



## English Language MOOC to Improve Speaking Skills: A Needs Assessment Study

Neslihan Köse<sup>1</sup>, İlknur Civan<sup>2</sup>, Betül Çimenli<sup>3</sup>, Safiye İpek Kuru Gönen<sup>4</sup>, Burcu Şentürk<sup>5</sup>, Murat Köroğlu<sup>6</sup>, Edmundo Tovar<sup>7</sup>

Bartın University, Turkey<sup>1,3,5,6</sup>  
Eskişehir Anadolu University, Turkey<sup>2,4</sup>  
Universidad Politecnica De Madrid, Spain<sup>7</sup>

### Abstract

MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) are seen as a turning point for language learning [8]. For language learners, MOOCs present a noticeable change for learners from different backgrounds with flexible and practical training [4]. Based on this idea, Speak English-MOOC project<sup>1</sup> has been developed jointly by Bartın University, Anadolu University, BEST Institut für berufsbezogene Weiterbildung und Personaltraining GmbH and Universidad Politecnica De Madrid, and is funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the EU during 2019-2021. The purpose of the project is to design a 6-week English language MOOC for A2 level adult learners focusing on speaking skill. To develop this content, the first activity was to analyze the needs of the target learners to make decisions on the goals and content of a language MOOC. Within this phase, the purpose was to identify what hinders learners to speak English, what motivates them, what kind of topics they would like to speak, what skills they would like to focus on, what type of activities they would like to be engaged with, and what kind of materials they would like to use. To do this, a questionnaire was developed and administered to a total of 191 adult language learners in all partner countries. Overall findings of the needs assessment revealed that a majority of the respondents felt uncomfortable while speaking in English. Furthermore, delivering formal speeches or handling negotiations in English caused a serious spike in the level of anxiety. Lack of fluency, fear of making mistakes due to lack of vocabulary (e.g. phrasal verbs and colloquial expressions), and imprecise pronunciation were the most commonly stated concerns by the respondents. All in all, the respondents also noted that they would like to be fluent language users who talk with a certain level of confidence and who can handle any situation that may come up during travels to foreign countries. Therefore, based on the results from the in-depth analysis of target learners' needs, the project aims to meet these needs by creating an online content for learners to practise aspects of speaking skill with tasks that reflect everyday situations and interactive contexts..

**Keywords:** Language MOOCs, Needs Assessment, Speaking Skill.

### 1. MOOCs and Online Language Learning

Today, MOOCs are seen as a widely discussed revolutionary model of education [3] and a popular implementation of technology [5]. Language MOOCs (LMOOCs) are defined as “dedicated web-based online courses for second languages (L2) with unrestricted access and potentially unlimited participation” [1, p. 1]. Under the light of autonomy, diversity, openness and interactivity principles [2] they depend, LMOOCs appear to constitute a great potential to provide a meaningful language learning environment with no space and time limitations. Thus, MOOCs that appeal to diverse public are available at many well-established platforms and locally built ones. However, very few MOOCs are dedicated to language learning [1; 4].

LMOOCs provide remarkable opportunities to facilitate foreign language development [1] such as development of learner autonomy [9] and learning strategies, appropriate use of language through authentic materials and activities [11], and social development as well as professional development. Thus, LMOOCs can be regarded as a turning point for language learning [8] for many reasons. Having said that, many questions remain to be addressed as very few studies investigate LMOOCs, yet none research has been conducted to investigate one focusing on developing speaking skills.

To address this gap, we aim to promote speaking skills of a large number of adult L2 learners in-or-out of formal education through Speak English-MOOC Project, and in this paper, preliminary findings of this ongoing process are presented following an introduction of the project. Being the first LMOOC



focusing on fostering speaking skills in Turkey, Speak English-MOOC is designed to help learners to improve their interactional and social skills through engaging materials and varied interactional activities. The expected impact will be building up confidence among L2 learners while speaking English.

## **2. Speak English MOOC- English Language MOOC to Improve Speaking Skills Project**

Although English is indicated as de facto the first language in Europe and globally, the level of attainment is poor in most countries. On the other hand, there are megatrends, external factors, transforming the world around us. Among these trends are the aging population, labour market shifts, skills mismatch and economic shifts. Above all, in 2020, it has been the latest pandemic that shaped all areas of our lives. Like all other areas of our lives, these megatrends have implications on education as well. Distance education has, thus, emerged as an extremely important option. MOOCs are a form of distance learning. Despite the enormous number of courses provided, the number of Language MOOC initiatives is relatively small. With this data 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 Bartın 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. In the project, a 6-week Language MOOC Content for adult learners with a special emphasis on developing English speaking skills will be developed. To develop the content, several activities were defined, starting with defining the needs of the target group to set out the framework of the Speak English- MOOC content. In this paper, the results from the needs analysis carried out in three countries are given.

