

Massive Open Online Courses for ESP education

—Viewpoint of Educators

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Abstract: Based on a survey of 76 ESP teachers from different universities and colleges across China, significant differences exist in three areas of opinion: the importance of the use of Internet and some Web tools for academic use; general knowledge and perception of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs); and the opinion regarding the interest of MOOCs on ESP. The overall opinion of educators is positive. Flexibility is regarded to be the main advantage of MOOCs as well as autonomous learning.

1. Introduction

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is not General English (GE) teaching and learning, but it is specialized English. It has been growing as a distinct discipline since 1960s. (Momtazur Rahman, 2015). In comparison with General English (GE), ESP centers more on language in context than on teaching grammar and language structures. ESP covers subjects varying from Business or Medical Sciences to Tourism and Hospitality Management.

The development of information and communication technologies and globalization, has impacted, in fact, the English teaching and studying. In recent years, there are millions of registered users of MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) having offered thousands of courses around the world. When Stanford's Artificial Intelligence MOOC made headline news in 2011, one of the early predictions was that quality education at mass scale and at low cost was around the corner. (Fiona M. Hollands, Devayani Tirthali, 2014) MOOCs provide people from all over the world the opportunity to expand their education for free without any commitment or prior requirement. MOOCs breaks the stereotyped teaching mode in China and provides a stage for the fairness of education (Liu Yujie, 2016). It develops mainly in theory and research, but poorly in management and implementation. For this reason, this study provides an interesting research opportunity to learn the advantages and challenges that it would have for this specific field, from the teachers' point of view.

Thus, the overall objective of this study is to analyze the opinions of the ESP educators about the use of the MOOCs for teaching ESP.

2. Empirical study

To fulfill our research objective, we modified and validated a questionnaire of Julieth Ospina (Julieth Ospina, 2016). It included dichotomous and polytomous items with multiple choice questions and five-point Likert scale affirmations, with a total of 23 questions: three questions on personal variables such as gender, age, teaching experience; six questions about the priority on the use of the Internet and the valuation of Web tools for academic use; six questions on knowledge and perception of the MOOCs in general terms; and eight questions on perception of an ESP MOOC. Reliability (Cronbach's Alpha 0.71) is adequate for the kind of study.

The participants attending this study were English teachers who had experiences of teaching ESP from different universities and colleges in China. We have connected with the participants through email or social software such as QQ and Wechat.

Data were collected between October 2017 and January 2018, 76 participants responded

questionnaires. For the statistical analysis of the data the raw scores were entered onto Statistical Package for the Social Sciences Programs (SPSS 21.0). A univariate of frequencies and percentages and then bivariate analysis to detect statistical differences between variables.

3. Results and discussion

The descriptive statistics (Table 1) indicate that all the items related to the priority of educators in the personal use of the Internet got an average score of 3.94 (based on a 5-point Likert scale). The Social networks, which mainly consist of Wechat and QQ, is the best resource for personal use, followed by information search (mean=4.78) and news (3.75). Interestingly, the e-mail has the lowest valuation on personal Internet use (mean=2.33).

3.1 Importance of Web tools for academic use.

The average of the importance of Web tools for academic use (mean= 3.03) is lower than priority of educators in the personal use of the Internet. The mean of educational use of QQ and Wechat (mean= 2.24) suggesting that there is no widespread use of Web tools among teachers for teaching ESP. It seems logical that scholars see social interaction tools as less relevant for educational use. The idea corresponds to Julieth Ospina test, as teachers giving higher priority to social networks on personal Internet use, the more important they perceive Web tool for academic use. The participants use Baidu baike the most (mean=4.25) followed by Zhi hu (mean=3.35) to search for information they do not know or are not so familiar with.

Teachers and educators seem to employ new techniques and tools very often in their personal use. As for the academic use, they still hesitate to apply them into teaching and researching. Some teachers still teach students what to learn rather than how to learn as they often search information through Zhi hu or Baidu baike as supplementary materials. Comparatively, they employ networks such as QQ and Wechat as teaching and academic use less often because they think QQ and Wechat are casual methods for learning and studying and they are just suitable for personal use.

