

# LMOOCs

## free, self-access language learning on a global scale

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<b>Potential impact</b>	high
<b>Timescale</b>	ongoing
<b>Keywords</b>	LMOOCs, global audience, autonomous learning, self-regulation, self-access

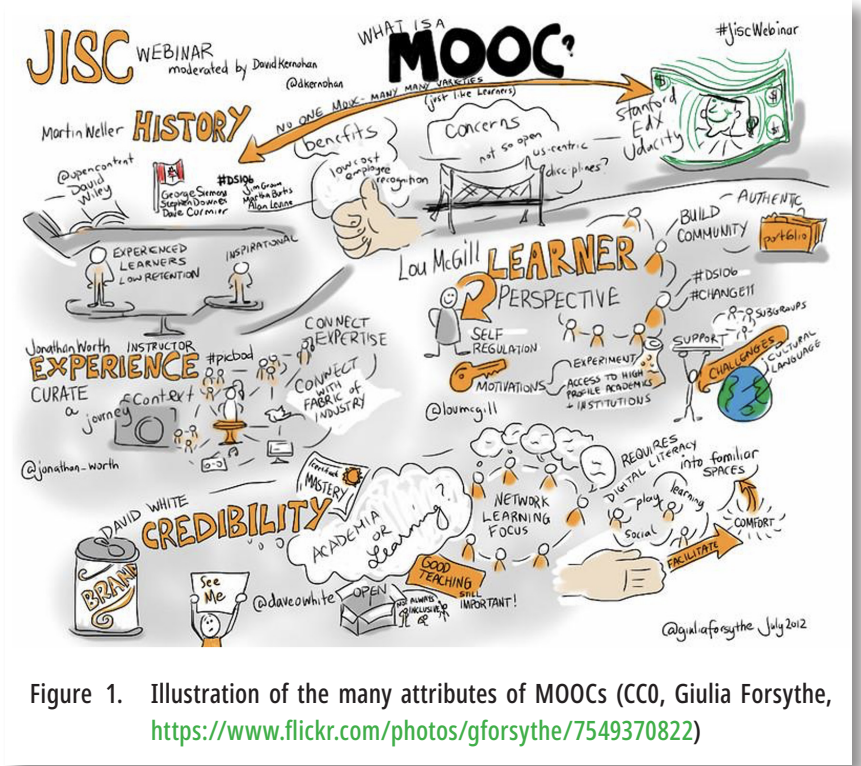
### What is it?

Massive Open Online Language Courses, also commonly known as Language MOOCs or LMOOCs, are online courses offered for a limited period of time by higher education institutions worldwide for anybody wishing to learn a foreign language. The average duration of these courses is between four and six weeks, and approximately three to five weekly study hours are required. Because of their duration, LMOOCs often focus on specific aspects of the target language, e.g. academic writing, improving pronunciation, written communication for the workplace, preparation for specific language examinations, survival language skills, etc. There are also abundant introductory courses focusing on basic language performance. Enrolment is free but these courses are usually not eligible for credit; however, learners may purchase a certification, which is normally moderately priced. Enrolment is not restricted by age, qualifications, or geographic location, conditions that nurture their ‘massiveness’. MOOCs are delivered through online platforms which are based on the template approach to software authoring, that is, multimedia content is inserted into templates by materials writers. MOOCs that follow a course format are known as xMOOCs (x stands for eXtended). They include a syllabus and are organised according

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to a set schedule; moreover, learners usually have access to some instructor guidance. On occasions, after the first edition of the scheduled course, some LMOOCs are made available on a self-access basis. This means that learners are free to set their own pace and organise their study at will. The onus of learning is therefore on the student. Most MOOCs are based on micro-lessons delivered through short audio or video clips followed by exercises, activities, and reading material. Most LMOOCs also include assignments, tests, or quizzes that are either automatically assessed or peer-assessed by means of rubrics. Grading is also provided, and students can oversee their performance through an automatic scoring system.



Among their many benefits, MOOCs allow learners to easily return to course materials as needed if access remains open. Through the course Forum, learners

can connect with global learners and engage in communication through their common target language. They also have the opportunity of giving and receiving feedback from peers. Most LMOOCs are based on effective instructional design criteria. See [Figure 1](#) above for a sketchnote of a webinar on MOOCs and the pedagogical issues around their use.

