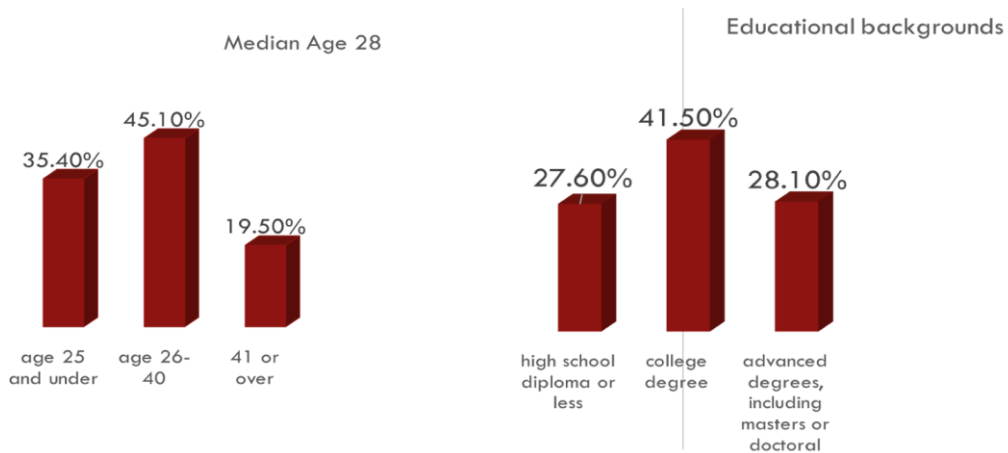*Figure 2: Enrollments in MandarinX's Current MOOCs*

Figure 3: Participants Demographics of MandarinX

Prolific research has identified three key elements for successful language MOOCs: social networking, teaching presence, and video quality (Chen, 2017 [1]). Learners have indicated that they value relationships built during their online courses, in which they can practice and interact through social media (Jiao et al., 2017 [3]). Teaching presence refers to the pedagogy and teaching styles of the instructor and is proven to be one of the the top criteria for online learning courses and environment (Shapiro et al., 2017 [6]). Video quality involves largely the pedagogical designs and graphic productions of thematic videos. Important considerations include the length, composition, and production value of MOOC videos (Crook & Schofield, 2017 [2]). When responding to "What did you find most engaging while taking MandarinX?", the majority of participants choose "high quality videos" over the other options illustrated in Figure 4 (Chen & Liao, 2018 [1]):
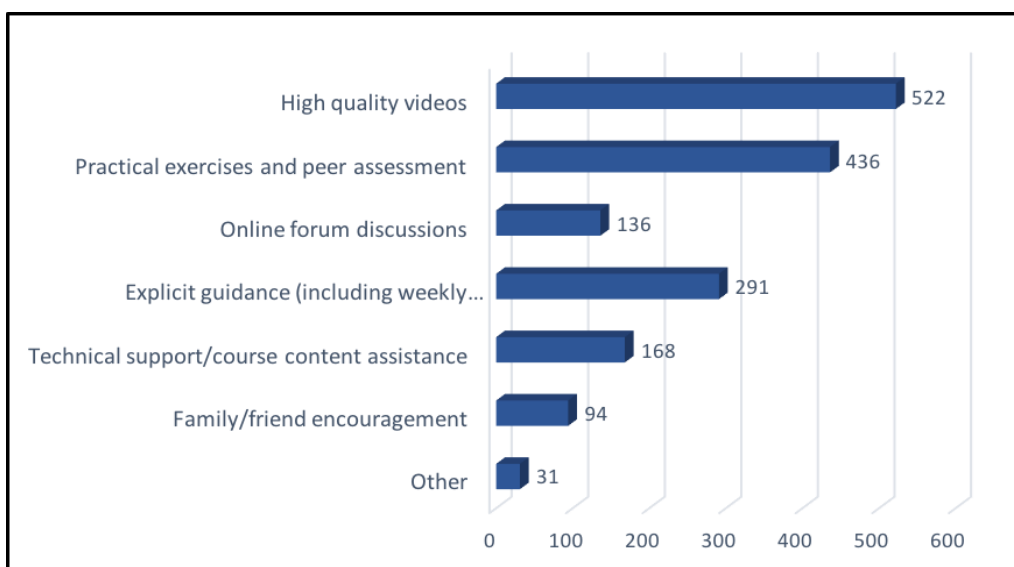