Table 1. Personal use of the Internet and Importance of Web tools for academic use

Variables		Mean	S.D.	Sig.
Priority for the personal use of the Internet	E-mail	2.33	0.624	
	Social Networks(QQ and Wechat)	4.90	1.431	
	Information search	4.78	0.687	
	News	3.75	1.023	
	Average	3.94	0.734	
Importance of Web tools for academic use	E-mail	2.83	1.043	0.050 *
	Youku	2.47	1.249	0.000***
	Networks(QQ and Wechat)	2.24	0.872	0.000***
	Zhi hu	3.35	1.324	
	Baidu baike	4.25	1.246	
	Average	3.03	0.792	0.000***

*** Significant at 1% * Significant at 10%

3.2 Perception of MOOCs.

Among the participants, 28% of the participants report that have experienced a direct participation in MOOCs, 16% have read about it, 39% have possessed clear information, while 10% have heard but do not know what MOOCs mean and 7% have not the slightest idea about it. Most participants consider MOOCs useful for learning processes (answers level 3 to 5 Likert scale), giving high importance to the criterion of flexibility. Teachers whose perceived usefulness of MOOCs is greater, are those with a prior knowledge of this trend, those who had participated in one and those giving

more importance to Web tools for academic use.

Teachers have to learn new teaching techniques to keep the pace with the high-speed evolution and development of technology. Among the participants, most of them have got a lot of or some information about MOOCs and some of them have a direct participation in it. Unfortunately, seven percent of the participants have never not heard of MOOCs, let alone participation in MOOCs or applying it in their teaching and study.

3.3 Teachers' interest of MOOCs on ESP.

As is indicated in Table 2, 85% of the teachers consider MOOCs as an advantage to share experience on ESP teaching and learning, and see it positive for autonomous learning; Thirty-eight percent participants would enroll as a student/learner of MOOCs. Interestingly, and this finding corresponds with some recent studies at home and abroad (Arquero & Romero, 2013; Wei Li, 2015; Min Cao, 2017).

Twenty-two percent participants would choose MOOCs, however, they would just prefer an initial level maybe because they would just like to get to know something about MOOCs. There are twenty-four percent participants tending to participate as MOOCs instructors who should know more about how to use this kind of teaching technique and tool. Comparatively, fifteen percent participants have n interest in MOOCs and would not participate MOOCs. Maybe this group of participants prefer traditional teaching method or multimedia teaching method.

According to table 2, among the participants, seventy-one percent of them think applying MOOCs in ESP teaching would improve students' learning interest, motivate students to learn and thus encourage students' autonomous learning. Fifty-two percent think MOOCs allow them to share experience on English learning and this helps students to participate in learning English more thoroughly. In contrast, forty-two percent of participants consider MOOCs in teaching ESP would reduce the students' ability of social interaction and thirty-four percent of them considers MOOCs would encourage students' passive learning because they spend too much time on Internet learning and little time in face-to-face learning between the teacher and students.

Table 2 Perception about MOOCs on ESP teaching & Learning

Decision that would take if your university offers MOOCs on ESP	Would enroll as a student/learner	38%
	Doing so, will prefer an initial level	23%
	Would participate as MOOCs instructor	24%
	Would not participate	15%
Major advantages of MOOCs on ESP	Encourage autonomous learning	71%
	Allows sharing experience on English learning	52%
Major disadvantages of MOOCs on ESP	Reduces the ability social interaction of learners	42%
	Encourages passive learning	34%

4. Conclusion

MOOCs could be seen as an opportunity to redesign dynamic environments and teaching consistently with current learning styles. Teaching should stimulate critical thinking and not just react in response to an institutional need for updating technological teaching resources. The most important thing is how to use technology effectively in a learning environment, maintaining a critical and proactive attitude. Therefore, teachers need to adopt a rational integration which integrates modern teaching techniques and traditional pedagogical model for higher achievement (Arbaugh, 2014 ;Isreal, 2015).

While in China there is still not an adequate recognition of the role that teachers play in society (Lui Yejie, 2016; Da Liu, 2016), this research could shed a light to reverse that situation. While teaching ESP, teachers have difficulty in carrying out interation and students sometimes do not have much motivation and interest in studying ESP. Creating a MOOCs on ESP will allow to evaluate the relevance of this technological resource in the context, responding to questions about the type of MOOCs which is more effective for teaching ESP. Furthermore, it not only helps to update

knowledge, but also, by taking advantage of the main elements of the MOOCs philosophy, improving learners' professional perspectives. The employment of MOOCs in ESP teaching would also cultivate students' ability of autonomous learning, cooperative learning and inquiry learning which is very important in language learning, and which is proposed by the Ministry of Education.

This study has some limitations. In order to gain a broader perspective, it is recommended that a further study that includes a larger number of ESP learners/ students who study via the MOOCs be conducted.

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