## Example

To date, there are several examples of effectively designed MOOCs that facilitate the development of communicative language competences. The *Professional Certificate in Basic Spanish* ([Figure 2](#)), which comprises three MOOCs: *Getting Started*, *One step further*, and *Getting there* (see the resources section below for links), is an example designed by language specialists from Universitat Politècnica de València (UPV), Spain, delivered via the edX.org platform.

These Basic Spanish MOOCs provide

“ a general understanding of common words and phrases, as well as basic grammar, Spanish pronunciation, and conversation skills, allowing [learners] to communicate in everyday situations according to the A2 proficiency level (elementary) as described in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages” (Programme overview, <https://stage.edx.org/professional-certificate/upvalenciax-basic-spanish>).

Although these courses are now available on a self-paced basis, learners can contact a teaching assistant via the Forum to ask questions. To date, these MOOCs have attracted just under 350,000 learners from a range of 206 countries, and approximately 10% have completed and successfully passed the graded tests.

Through a post course questionnaire, 77% of the respondents indicated that the reason for not completing the course was due to time constraints. In terms of

learner satisfaction, *Basic Spanish: Getting Started* is listed on [Class Central's Best Online Courses of All Time](#) ranking (2020) and on the [100 Most Popular Online Courses of All Time](#) ranking (2020). Additionally, it was also listed among the [100 Most Popular Courses During the 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic](#). All figures relate to Class Central's database of over 15,000 MOOCs.



## Benefits

The prime benefits of MOOCs are precisely their openness and massiveness, that is, the possibility of reaching out to a vast and diverse audience worldwide, and in particular to disadvantaged groups in remote areas of the world where formal education may be limited. Globally dispersed cohorts can communicate through the delivery platform, thus creating a sense of conceptual *belonging*, as well as being part of a community of practice where common experience can be shared.

Despite the fact that MOOCs are designed for autonomous learning, they can also be integrated as self-access materials in a taught course to reinforce language practice or as the work to be conducted outside the classroom in a

flipped teaching scenario. For instance, after having learners watch the video micro-lessons – which are often self-contained learning objects – and complete the exercises outside class hours, class time can be devoted to solving problems, extension tasks, and, on the whole, participatory activities.

MOOC platforms are self-contained systems and do not require additional plugins or add-ons for full functionality. Additionally, technical requirements are minimal so they can be used in areas of the world with limited technological access and development.

## Potential issues

MOOCs are particularly suited to self-access or informal learning, which in most cases means that learners have to self-regulate their learning, very much relying on cognitive and resource management strategies, the latter to manage time, study environment, and the resources provided.

Because MOOC platforms are neither discipline-oriented nor dedicated online language learning environments, there are many limitations in terms of practising productive skills, i.e. speaking and writing. One of the drawbacks is that authentic language practice is limited but, if integrated into a regular course, extra speaking practice can be incorporated as an in-class activity. Alternatively, learners can sign up for private online tutoring offered through a variety of platforms or use online language exchange sites.

## Looking to the future

Progressively, more LMOOCs will be on offer despite the challenges involved. MOOCs have demonstrated that they offer valuable educational opportunities to millions of potential students, and many universities have started awarding accreditation at various levels (OEDb, n.d.). This means that learners around the world can register for formal education and benefit from high-quality technology-enhanced distance learning. Moreover, LMOOCs in

particular are a means of widening participation in mobility and study opportunities, and can lead to enhanced employability. This belief was conveyed in the questionnaires given to UPV LMOOC learners: 15% of the respondents in the pre-questionnaire of the beginners' Spanish MOOC said their motivation to enrol was to improve their job prospects.

As well as providing learning for the most popular languages in the world, these platforms provide an unquestionable potential, both in terms of promotion and sustainability, for specialists to develop and learners to delve into courses for less commonly-taught languages.

Lastly, as MOOC platforms improve, better social tools are being embedded (for example peer grading is increasingly automated) and progress in building functionality to allow personalisation is being made (Quora, 2017).

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## Resources

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- Professional Certificate in upper-intermediate English by the Universitat Politècnica de València: <https://www.edx.org/professional-certificate/upvalenciavax-upper-intermediate-english>

**List of major MOOC providers hosting language courses:**

- Coursera: <https://www.coursera.org/>
- edX: <https://www.edx.org/>
- FutureLearn: <https://www.futurelearn.com/>
- Miriadax: <https://miriadax.net/home>



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