

**THE IMPACT OF MOOC AGGREGATORS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF
LANGUAGE EDUCATION**

***O IMPACTO DOS AGREGADORES DE MOOC NO DESENVOLVIMENTO DA
EDUCAÇÃO EM LÍNGUAS***

***EL IMPACTO DE LOS AGREGADORES MOOC EN EL DESARROLLO DE LA
EDUCACIÓN DE IDIOMAS***

Rustam Sh. AZITOV¹
Alla Dmitriyevna KULIK²
Grigoriy Mikhailovich BAZHIN³
Tatyana Ilinichna GOLUBEVA⁴
Marina Alexandrovna GOLOVYASHKINA⁵
Natalia Sergeevna YUSHCHENKO⁶

ABSTRACT: Due to many massive open online courses (MOOC), it becomes more difficult for the users to determine which course best suits their needs. To improve the efficiency of course selection, a place is needed where they can visually compare the offers of different MOOC providers. The article aims to identify the number and characteristics of massive open online courses for language learning (MOOLC) using MOOC aggregators and to trace their impact on the development of language education. The article presents different approaches to such concepts as MOOC, MOOLC, MOOC platform, MOOC aggregator, and MOOC provider. The article determines MOOC aggregators, which would allow identifying the number and characteristics of MOOLC, and examines the possibilities of some MOOC platforms, which offer courses for English language learning, basing on the selected criteria for evaluation of the existing MOOC platforms. The author concludes that nowadays, the ideal MOOC platform, which could offer the necessary conditions for creating an ideal MOOLC, does not exist.

KEYWORDS: Massive open online courses for language learning. MOOLC. MOOC platform. MOOC aggregator. MOOC provider.

RESUMO: Devido ao grande número de massivos cursos online abertos (MOOC), torna-se cada vez mais difícil para os usuários determinar qual curso melhor atende às suas

¹ Kazan University, Kazan - Russia. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1792-7657>. E-mail: rustam15278@mail.ru

² Peoples' Friendship of Russia (RUDN University), Moscow - Russia. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1545-641X>. E-mail: pesocheck08@mail.ru

³ Moscow State University of Civil Engineering, Moscow - Russia. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7960-6421>. E-mail: gbajin@stc-c.ru

⁴ Russian State Social University, Moscow - Russia. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1916-2328>. E-mail: paloma60@mail.ru

⁵ K.G. Razumovsky Moscow State University of Technologies and Management (First Cossack University), Moscow - Russia. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9451-7101>. E-mail: placid2@yandex.ru

⁶ Russian State Social University, Moscow - Russia. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8911-5765>. E-mail: n.yushenko@list.ru

necessidades. Para melhorar a eficiência da seleção de cursos, é necessário um local onde possam comparar visualmente as ofertas de diferentes fornecedores de MOOC. O artigo tem como objetivo identificar o número e as características dos cursos online abertos massivos para aprendizagem de línguas (MOOLC) usando agregadores MOOC e traçar seu impacto no desenvolvimento da educação de línguas. O artigo apresenta diferentes abordagens para conceitos como MOOC, MOOLC, plataforma MOOC, agregador MOOC e provedor MOOC. O artigo determina agregadores MOOC, o que permitiria identificar o número e as características dos MOOLC, e examina as possibilidades de algumas plataformas MOOC, que oferecem cursos para o aprendizado da língua inglesa, com base nos critérios selecionados para avaliação das plataformas MOOC existentes. O autor conclui que atualmente não existe a plataforma MOOC ideal, capaz oferecer as condições necessárias para a criação de um MOOLC ideal.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Cursos online abertos e massivos para aprendizagem de línguas. MOOLC. Plataforma MOOC. Agregador MOOC. Provedor de MOOC.

