

A Critical Evaluation of the Reading and Contents of A MOOC Module

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, due to the flexibility and convenience of online learning and distance education, more and more people are choosing online courses for their studies. Among them, MOOC as one of the largest online learning platforms has become a priority for many learners. This paper evaluates one of the online courses based on the MOOC platform, tries to explore the advantages and disadvantages of the current design and use of online courses and puts forward suggestions for improvement, trying to optimize the design of the online course in order to improve the learners' online learning experience and efficiency.

KEYWORDS

MOOC; Online module; Online learning

With globalization and the continuous development of technology, the class is no longer limited to the face-to-face classroom. More and more classes are moving online, and the word “distance language teaching” is becoming widely discussed. The social interaction patterns in the online learning environment differ from those in traditional classrooms (Lister, 2014). But equally, it is crucial to provide a learning environment that is high-quality and effective in an online course as it is offered through traditional means (Swan et al., 2014). The quality of course design always has an impact on learners’ motivation and success. Moreover, flawed course design can even lead to serious consequences (White, 2017). In this context, the evaluation of the online courses is indispensable. Because it can not only observe the design rationality of the modules from different perspectives but also achieve better teaching results. Even though a defined set of “best practices” for online courses was not something (Baldwin et al., 2018), we can analyze and look for “better practices” from different angles. Thus, this essay will focus on a MOOC course, critically evaluate its structure and content and then give some suggestions for improvement. This essay will be divided into four parts: the first is an introduction, which introduces the topic and the structure of this article; the second part will critically examine the reading of this MOOC module from three aspects: structure, activity, and interaction. In the third part, the author will evaluate the content of this module from its introduction, material and interaction and feedback, find the advantages and disadvantages of these three aspects, and give some suggestions based on the shortcomings presented. Finally, this article will summarize the full text and propose the potential shortcoming of the suggestions mentioned by the author.

1 The Evaluation of the Structure of MOOC

1.1 Accessibility

Providing simple and consistent navigation support for learners is essential (Graf et al., 2010). This MOOC module provides navigation of the basic structure of the course such as course duration, weekly learning activities, etc. On the homepage(Fig. 1), and after entering the weekly learning content page, the title and subtitle are also provided on the left side of the page for students’ reference (Fig. 2). Young (2006) found that students would prefer structured and well-organized modules. This well-structured module not only helps students view their own learning progress but also provides students with clearer course relevance to better grasp the learning of the entire module. Similarly, the “Progress” button and “Continue” buttons are provided on the course homepage (Figure 1) to make it easier for students to check their progress and completion at any time and to ensure their previous learning more conveniently.

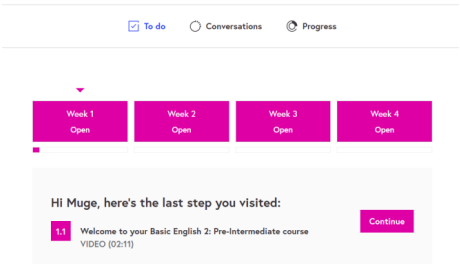


Fig.1

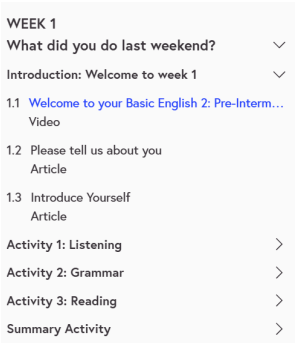
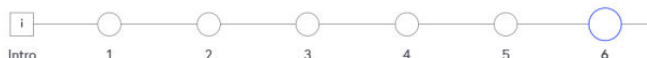


Fig.2

However, it also has some shortcomings in terms of structure. In the quiz section, once students start the test, the test would skips to the last question, while students need to manually flip to the first question (Fig. 3). As a result, students may even miss out on practice because of their carelessness. Good design will enable students to participate in their education (Dahalan et al., 2013), while improper design may result in students losing opportunities. Another disadvantage is that the course doesn’t explicitly commit to the time required for each unit and activity (Fig.4). Gentile and Lalley (2003) mentioned that in order to prevent the learner from getting frustrated, the module must estimate the number of hours needed to complete each unit. It is advisable to predict more time than is necessary. Considering the diversity of students, if the course can provide an estimated time spent, it can help students plan and allocate study time, so as to make rational use of spare time to study.