## **3. Method**

### **3.1. Participants**

191 adult EFL learners from various backgrounds and language learning experiences participated in the study (30 from Austria, 35 from Spain, 126 from Turkey). In the selection of the participants, convenient sampling strategy was adopted. In order to identify the needs of potential users, a heterogeneous participant pool was aimed.

### **3.2. Instrument**

In the study, an online questionnaire was developed in English investigating learners' demographic information and English language background, needs in ICT skills, factors that hinder and motivate learners while speaking English, topics and situations that would make them willing to speak, activities they would like to be engaged with and materials they would like to use to practice speaking English. To elicit participants' ideas on these issues, the questionnaire included multiple choice, checkboxes, and short answer questions. A group of experts checked the content for face validity and reliability. Austrian and Spanish participants responded in English whereas the ones in Turkey responded in Turkish. For this, the questionnaire used in Turkey was translated into Turkish and it was also submitted to further expert opinion.

### **3.3. Implementation and Data Analysis**

Final versions were uploaded onto an online platform to ease its accessibility. It took approximately 10 minutes to answer the questionnaire and anonymity of the respondents was guaranteed. After needs assessment was conducted, the collected data were transformed into a shared database. The analysis adopted both quantitative and qualitative approaches. For items eliciting quantitative data, simple descriptive analysis was adopted by calculating the means and percentages. For qualitative data, content analysis was conducted. All qualitatively stated ideas were listed, sorted out and delineated in order to reveal participants' needs in a MOOC platform.

## **4. Findings**

The questionnaire aims to dwell on essential points to be identified for the design of the LMOOCs. The demographic data indicate that the age range is between 18 to 42 and older. 44.8% are females and



55.2% are males. 61.2% of the respondents hold a Bachelor's degree, 30.8% have high school diplomas, and almost 8% have a postgraduate degree. Respondents' occupations are too diverse to be classified. 54.6% have experience studying English outside the school. A large portion of the respondents accumulate within the A2-B2 band. More than half of the respondents had never been abroad.

While the possibility of using MOOCs to improve English language skills actually is not well known among the participants, their ICT skills and knowledge are on a level high enough to allow them to take part in online learning activities. Nevertheless, the majority of the participants have no online language learning experience (60% in AT, 60% in ES, and 75.8% in TR). Regarding what motivates and hinders learners in language learning, many Austrian participants aim to achieve a higher level of self-confidence when speaking English with the intention to travel abroad and deal with any situation without feeling uncomfortable. The main motivation to improve English skills for Turkish and Spanish participants is to have confidence speaking English to anyone and in any situation.

The main needs to speak English for the participants are found to interact fluently with natives and to describe in detail various social topics such as personal/social life, making purchases/arrangements, requesting, ordering, complaining, asking for/giving permissions highlighting/summarizing, helping etc. in their professional fields and in an online learning environment. Relatedly, learners mostly prefer interactive activities (76% in AT, 69.4% in TR), listening (63% in AT, 77.1% in ES), pronunciation (50% in AT, 62.9% in ES) followed by language learning games, collaborative tasks, video recordings, voice chatting, vocabulary activities, watching videos and having discussions. That is, learners prefer a variety of activities they find interesting or entertaining. Moreover, integration of technology into activities keeps their attention so they do not get distracted. As for the materials learners would like to use, it is seen that learners prefer reading passages (76% in AT, 54.3% ES, 50.8% in TR). Other activities favoured by the participants are videos (73% in AT, 85.7% in ES, 80.6% in TR), games/puzzles (63% in AT, 25.7% in ES, 58.9% in TR), authentic materials (50% in AT, 77.1% in ES, 79.8% in TR), audios (33% in AT, 71.4% in ES, 42.7% in TR) and visuals (30% in AT, 20% in ES, 62% in TR). The results denote that most of the learners would like to be engaged with materials that represent real life, facilitate learning with visual triggers and technology use.

## **5. Discussion & Conclusion**

The general results suggest almost all respondents have confidence in their ICT skills to follow online learning while most respondents are not aware of MOOCs. Few have tried using MOOC for language learning but a vast ratio did not continue and finish the MOOC program due to lack of time, unappealing and irrelevant content, mismatch between respondents' and courses' proficiency levels. This is in line with Wang-Sziliias & Bellassen's study as technical problems, lack of time, and workplace commitments are considered the main barriers in completing the MOOC. Moreover, most feel uncomfortable while speaking in English regardless of the situation. Yet, delivering formal speeches or handling negotiations in English causes a serious spike in the level of anxiety. In general, not being fluent and making mistakes due to lack of vocabulary and imprecise pronunciation are two basic concerns. Like many foreign language learners, they would like to be fluent language users who talk with a certain level of confidence and who can handle any situation that may come up during travels to foreign countries and thus survive in their social life. This supports Richardson et al.'s [11] definition of active learning, when learners take initiative and become more conscientious, which has a positive impact on the learning, as more interactions are needed when learning a new language. Hence, it is important to shape the language teaching and learning process according to their survival desires and needs, which will give them opportunities to speak. Likewise, the learners want to deal with a variety of activities that they enjoy. Like Waard & Demeulearenae's [13] findings, the students prefer to be engaged in different activities rather than doing the same kind of stuff. They are more intrinsically than extrinsically motivated, and this might come from the freedom to choose what they wanted to learn. Besides, individual works and collaborative tasks should be promoted and assisted with well-chosen visuals and audio materials. This finding is in line with [13] that students prepare for their futures, develop specific vocabulary in a professional area of their interest, and also become more efficient in planning their own learning and appreciating the benefits of peer and social learning. Also, today technology holds a big deal in every part of life, which requires the integration of technology into activities to keep learners' attention high as seen in the results. Furthermore, learners generally would like to be engaged with real life materials and games, which is in line with [14]