RESUMEN: Debido a la gran cantidad de cursos en línea abiertos masivos (MOOC), se vuelve cada vez más difícil para los usuarios determinar qué curso se adapta mejor a sus necesidades. Para mejorar la eficiencia de la selección de cursos, se necesita un lugar donde puedan comparar visualmente las ofertas de diferentes proveedores de MOOC. El artículo tiene como objetivo identificar el número y las características de los cursos en línea abiertos masivos para el aprendizaje de idiomas (MOOLC) utilizando agregadores MOOC y rastrear su impacto en el desarrollo de la educación lingüística. El artículo presenta diferentes enfoques de conceptos tales como MOOC, MOOLC, plataforma MOOC, agregador MOOC y proveedor MOOC. El artículo determina los agregadores de MOOC, lo que permitiría identificar el número y características de MOOLC, y examina las posibilidades de algunas plataformas MOOC, que ofrecen cursos para el aprendizaje del idioma inglés, en base a los criterios seleccionados para la evaluación de las plataformas MOOC existentes. El autor concluye que en la actualidad no existe la plataforma MOOC ideal, que pudiera ofrecer las condiciones necesarias para crear un MOOLC ideal.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Cursos online masivos y abiertos para el aprendizaje de idiomas. MOOLC. Plataforma MOOC. Agregador de MOOC. Proveedor de MOOC.

Introduction

Since 2012, the number of massive open online courses (MOOC) all over the world has increased significantly. The main reason for this was the appearance of the popular MOOC platforms, such as edX, Coursera, Udacity, and FutureLearn, which were the first big providers of MOOC platforms. All these companies are based in North America (BATURAY, 2015). Most MOOC are developed by academic institutions and are presented to the public on a MOOC provider's platform such as Coursera, edX, and Udacity. The original MOOC were designed to expand the process of lifelong learning (MURRAY, 2014). Coursera, one of the MOOC platforms, claims that its mission is to "provide people with education that will improve

their lives, the lives of their families and the communities in which they live”. The founder of another MOOC platform, Udacity, said that he was “against the imbalance that the current system brings to the world” and that he “wanted to improve the possibilities” (LANE; CAIRD; WELLER, 2014, p. 115).

MOOC stands for Massive Open Online Courses, which are the key elements describing this new type of courses:

- Massive: this term refers to the number of people participating in the MOOC, which should be large enough;
- Open: this term refers to such type of courses which are free and do not impose any entry limits;
- Online: MOOC were created as an e-learning model, based on the idea of distributed content available on the Internet for free (STEWART, 2013).

The original goal of MOOC was to make university education open and accessible to as many students as possible (O’CONNOR, 2014). This reason was enough to interest students all over the world.

Nowadays, there have appeared many new providers of MOOC platforms, including the European ones such as EMMA (European Multiple MOOC Aggregator) and FutureLearn. The first MOOC platforms were only in English, but now there are regional MOOC platforms and/or platforms that include languages other than English, for example, Edraak (Arabic), MiriadaX (Spanish and Portuguese), and XuetangX (Chinese). Some States promoted national MOOC services. For instance, the France Université Numérique platform (FUN), which was launched by the French Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation. The Mexican government funded MexicoX, which is now operated by the Directorate General of Educational Television.

The rapidly increasing number of providers and the expansion of the range of MOOC have created a market in which aggregator services add value by collecting MOOC from various platforms and then analysing and evaluating them independently from suppliers (BANSAL; KAGEMANN, 2015). This allows the potential participants to find courses from different providers in one place with multiple search options, divided into different categories by these aggregator services.

The introduction of MOOC has become a turning-point in the field of language learning. Language competences and intercultural skills are now very important for every person from any part of the world. Massive open online courses for language learning (MOOLC) can support this educational need since they allow a huge number of students to learn a foreign language

for free via communication in a learning environment without any space or time limits. This fact justifies the growing interest of language learners in MOOLC (CHACÓN-BELTRÁN, 2017).

Literature review

There are various approaches to the concept of MOOC in the scientific literature (Table 1).