Choosing correct comparative adjectives



Question 6

Which sentence is correct? Choose the sentence with the correct form of comparative adjective.

Fig.3

- 3.2
Listening: What will you be doing in this activity?
ARTICLE
- 3.3
What do you see in the pictures? QUIZ

Fig.4

1.2 Instruction on Activity

The module divides the activities into grammar, listening, and reading, and uses fonts, colors, symbols, and spaces to increase the readability of the text in the activities (Fig.5). Any task we assign to learners must be understood by them (Meskill & Anthony, 2015), and by using these methods learners will be more likely to engage in the activity.

The downside is that some of the audio provided in the activity doesn't provide a corresponding transcript (Fig.6), which makes it difficult for learners to evaluate themselves by reading it. Moreover, some expressions only provide audio and no text information (Fig.7), which makes it difficult for learners who cannot turn on the sound of their mobile phones in public to complete the study.

6577 comments

We'd love to learn more about you. Clicking 'Tell us more' will send you to an optional, 5 question survey hosted by FutureLearn and King's College London on SurveyMonkey - where you'll be able to tell us more about yourself.

Please note: We're collecting this info because we'd like to know more about your background - which will help us understand who we're helping.

[Tell us more](#)

Your responses will be associated with your FutureLearn account but will not impact your progress on any course. All information collected from your answers will be handled according to [FutureLearn](#) and [King's College London's Privacy Policy](#) and only be presented in anonymous and aggregate formats.

Fig.5

Listen to the conversation again and answer the question.

► Mo and Nadia

Question: How many days does Nadia work every week?

☐ She works three days a week.

☒ She works four days a week.

☐ She works two days a week.

Fig.6



Ahmed is a Syrian student living in Jordan but about to move to London for university. He is speaking to a university halls of residence worker (Accommodation Officer) called Joan Smith.

Listen to a telephone call between them.

Play the listening clip twice and type an answer to the question in the comments box below.

Question: Where was Ahmed born?

Fig.7

2 The Platform for Learner-Learner Interaction

One of the advantages of this MOOC module is that it provides a comment section in the course (Fig.8), giving learners a space and platform to display their personal ideas, to reply other learners, and communicate with each other. Moore (1989) believes that Learner-content, Learner-Learner, and Learner-Teacher interactions are the three main types of interactions in online learning. The comment section here provides a convenient way for learners to interact with each other as well as between learners and teachers.

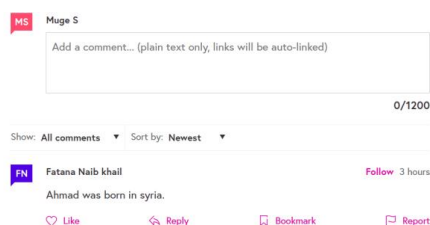


Fig.8

However, the author found that the course has a word limit for students' comments, which requires students to enter text up to 1200 words, and students can not provide pictures, documents, and other forms of comments here (Fig.8). This limits the form of comments from students, and they are unable to share a wider variety of comments and ideas. The conversation and comment sections are both displayed in this MOOC module, but it has been observed that "conversation" only

aggregates the learner's comments together. So the course does not provide a place where students can communicate freely (Fig.9), and it is obviously inappropriate to communicate outside of academia in the comment. Teräs and Herrington (2014) found that the usage of discussion boards for casual communication and engagement has enhanced learners' teamwork. The establishment of a learning community not only allows learners to experience a sense of belonging similar to that of an offline classroom but also allows students to help each other and thus be more engaged in module learning.

