Beyond ESL Classroom: The Use of MOOC in Enhancing ESL Reading Skills

Muhammad Afif Razali, Harwati Hashim, and Melor Md Yunus*
Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

*melor@ukm.edu.my

Abstract. Technology is changing the landscape of language learning and is viewed to have a huge potential in enhancing the teaching and learning of English language. Due to the high accessibility of the internet, coupled with the availability of ICT tools in Malaysian schools, it is believed that new methods which can shape new pedagogical techniques could be brought into the Malaysian classrooms. The lessons could then be shaped to become more personalized for the learners’ needs and allowing them to learn on the move. This creates the potential for significant change in the teaching and learning process of English as a second language (ESL) in Malaysia. By looking at the existence and potentials of the Massive Open and Online Courses (MOOC), this paper offers reflections on the benefits that MOOCs can offer to ESL classrooms; specifically, to the development of the reading skills, as well as the constraints that might be faced by the English as a Second Language (ESL) learners when using MOOC. Above all, it also looks at the changes MOOC might bring to the pedagogical aspect of the ESL classrooms; towards both the students and the teachers themselves.

1. Introduction
We are living in a world where English is the global language. The usages of the English language have expanded through a wide variety of communicative discourses of its native and non-native speakers around the world, such as in inter-country administrative affairs, international business, science, popular culture, and many more. If a person does not have good grasp of the linguistic skills and knowledges of the English language, it will only cause more harm than good to that person’s humane development, especially in this globalized world we are currently living in [1]. The English language consists of four main linguistic skills, but none is more important than the reading skill. It is through reading that most learners are mainly able to gain new information, knowledge, and understanding, among others [2]. In Malaysia, the English language is taught as a second language in schools and universities nationwide, as it is not the native language of Malaysians [3]. The term ‘second language’, or simply known as L2, indicates that the users have lower level of actual or perceived proficiency, compared to the first language (L1). Due to the fact that English is the ‘second’ or ‘weaker’ language in Malaysia, special measures must be taken in order to provide the best platform for the learners to fully grasp the language; proposedly through the usage of technology [4] [5] [6] [7].
Throughout the years, educational technology in Malaysia had gone through several phases of evolvement and development. Before the era of educational technology began, the go-to medium of instruction in the 1920s up until the 1950s was the visual instruction [8]. Back then, visual materials such as charts and flash cards were used to support the chalk and talk pedagogical method [9]. Then in
the late 1950s, audio materials such as educational radio and television broadcastings, audio recordings and motion pictures started coming into the play, thus creating a new era called the audio-visual (AV) instruction period [10].

The accessibility and the number of computers in Malaysia started growing exponentially from then on, and this growth hugely affected the education quality of Malaysians. The Malaysian Institute of Microelectronic System; better known as MIMOS, collaborated with the Ministry of Education in 1989 to develop the Computer Integrated Education program [11]. Consequently, all schools nationwide received funding to build computer labs, install internet routers, LCDs, and many other ICT education elements [12]. This paved the way for teachers to incorporate a huge variety of elements of the internet into the classroom lessons. Teachers since then started to use web-based tools such as Blogspot, Blendspace, Prezi, and Kahoot, among others, making the classes more fun and interesting for the students, especially the students from the technologically-competent ‘Z’ generation. Educating Malaysian learners with English is a tough task, but technology seems to hold the key on facilitating the process. One of the internet-based learning tools that has the biggest potential of doing so is MOOC. An abbreviation for ‘Massive Open and Online Course’, it is a learning platform that is based on the online world, rather than the physical world where traditional teaching and learning normally happen. Not only it is ‘online’, MOOC is also ‘open’, where the learning process in it is built on the interactions of the participants [13]. The following sections of this research will discuss the potential of MOOC to be used as an educational tool to teach English as a second language in a Malaysian context, with the focus is mainly directed to the all-important reading skills.

2. Reading in Malaysian Education Context

One of the most important skill of the English language is the reading skill. It is the main skill used by human beings to recognize written words, deciphering meaning, and fetching information from texts [14]. Without reading, messages cannot be delivered if the listeners and speakers are far away from each other, thus causing a massive burden to human communication as a whole. The Malaysian educational planners certainly realized how important reading skills is for the development of Malaysian students, so it is according that they implement a lot of reading-based programs and initiatives. In 1983, the government introduced the KBSR and the KBSM with the main goal is to implement an education system with a common goal, direction and approach [15]. The main direction of the English KBSR curriculum was to equip students with the three ‘R’ skills, namely reading, writing and arithmetic. With that in line, the government introduced literature components to develop reading habits and critical thinking for Malaysian students and enhancing their English proficiency along the way. A range of literary texts were formally picked by the ministry from Malaysian, British, Australian, American and African works. Learners were expected to be able to follow a story-line and understand a poem and to give their own response to literary texts.