Table 1 - Approaches to the concept of MOOC

Source	Definition
ROSS <i>et al.</i> , 2014, p. 57	Online courses with unlimited participation and open access via Internet. In addition to traditional materials such as videos, readings, and sets of tasks, MOOC include interactive user forums that help to create a community for students, professors, and assistant lecturers.
PALDY, 2013, p. 6	Online courses that allow hundreds of thousands of students to participate simultaneously in the course and are open to everyone interested.
KNOX, 2014, p. 146	A combination of video lectures, interactive tasks, and forums for the discussion of the educational materials. The main characteristic is the free access to the best university-level educational courses for everyone, regardless of the place of residence, age or condition. This format illustrates the concept of lifelong learning.

Source: Devised by the authors

The researchers give the following definitions to the concepts of MOOC platform, MOOC provider and MOOC aggregator.

MOOC platform is a web-system that offers courses and related services to a huge number of learners. This platform can be just a website (xMOOC) or a combination of multiple sites or services (cMOOC). In comparison with the traditional LMS, MOOC platforms include additional features such as badges, analytics tools, communication tools, assessment tools, etc. Most MOOC platforms offer additional paid services such as certification, materials, or tutoring (DELLAROCAS; VAN ALSTYNE, 2013; KOPTSEVA; FOMINA, 2020; KRASIL'NIKOV, 2020).

MOOC provider is an organization that creates open courses in cooperation with another organization such as a university. MOOC providers often develop their platforms and offer their services directly to teachers (authors) and students (KALMAN, 2014).

Table 2 presents different approaches to the concept of MOOC aggregator.

Table 2 - Approaches to the concept of MOOC aggregator

Source	Definition
CISEL, 2019, p. 212	A search engine that works with various MOOC providers and presents unified information about them for the convenience of potential students.
ZHU; SARI; LEE, 2014, p. 31	A web application or a website that combines data from multiple MOOC providers into a single user-friendly interface.
FOURNIER; KOP, 2015, p. 289	A search engine for free courses where anyone can find information about all available MOOC offered on various sites.

Source: Devised by the authors

Several studies suggest that, from the point of view of a university, it is important to consider the way how MOOC can be used to improve the reputation of academicians, academic departments, and the university in general (WHITE *et al.*, 2015; GOLUBEVA *et al.*, 2020). MOOC can also be used for the creation of learner communities that maintain long-term communication with the university, narrowing the gap between students and graduates and allowing the former classmates to continue communication (LIYANAGUNAWARDENA; LUNDQVIST; WILLIAMS, 2015). MOOC can help to interact with the public in the context of innovative research projects.

Besides, there are several studies devoted to the use of MOOC for language learning. To be more accurate, there is little research aimed at suggesting effective models for designing successful MOOC for language learning that can make the best use of modern technologies which support authentic communication, co-operation, and autonomous learning (CHACÓN-BELTRÁN, 2014; TEXEIRA; MOTA, 2014).

Research Hypothesis: nowadays, the ideal MOOC platform, which could offer the necessary conditions for creating an ideal MOOLC, does not exist.

Research objectives:

- To determine MOOC aggregators, which would allow identifying the number and characteristics of MOOLC;
- To examine the possibilities of some MOOC platforms, which offer courses for English language learning, basing on the selected criteria for evaluation of the existing MOOC platforms.

The article consists of the introduction, the literature review, the descriptions of research methods, the results of the research and their discussion, and the conclusion.

Methods

To achieve the goal of the study, which is to identify the MOOC platforms for English language learning, we used a list of MOOC aggregators that could help us to identify the platforms, which provide the required MOOLC. Examples of the tools used for the study are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 - MOOC aggregators

No.	MOOC Aggregators	Characteristics
1	EMMA	The European MOOC aggregator, which offers a variety of courses provided by European universities that want to make their courses available in different languages. It is aimed at showing the best practice in the field of innovative teaching methods and learning approaches through large-scale piloting of MOOC in different spheres and different languages.
2	MOOClist	The aggregator of MOOC offered by various providers. This is the website where one can find free online courses by top universities all over the world.
3	Coursetalk	The leading site for search and exchange of information for learners who want to explore the widest range of online courses. It connects users not only to individual course capabilities but also to universities, professors and other learners with the help of online course reviews and MOOC.
5	OpenupEd	The Pan-European initiative portal, which offers about 40 online courses by several institutions and covers a wide range of topics. Each partner offers courses through their learning platforms and in their language. They are free and available in 12 different languages.
7	Class central	Free online aggregator of MOOC by top universities like Stanford University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Harvard University, etc., offered through Coursera, Udacity, EdX, NovoEd, and others.
8	Academic Earth	The portal, which offers a wide range of free online college courses from the best universities in the world.
9	Coursade.com	MOOC aggregator, which shows the results according to the provider, school, category and price.