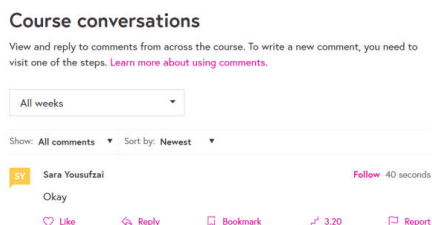


Fig.9

3 The Evaluation of the Contents of MOOC

3.1 Introduction of Course and Activity

At the beginning of the module, there is an overall introduction to the course, in which videos, links, course objectives, etc. are used (Fig.10), and there are buttons in the video to adjust subtitles, speed, and clarity (Fig.11). The video also displays the key information and pictures, and the teacher keeps smiling and using gestures to help with the introduction (Fig.11). Mayer (2017) argued that consciously incorporating text messages into videos is one of the fundamentals of video production. Cowie and Sakui (2020) claimed that a teacher should strive to be as friendly as possible, try to be authentic, and have some amount of passion. Transcripts and video downloads are also available in English and Arabic at the bottom of the video for students to choose according to their needs (Fig.11). The introduction part of each activity lists the flow of the activity, the content, and the aims (Fig.12). Ausburn (2004) argued that learners are kept "focused and on-task" by these elements, which also give structure. With those provided goals, students will also have a better idea of what behaviors they should achieve after the module or activity and check them one by one.

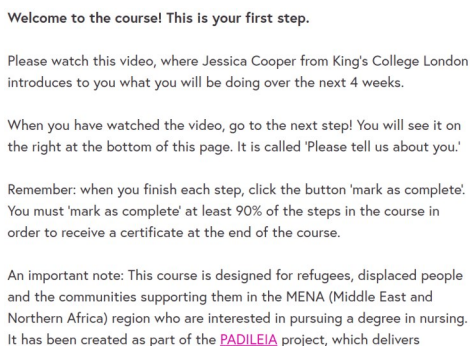


Fig.10

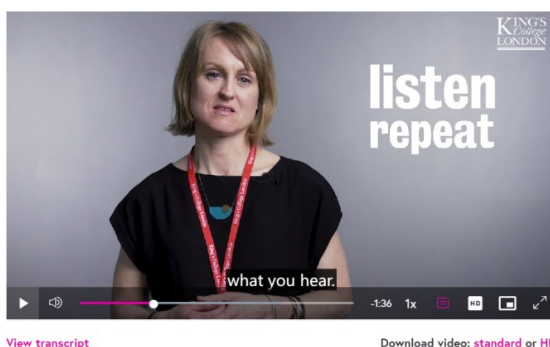


Fig.11

Welcome to your first *listening activity* of the course. In this activity, you will go through a number of *steps* to practise your listening skills.

This step, S1.4, is an introduction to the whole activity to give you a list of some things you will do throughout the activity.

So, in this activity you will:

- listen to 2 of our characters, Nadia and Mo, talking about their schedules.
- practise your listening skills by answering questions on what you hear.
- learn some useful vocabulary to help you with the exercises.

Fig.12

However, the introductory part also has shortcomings, such as being too long for learners to easily capture the main points. To ensure that the learner fully comprehends the instructions, the introduction must be given in a clear and simple manner (Harnett et al., 2011). Reduced "cognitive load" is one of the most crucial guidelines for language instructors (Sweller, Ayres, and Kalyuga, 2011). Because of the diversity of learners, it is appropriate to try to use the most concise language possible to avoid ambiguity.

3.2 Learning Material

Typically, educational materials come in the form of text, audio, video, and images (Zimmerman, 2012). In module activities, this course not only uses text but also makes full use of other resources such as pictures, audio, tables, and online dictionaries (Fig.13 and Fig.14). This makes learning more fun, intuitive and accessible.