According to the Curriculum Development Centre of Malaysia (CDCM), by reading literary texts, students could acquire vocabulary and domain knowledge, enhance their critical thinking, and build a background of verbal and factual information that could help them to approach more complex materials. At the same time, there are also aesthetic values from the texts that students can reap, where students may relate their personal experience with the contents of the texts [16]. This shows how wholesome the benefits of reading components implementation into the curriculum to the humane development of the students. The government also implemented a nationwide reading program known as Nadi Ilmu Amalan Membaca (NILAM) in 1999, with the aim of instilling the reading habits among primary and secondary students as well as computer literacy programs [17]. Not only that, the government also introduced a brand-new English SPM paper known as English 122/322 in the second phase of the English Language Teaching curriculum reforms, where it is implemented between the year 1970 to 1990. In this paper, students’ communicative skills were more comprehensively tested, with the focus is on the students’ reading, writing and speaking (oral assessment) skills. In 1995, the English 122/322 paper is renamed into English 1119 and it is remodeled to mirror the O-level syllabus set by the Cambridge Examination Syndicate of England [18].
3. Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC)

In 2008, two men named Stephen Downes and George Siemens had come up with an idea to develop an online learning platform where a wide variety of participants can interact with each other in order to create a richer learning experience than what learners usually went through with traditional learning tools. They called it MOOC, that stands for Massive Open and Online Course. MOOC is also defined as an online learning tool that integrates the connectivity of social networking, the facilitation of an acknowledged expert in a field of study, and a collection of freely accessible online resources [13].

Defining it by its abbreviation, MOOCs are indeed massive, where a certain MOOC can entertain a huge number of students per lesson. MOOCs are also open, where it is open for any learners interested with the course offered. MOOCs are also based on the online world, which anyone from any part of the world have the ability to join, given they are connected to the internet. There are also a huge variety of courses offered in MOOC, and the learners are free to choose any course that they are interested in. MOOCs are of no financial burden as the majority of MOOC courses are free of charge, there are no fixed time commitment where users are free to enroll MOOC courses whenever they wanted, and MOOCs do not require its users to attend physical classes [19]. The idea of MOOC really took off with the emergence of a number of private initiatives that carried the idea of MOOC, such as Udacity, Coursera, Edx, openlearning, and many more. Due to the MOOC's high tolerant to its users in three different avenues (the wallet, the time and the energy of its users), it is really popular among learners and educators worldwide, and it is time for Malaysian English learners to also enjoy some learning experience on this online platform. Through the usage of the internet-based MOOC, the students can browse online to gain access to related resources and texts that can enhance their knowledge of the text, and relate the idea of the text with their own experiences and relatable world issues. Not only that, the students can also conduct online discussions with their peers about the preliminary ideas of the text through discussion windows on MOOCs.

4. Benefits and Challenges

There are a lot of studies conducted by educational researches about the prospects of using technology in teaching and learning the reading skills. Surely there are benefits of it for both the educator and the learner, along with some risks that the educator must note in order to create the best learning environment possible. According to [20], there are six benefits of implementing technology in the process of teaching and learning English. Firstly, using technology in teaching and learning can help develop students’ interest. By using multimedia technology, educators are able to use a variety of medium to convey knowledge, such as through simple images, audio, and visual animations among others, which helps to deliver information across the boundary of time and space. This will make the learning process more interesting for the students thus captivating their interests. A teacher can fully include multiple forms of media in the MOOC to capture students’ attention and develop their interest in learning.

Additionally, technology can help promote the communicative capacity of the learners. Through the usage of technology, students can develop their critical thinking about a certain topic. Most importantly, technology can also help to facilitate the students’ delivery of their thoughts and ideas about that particular subject. For example, a teacher can open a book-review discussion window in a MOOC. Students’ will give provide their views about that book, which helps to develop their productive communicative skills. At the same time, other students can read the views of the other students, thus developing their receptive communicative skills. Third, technology can help to develop students’ insights and knowledge of the world. Multimedia teaching coupled by the internet can provide students more information than what textbooks are able to offer. This will help widen their scope of knowledge and deepen their general understanding thus shaping them to become a more versatile type of learner. Fourth, technology can improve the teaching effect. In traditional learning environment, the learning processes are largely teacher-centered, and students does not participate much, apart from affirming to the teachers’ orders upon them. On the other hand, technology opens up
A new space for students to express themselves while at the same time gaining valuable knowledges from the teacher, thus increasing their involvement in the teaching and learning process. A good type of MOOC is interactive for the students and it involve a lot of discussions and feedbacks between the teacher and learner, and between learners themselves [19], thus providing ample windows for the students to shape the learning process according to their needs. This brings to the fifth benefit of technology in teaching and learning, which is improving the interaction of teacher and learner. With multiple interaction windows between students and educators in MOOCs, students can provide more feedback than they possibly can in traditional lessons, thus creating a special bond between the two like never before. Last but not least, technology also creates more flexibility to the structure of the course content. Through the feedback given by the students, the teacher can make changes to the course in a MOOC according to the students’ needs and achievement, thus creating a more impactful learning experience.