10	MOOC.co	The leading online global directory of MOOC providers, developed by MOOC University.
11	My education path	The site, which helps to find free or cheap MOOC. It also offers the possibility to share comments and feedback.
12	OpenCourseWare Consortium	The online learning portal, where anyone can search and find a course of their choice.
13	MOOCE	The aggregator of MOOC by top universities like Stanford University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Harvard University, etc., offered through Coursera. It also has an offline mode.

Source: Devised by the authors

According to the research results, 16 MOOC platforms offer a variety of foreign language courses, including English (Table 4).

Table 4 - MOOC platforms with open online language courses

No.	MOOC platform	Country	Free open-source platform/ possibility to create new courses	English language course/total number	Course characteristics	Accreditation
1	FutureLearn	UK	-/- (paid option for institutions)	+/-more than 40	Fixed, short-term	Yes (paid)
2	EdX	USA	+/+	+/-more than 250	Fixed, short-term	Yes (paid)
3	Coursera	USA	-/-	+/-5	Fixed, short-term	Yes (paid)
4	Udemy.com	USA	-/+	+/-more than 60	Self-studied	Yes (free certification included in free courses)
5	Alison	Ireland	-/+	+/-more than 30	Self-studied	Yes (free certification included in free courses)
6	Education Portal	USA	-/- (collaboration with teachers on a contractual basis)	+/-8	Self-studied	Yes (free)

7	The Mixxer	USA	-/+	+/5	Fixed, short-term and self-studied	No (only the confirmation)
8	Open Initiative (OLI) Learning	USA	-/+	+/6	Fixed, short-term and self-studied	No (certificates are issued by the decision of the teacher)
9	Saylor.org	USA	-/-	+/6	Fixed, short-term	Yes
10	TandemMOOC	Spain	+/-	+/2	Fixed, short-term	Yes
11	FUN: France Université Numérique	France	+/-	+/3	in	No (the possibility of attestation with a certificate will appear)
12	IMoox	Austria	+/-	+/1	Fixed, short-term	Yes (only for the students of the University of Graz)
13	COURSEsites Open Education Platform	USA	+/-	+/1	Fixed, short-term and self-study after the end of the course	Yes (free)
14	MOOEC	Australia	-/-	+/2	Self-studied	No
15	OpenLearning	Australia	-/+	+/10	Self-studied	Yes

Source: Devised by the authors

Discussion

Several researchers successfully compared and evaluated all MOOLC platforms available worldwide at the time of their study (PERIFANOU; ECONOMIDES, 2014; DENISOVA *et al.*, 2020; MUHAMMAD *et al.*, 2019). Basing on the conducted research, they proposed to analyse all the main elements of MOOLC according to six criteria:

a) *Content*. The course should provide authentic language resources as well as various activities that could contribute to the development of all basic language skills and maintain cultural awareness. Interactive materials (multimedia) also indicate great importance for language learning.

b) *Pedagogy*. The course should facilitate active communication and cooperation between the participants through group projects, forums, etc. It also should keep everyone

involved and motivated with the help of fun, playful and interactive activities and involve a large number of teachers to support the students' learning process.

c) *Assessment*. The level of the participants' proficiency should be evaluated with an introductory test. Subsequently, it should follow a continuous multiple assessment schedule that could better structure the learning process for each participant. Besides, a final test is needed to check students' progress. Post-tests can help to improve the language skills of participants. To assess the active participation of a student, the course should be complemented by specific metric instruments. It also should provide opportunities for feedback between the participants via comments, reviews, etc.

d) *Community*. The course should include a social community supported by useful social media tools. The creation of a massive and open language learning environment means the possibility of being connected with an authentic audience, which is essential for the development of every language skill and practice.