Figure 4. Participants Found the Most Engaging Part while Taking MandarinX

In addition, MandarinX has taken measures to increase interactions with learners, such as rapid feedback, flipped classroom, active reading, adaptive hinting, flexible delivery, and simulations and visualization. Regular activities and events include:

- Instructor-led online office hour
- Facebook live broadcast
- Weekly cultural notes videos
- Boot camp
- High-quality online tutoring service
- Blah blah corner

As how participants perceive their learning experience in MOOCs that differs from that in physical classroom settings is an important factor in their satisfaction of online learning (Milligan & Littlejohn, 2017 [5]), MandarinX has been striving for bringing high quality courses to online education. MandarinX argues that while language MOOCs have taken learning opportunities far beyond the traditional limitations of classrooms, the next frontier of innovations in teaching foreign languages lays in providing immediate and tailor-made feedback for individual learners. The MandarinX team aims to combine courses and an online speech recognition and immediate feedback tool. This tool, NetProF, provides learners of Chinese with immediate and quantitative feedback about their accuracy on pronunciation, tones and intonations. It also assists learners in identifying and focusing on their actual deficiencies and based on their individual performance, guides them in real time through individualized training, drills and a road to improvement. Below is an introductory platform of NetProF:
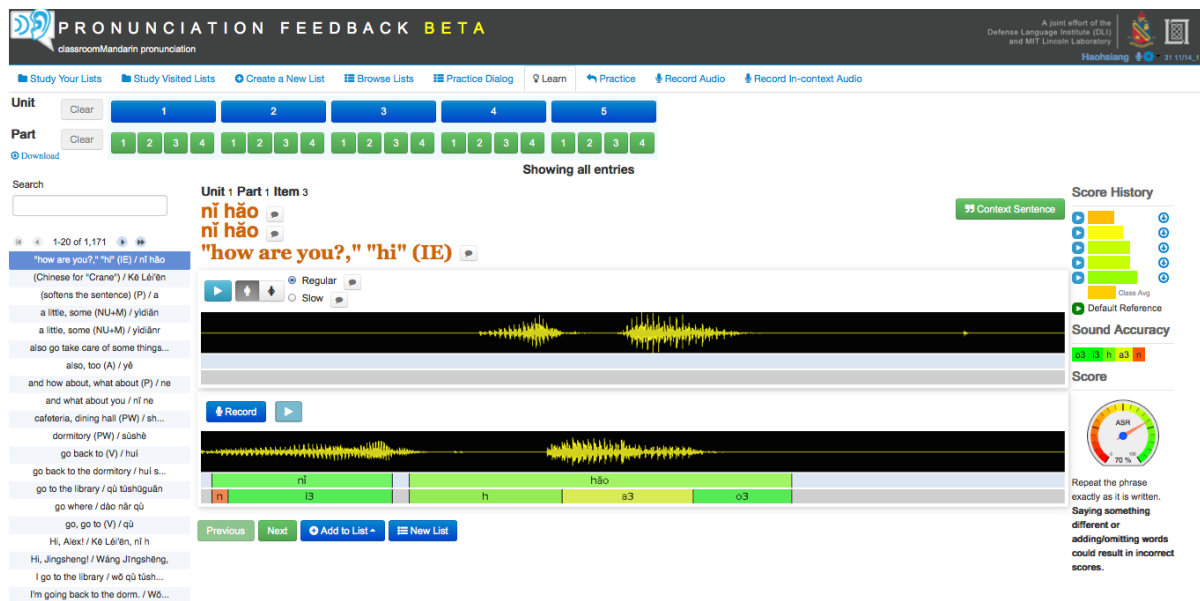

Figure 5. The Platform of NetProF

Chinese language pedagogy in the era of global education have evolved over the years. How to adequately implement FACT (declarative knowledge) and ACT (procedural knowledge) into online Chinese language education and assess learner's performance, challenges even the most experienced experts. The MandarinX team has been striving for using innovative pedagogical methods to equip our learners with the required language forms and cultural norms to function successfully in Chinese societies using Mandarin as their primary language. We are confident that MandainX has demonstrated itself as a successful MOOC language course for our long-term goal of serving both the residential and international communities of Chinese language learners with high-quality education.

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