Along with the positives of implementing technologies in English teaching and learning, there are some risks and negatives of it. [20] highlighted the fact that through MOOC, the development of students’ speaking communicative skill is somewhat hindered. By incorporating technologies such as computers and smartphones in education, learning only involves the usage of audio, visual and textual effects. In MOOCs, the learning process involves the interaction of learners with learning materials, the teacher and other learners in the form of texts, videos and audios, and there is no avenue where the students can use their speaking skills to convey their opinions and messages.

5. Conclusion
Using MOOCs to cover the teaching and learning tasks of the English as a second language (ESL) subject is a simple task, yet it is highly-beneficiary for students and teachers alike. However, it is important to note that the efforts to employ MOOCs in Malaysian ESL classrooms need to be done in a highly holistic manner. Teachers should always put the students at the center of the learning process, and the teacher must heavily rely on the usage of ICT and mobile devices in a classroom. Undeniably, mobile devices which are popular among students are motivational tools to be used in education and various learning activities as many researches have shown the positive outcomes. These could be seen as an indicator that the utilization of educational technology components such as MOOCs in teaching and learning of ESL, particularly reading skills; would be an effective approach in overcoming the difficulties faced by educators in motivating Malaysian students to learn the English language, as well as enhancing their learning experience and eventually increase their proficiency. Hence, we should agree that MOOCs are undeniably the way to go for Malaysian English classrooms, and we have to ensure that the Malaysian educational system should include them effectively and productively; so that Malaysian learners can gain invaluable benefits from it.

Acknowledgment
This research is supported by Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia under research scheme no. (i) GG-2018-001; (ii) KRA-2018-044.

References
[1] M. S. Reddy and P. Mahavidyalaya, “Importance of English Language in Today’s World,” Int. J. Acad. Res., vol. 3, no. 4(2), pp. 179–184, 2016.
[2] K. Lawton and H. Warren, “The Power of Reading,” 2015.
[3] Thirusanku J, Yunus MM. Status of English in Malaysia. Asian Social Science. 2014 Jul 1;10(14):254. 2014.
[4] H. Hashim, Yunus. MM, and Embi, M. A. “Factors influencing polytechnic English as second language (ESL) learners’ attitude and intention for using mobile learning,” Asian ESP J., vol. 14, no. 7, pp. 195–208, 2018.
[5] Yunus MM, Nordin N, Salehi H, Sun CH, Embi MA. Pros and Cons of Using IICT in Teaching ESL Reading and Writing. International education studies. 6(7):119-30. 2013.
[6] Yunus MM, Lubis MA, Lin CP. Language learning via ICT: Uses, challenges and issues. Wseas transactions on information Science and applications. Sep 1;6(9):1453-67. 2009

[7] Mohamad M, Ghazali N, Hashim H. Secondary School Students’ Perceptions on the Use of Google+ towards Improving ESL Writing Skills. International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning (iJET). Sep 29;13(09):224-38. 2018.

[8] H. Yusup and M. Razmah, “Instructional technology: Theory and application,” 2006.

[9] Dussek and M. Hashim, “Kitab Pedoman Guru,” 1953.

[10] J. Nuruddin, “The development of educational media services in Malaysia 1957-1972,” 1978.

[11] MIMOS, “MIMOS Milestone,” 2017.

[12] G. Simin and S. Ibrahim, “Effectiveness of ICT Integration in Malaysian Schools: A Quantitative Analysis,” Int. Res. J. Qual. Educ., vol. 2(8), no. August 2015, 2015.

[13] McAuley, B. Stewart, G. Siemens, D. Cormier, and C. Commons, “The MOOC model for digital practice,” Massive Open Online Courses Digit. ways knowing Learn., pp. 1–64, 2010.

[14] M. Košak, “THE TYPES OF READING,” 2011.

[15] Darus, “The Current Situation and Issues of the Teaching of English in Malaysia,” 2009.

[16] D. L. Grossman and J. T. Lo, Social Education in Asia: Critical Issues and Multiple Perspectives. 2007.

[17] Bahagian Teknologi Pendidikan, “Laporan pencapaian pelaksanaan Program NILAM 2003.,” 2003.

[18] M. N. N. Lee, “Educational Change in Malaysia,” 2002.

[19] E. Bourli, “Language Massive Open Online courses in Teaching English as a Foreign Language,” 2017.

[20] D. S. Solanki and M. Phil, “‘Use of Technology in English Language Teaching and Learning’: An Analysis,” 2012.