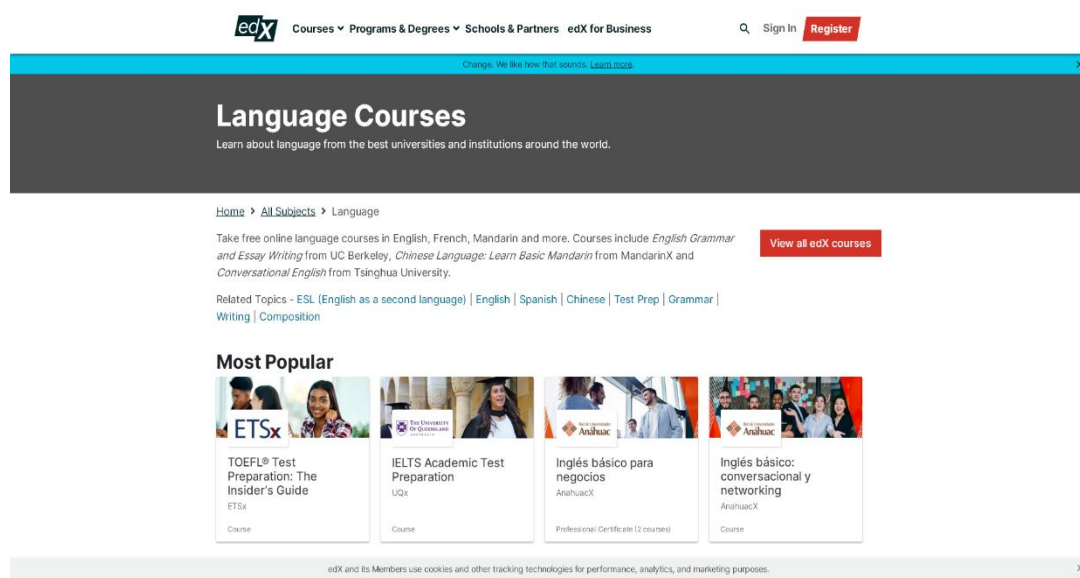
e) *Technical infrastructure*. MOOLC platform should have a user-friendly interface and be able to involve enough students. Besides, tools are needed to monitor the performance of the platform as well as to ensure security.

f) *Financial issues*. Apart from costs, the creator of MOOLC should consider the level of the desirable profit, therefore the price for the course or the certification or accreditation should be planned (PERIFANOÛ; ECONOMIDES, 2014).

Basing on these criteria, four platforms were examined to assess the existing MOOC platforms, which offer courses for English language learning (Table 3): EdX (the USA), Eliademy (Finland), Mixxer (USA) and OpenLearning (Australia).

We began our assessment with the provider called **EdX**, which is an open-source non-profit organization created by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard University in 2012. We chose the course for English language learning at a novice proficiency level (A1-A2) for the assessment. This is a 16-week course designed for students who would like to learn spoken English starting with the basics. The course introduces everyday language and includes classes aimed at practicing the four language skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

Figure 1 - Courses for English language learning on EdX (the USA)



Source: Devise by the authors

We identified the following features during the assessment:

- An independent course supported by four teachers;
- An explicit description of the course program: structure, goals, prerequisites, duration, efforts, assessment, and academic policy;
- Updating courses and information;
- Variety of activities and grammar support (quizzes, self-presentations via text, video, and audio);
 - Content: one dictionary, a glossary and a selection of external resources that can be helpful for language learning (external links: videos, series, written and oral exchanges, texts, exercises, music, applications, other didactic materials);
 - Community functions: discussion forum sorted by date, polls or comments; search by comments, topics; discussion bookmarks; possibility to add a poll or a report and to receive updates;
 - Good security system;
 - Accreditation (costs \$40) after successfully passed final exams.