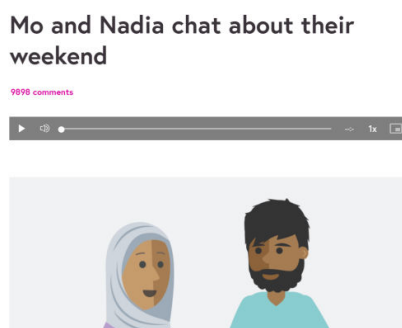


Fig.13

Adjective	Comparative Adjective
Big	Bigger
Small	Smaller
Hot	Hotter
Cold	Colder

Fig.14

Chen (2007) advised using real-world tasks to deliver content. Unfortunately, there is not much authentic activity used in this module, and all characters and dialogue are virtual (Figure 15). Furthermore, all tasks are uniform (Fig.15), and the author believes that it would be better if different tasks could be designed for students to choose from, depending on their characteristics or different language levels. Learners with diverse characteristics may like and benefit differently from different educational features and objectives (Ausburn, 2004). Therefore, module designers can provide different choices and topics for learners to choose from.

Read the conversation between Heba and Dina.

Question: What is the problem with Heba's new phone? Type your answers in the comments box below.

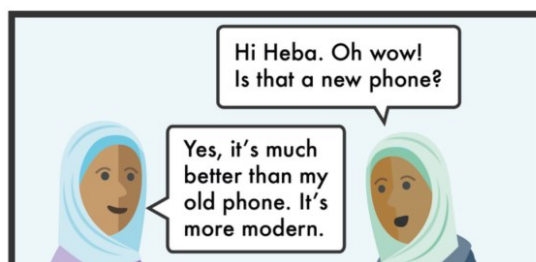


Fig.15

3.3 Learner- Teacher Interaction

In this module, the quiz's feedback is timely (Fig.16). To keep students motivated and satisfied with the course, timely feedback is crucial (Dahalam et al., 2013). At the same time, during the module, the teacher encourages learners to post their own comments, gives them topics related to the learning content, and provides examples for them (Fig.17). Willis (1996) mentioned that before the task, learners should have the opportunity to observe or be exposed to examples of others completing similar tasks. Lee (2014) also found that clear rubrics and finished task samples were sought after by students.

Ausburn (2004) believed that students valued chances for both instructor-to-student and student-to-student contact. So, in addition to the communication between learners, the module also needs the communication between instructor and learners. In the comment section, only learners respond according to the task requirements, and there is no response or feedback from the teacher (Fig. 18). But in online courses, the role of the teacher should not only be that of a knowledge transmitter, but that of a facilitator to motivate students and provide scaffolding (Martín-Monje& Bárcena, 2014).

Correct



Jessica Cooper Lead Educator

Yes. Nadia says: " My free time is Sunday, Monday, Tuesday.", so she must work the other 4 days of the week.

Fig.16

Nadia and Mo had a very busy weekend. What about you? Did you have a busy weekend? List three things that you did this weekend. Don't worry about making mistakes!

For example:

This weekend was very busy. I went to the supermarket to buy food. I studied English. I worked in the shop near my house.

What about you? Type an answer in the comments box below.

Fig.17

As

Ankita sharma

Follow 5 hours

Yes i had had a on Monday to Saturday

Like

Reply

Bookmark

Report

KB

Kibrework Bogale

Follow 6 hours

Yes, I had a busy weekend.

Like

Reply

Bookmark

Report

OH

OMAR AHMED EBRAHIM HUSHAIBERI

Follow 8 hours

I had a busy weekend, I visted my friends, I bought some clothes,and I played some games with my children.

Like

Reply

Bookmark

Report

Fig.18

4 Conclusion

With the continuous development of online courses, more and more scholars are paying attention to issues related to course design. The design of online courses requires designers to consider many aspects to create a course that is strong, cohesive, approachable, learner-centered, and learning-focused (Russell& Murphy-Judy, 2020). The evaluation of the module is not the end of the road but a method that leads the module to better quality. This essay critically evaluates a MOOC module from both reading and content perspectives and gives some recommendations. However, as Ausburn (2014) said, learners with different traits may have different preferences for different instructional features. Factors such as learners' background, prior knowledge, and online learning experience, teachers' professional level all affect teaching effectiveness and success. Therefore, it is necessary to carry out targeted module design and evaluation in different contexts and different standards, only in this way can we help online modules get better.

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