because many students find them quite efficient in helping them recognize and memorize characters without being assessed. Also, videos and audio materials are preferred mostly together with the ones that relate to technology use rather than the materials they feel isolated. Thus, the design of MOOCs should take these into consideration to reach the objectives.

It is proved that MOOCs can potentially play an important role in bridging the gap between formal and informal learning and in widening participation. They fulfil the brief of making educational resources freely available to a wider audience, and they foster innovation in pedagogic approaches, allowing universities to test new ways of delivering courses.

## References

- [1] Bárcena, E., & Martín-Monje, E. "1 Introduction. Language MOOCs: an Emerging Field", *Language MOOCs: Providing Learning, Transcending Boundaries*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2014, 1-15.
- [2] Downes, S. "Connectivism and Connective Knowledge: Essays on Meaning and Learning Networks" (2012), In Qian, K & Bax, S. "Beyond the Language Classroom: Researching MOOCs and Other Innovations", Research-publishing, 2017.
- [3] Bouchet, F., & Bachelet, R. "Socializing on MOOCs: Comparing University and Self-Enrolled Students", 6th European MOOCs Stakeholders Summit (EMOOCs 2019), May 2019, Naples, Italy. 31-36.
- [4] Castrillo, M. D. "Language teaching in MOOCs: The integral Role of the Instructor", In E. Martín-Monje & E. Bárcena (Eds.), "Language MOOCs: Providing Learning, Transcending Boundaries", Berlin, De Gruyter, 2014, 67-90.
- [5] Duru I., Sunar A.S., Doğan G., & White S. "Challenges of Identifying Second Language English Speakers in MOOCs". In: Delgado Kloos C., Jermann P., Pérez-Sanagustín M., Seaton D., White S. (Eds) "Digital Education: Out to the World and Back to the Campus". EMOOCs 2017. Lecture Notes in Computer Science, vol 10254. Springer, Cham. 2017 [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-59044-8\\_22](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-59044-8_22)
- [6] Mackness, J., Mak, S. F. J., & Williams, R. "The Ideals and Reality of Participating in a MOOC", In Dirckinck-Holmfeld L, Hodgson V, Jones C, de Laat M, McConnell D & Ryberg (Eds.), "Proceedings of the 7th International Conference on Networked Learning", University of Lancaster, Lancaster, 2010, 266-275.
- [7] Misir, H., Koban Koç, D., & Koç, S.E. "An Analysis of Learner Autonomy and Autonomous Learning Practices in Massive Open Online Language Courses", *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ) Special Issue on CALL (4)*, 2018.
- [8] Perifanou, M. "Research Report on the Current State of Language Learning MOOCs Worldwide: Exploration, Classification and Evaluation", LangMOOC Project, 2015.
- [9] Perifanou, M. "Designing Strategies for an Efficient Language MOOC. In Papadima-Sophocleous, S., Bradey, L. & Thouesney, S. (Eds.), *CALL Communities and Culture - Short Papers from EUROCALL 2016*, Dublin, 2016, 386-90.
- [10] Richardson, M., Abraham, C., & Bond, R. "Psychological correlates of university students' academic performance: A systematic review and meta-analysis", *Psychological Bulletin*, 138(2), 2012. 353-387.
- [11] Sokolik, M. "What Constitutes an Effective Language MOOC?", In E. Martín-Monje & E. Bárcena (Eds.), "Language MOOCs: Providing Learning, Transcending Boundaries", Berlin, De Gruyter, 2014, 16-32.
- [12] De Waard, I., & Demeulenaere, K. "The MOOC-CLIL project: using MOOCs to increase language, and social and online learning skills for 5th grade K-12 students", In Q. Kan & S. Bax (Eds), "Beyond the language classroom: Researching MOOCs and other innovations" Research-publishing.net, 2017, 29-42.
- [13] Wang-Szilas, J., & Bellassen, J. "Dualism-based design of the Introductory Chinese MOOC 'Kit de contact en langue chinoise'", In Q. Kan & S. Bax (Eds), "Beyond the language classroom: researching MOOCs and other innovations", Research-publishing.net, 2017, 43-57.

**"Funded by the Erasmus+ Program of the European Union (Project No: 2019-1-TR01-KA204-074155). However, European Commission and Turkish National Agency cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein".**