EdX advantages:

- A good course review system (ratings and comments) for teachers, providers and social media users and the possibility to share the course;
- The possibility to create bookmarks for the course content;
- The possibility to create personal content in the Wiki space;

- The visualization of student achievements (reports on the tests and assignments progress);

- Optimized difficulty levels;

- Teachers can use this open-source platform for free, but there are still installation and maintenance costs;

- The possibility to sign in using social networks (FB, Google+, etc.);

- Compatibility with mobile devices.

EdX disadvantages:

- No community-building functions;

- No personal dashboard;

- No main group activity (the only exception is rare meetings);

- No support for the “drag and drop” function for touchpads, which is a well-known problem of the EdX platform;

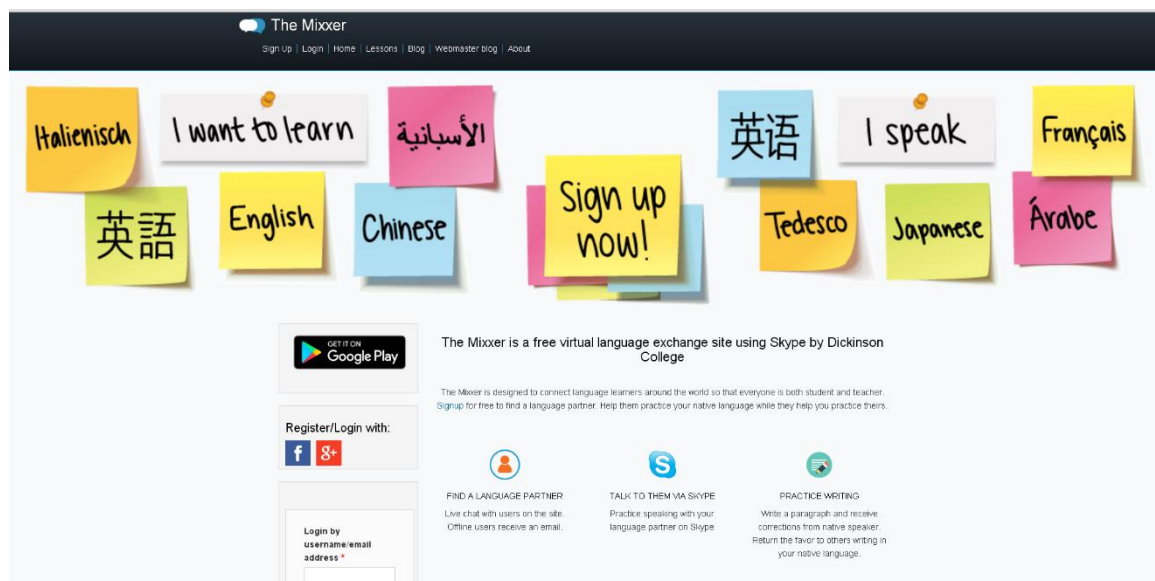
- No range of assessment levels (preliminary assessment, teacher-student mutual assessment, group assessment, etc.).

- Only the feedback on the discussion forum is supported;

- No possibility to add suggestions.

The **Mixer** platform is a free educational social network created by Todd Bryant and Akiko Meguro and hosted at Dickinson College. It is aimed at helping language learners and teachers to exchange information using a free program. Students can create their profiles, add the native and target languages and find a partner individually. After they have found a potential partner, they send a message suggesting communication via Skype. The usual arrangement is a one-hour call, during which each person speaks for 30 minutes in the native language and 30 minutes in the target language. Teachers can also unite their students in a group. Besides, they can also organize “events” during which native speakers are encouraged to contact students from their group via Skype at a particular time.

Figure 2 - Courses for English language learning on Mixxer (USA)



Source: Devised by the authors

The Mixxer platform offers useful features such as a personal profile; messenger; friend requests; suggested profiles; blogs.

Mixxer advantages:

- Authentic oral communication with native speakers;
- Writing practice;
- Reward system for helping others (points);
- bookmark content, discussions;
- personal dashboard (profile, bookmarks, relations, points, subscription).

Mixxer disadvantages:

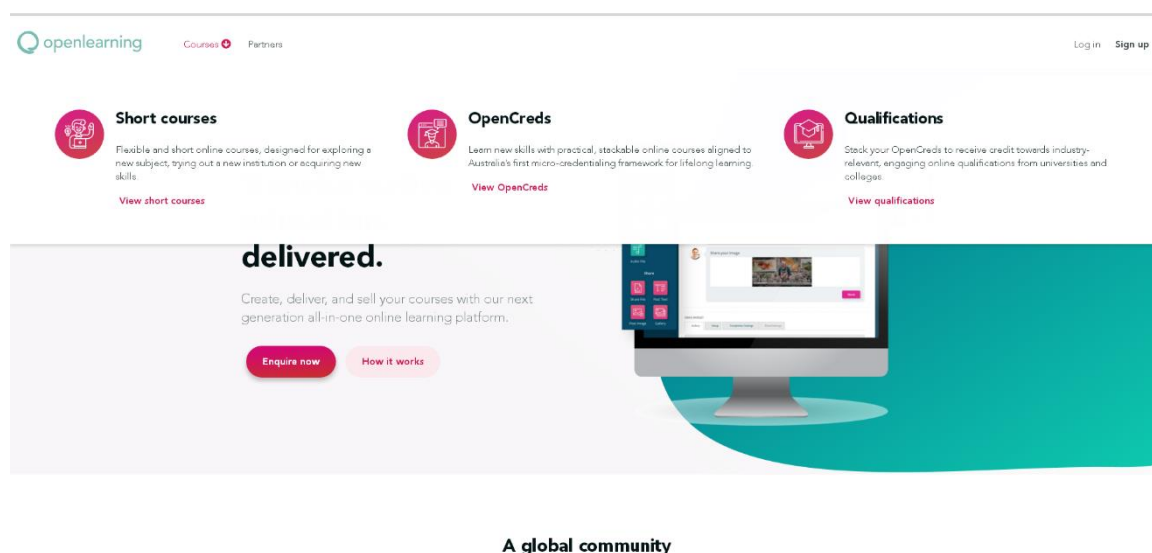
- No certification;
- No joint educational activities;
- No precise intellectual copyright information;
- No user content and suggestions from users;
- No multi-level assessment system;
- No factual content.

The OpenLearning platform was launched in 2013 by a non-profit Australian company in cooperation with the University of New South Wales and Taylor's University. In 2015, OpenLearning was selected to be the official MOOC platform for 20 state universities in Malaysia. This platform uses cloud-based software and allows teachers, institutions or private

companies to make their courses available online (private or public, free or paid) in a very simple way without any technical skills.

OpenLearning has many good features: support by six teachers; an explicit description of the course program: structure, goals, prerequisites, duration; the ability to create various interactive multimedia events, grammar learning (quizzes, videos, auto-recording, blogs); a public course blog created by the teachers to share information, materials and support of the community; good security system (the participants need to fill in a form with personal data, general Creative Commons licenses for most materials); accreditation (costs \$40) after successfully passed final exams.

Figure 3 - Start menu of the OpenLearning platform (USA)



Source: Devised by the authors

OpenLearning advantages:

- Personal dashboard (photo, program information, recent activities, personal blog, favourites, courses, chat, history, communities, ratings of comments or pages);
- The possibility to create groups, participate in multiple groups, participate in a public forum, chat with the course community and the availability of a practical space for communication;
- An interesting system of course reviewing;
- The possibility to add tags (discussion, pages, etc.);
- The possibility to create bookmarks for current activities;
- The possibility for users to create and share multimedia content (blog);

- Visualization of educational achievements (profile page, blog, activity status with marks and comments of the teacher, course comments, general assessment, tests);

- The possibility to sign in using social networks (FB, Google+, etc.);

- The possibility to change account settings (privacy, blog, chat, photo);

- The possibility to join group communities (FB, Twitter);

OpenLearning disadvantages:

- No well-optimized difficulty levels,

- Uncertain compatibility with other mobile devices,

- No communication with native speakers,

- No preliminary tests, final grades, opportunities for constant feedback,

- No copyright information.

The **Udemy** platform is an online learning and teaching marketplace where learners have access to an extensive library, which include more than 65,000 courses. The project was launched in 2010. All MOOC are created on Udemy using a free platform with instructor guidance.

Figure 4 - Courses for English language learning on Udemy

The screenshot shows the Udemy website interface. At the top, there is a search bar with the text 'английский язык' and a search icon. To the right of the search bar, there are buttons for 'Продолжить на Udemy', 'Войти', and 'Регистрация'. Below the search bar, the text '283 результатов по запросу «АНГЛИЙСКИЙ ЯЗЫК»' is displayed. A filter section on the left includes 'Фильтровать' and 'Наиболее подходящие'. The main content area shows a list of courses. The first course is 'Английский язык для Новичков. Понимание Английской Речи 95%' by Ангелика Вайновская, priced at 999 руб. The second course is 'Английский язык с нуля для начинающих' by Мусеев Евгений Эдуардович, also priced at 999 руб. A 'Чему вы научитесь' (What you will learn) box is overlaid on the first course, listing benefits like 'Закрепление английских слов, которые Вы уже знаете' and 'Разберем основы грамматики и заложим крепкий фундамент знаний'.

Source: Devised by the authors

It is worth mentioning that this platform offers more than 60 courses for language learning (some of which are free) in more than 15 languages. Thus, it is very easy for teachers to create their courses (it is a free option, but if the teachers create a paid course, they should

give 30% of profits to Udemy). There is also the premium account option (which is free only for non-profit government academic institutions and student projects), which offers more options for private courses.

The platform's main features are a simple course editor, easy registration with personal accounts, free course completion certificates (high-quality printed version), support of all multimedia formats, the possibility to share and create multimedia content.

Udemy advantages:

- A personal study calendar in which each student can find all courses, quizzes and deadlines (Udemy calendar can be synced with Google and Outlook);
- News feed and notifications about all important class events via e-mail or social networks;
- Free access to any document (no need for MS Office software);
- An overview of student progress: visualization of the learning process (activities history, interaction with the course content, assignments progress and grades from all courses);
- A variety of assessment tools, including information about the group's progress;
- Bookmarks for content;
- Discussion board and topic chats (instant communication): instructors can create topic forums in addition to the general discussion board;
- Supports interoperability;
- The ability to create a social profile (FB, LinkedIn, Google+) and add friends.

Udemy disadvantages:

- No multi-level assessment system (preliminary tests, mutual assessment, group assessment by the community, etc.);
- No scripts for videos and interactive joint educational activities;
- No copyright information;
- No user-generated content and suggestions from users;
- No use of open educational resources;
- No factual content;
- No communication with native speakers;
- No group activities.

Conclusion

The following conclusions can be drawn from the study.

Although language literacy is an important skill in the 21st century for many important reasons (professional development, cultural awareness, etc.), language barriers still exist. To make the world more united in its diversity, it is necessary to provide open access to the courses for language learning, especially English, since it is the language of international communication. MOOLC, a recent educational phenomenon of online learning, can contribute to linguistic diversity and language learning, breaking any language barrier.

This given study was aimed at examining and evaluating the existing MOOLC platforms and proposing an effective “MOOLC solution” that can be implemented by language teachers or non-academic institutions such as private linguistic schools.

The research identified the positive features that each MOOC platform has to offer. There is also a shortlist of open-source MOOC platforms that can help to create MOOLC.

The evaluation of the MOOC platforms was based on six main criteria: content; pedagogy; assessment; community; technical infrastructure, and financial issues. All these criteria need to be considered for the successful design and creation of a MOOLC. During the study, we described and assessed four MOOLC platforms and identified their main advantages and disadvantages.

The results of the study confirmed the hypothesis that nowadays, the ideal MOOC platform, which could offer the necessary conditions for creating an ideal MOOLC, does not exist.

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