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Preferences and Views of School Students on the Integration of MOOCs in Performance Tasks of EFL Courses

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Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic forced the education sector to transition from traditional classroom settings to online and blended learning formats. MOOCs have emerged as a potential alternative to traditional classroom instruction, providing students with access to high-quality education from leading universities. This case study examines the preferences and views of school students on the integration of MOOCs in the performance tasks of EFL courses. The study was conducted in Türkiye during the 2020-2021 school year, and a total of 110 K-12 students participated. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected. Statistical analysis was used to analyse the quantitative data, while descriptive and content analysis was used for the qualitative data. The study found that integrating MOOCs in K-12 EFL classes had a positive impact on students' motivation and engagement levels. Using MOOCs as performance tasks increased students' awareness of global issues and improved their research and analytical skills. Additionally, the results showed that MOOCs have the potential to enhance language learning outcomes in K-12 EFL courses. The findings of this study can guide researchers and practitioners in the theoretical and practical aspects of online and blended learning in K-12 education.

Introduction

MOOCs provide free access to high-quality educational content through the internet, making it possible for anyone, anywhere, to access educational resources. MOOCs can be used to offer remote learning opportunities during a crisis (Al-Fraihat, 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic forced many institutions to move their courses online, changing their teaching approach from traditional face-to-face learning to online methods (Pant et al., 2023) and leading to increased interest in MOOCs.

According to data from UNESCO in February 2022, out of the total enrolled learners, 43,518,726 learners were affected, accounting for 2.8%, due to school closures caused by Covid-19 (UNESCO, 2022). MOOCs were used to support student learning and engagement during school closures. They are particularly beneficial for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, providing a flexible and accessible platform for learners. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the preferences and perspectives of school students about the integration of MOOCs in performance tasks of EFL courses.

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Literature Review

MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) are online courses accessible to anyone, free of charge for basic content. They offer a large-scale learning environment, attracting learners worldwide who voluntarily guide their learning journey. Learners can register for any course of interest, create related content, and allow others to access it, making resources available anytime, anywhere (De Waard, 2013, p. 357). Platforms like Udacity, Coursera, Edx, Alison, Canvas, and others provide MOOCs to anyone with internet access, and their content is publicly available. MOOCs first appeared in educational technologies in 2008 and have grown in popularity ever since. They cater not just to higher education students but also K-12 learners, which has drawn attention to the value of K-12 education (Briggs & Crompton, 2016; Tomkins et al., 2016). MOOCs have been developed specifically for K-12 education, with platforms like EdX leading the way. These are often used as additional resources to traditional classroom instruction or are integrated into the curriculum to enhance the learning experience (Atkonson, 2014; Hollands & Tirthali, 2014). As MOOCs gain popularity in K-12 education, it is important to understand their potential, limitations, and effective integration for improved student learning outcomes.

Tichavsky et al. (2015) discussed the low completion rates of MOOCs despite their extensive reach. Bárcena et al. (2015) studied learner outcomes, exposing trends in performance and achievement. Zheng et al. (2015) delved into learners' motivations and challenges, emphasising personal interest and career development as primary motivations but also pointing out significant obstacles such as time constraints, technical problems, and language barriers. This requires further research into the experiences and needs of students and teachers using MOOCs, and innovative teaching and learning approaches that leverage MOOCs' unique features.

Objective

This research aims to study the preferences and views of school students on the integration of MOOCs in EFL courses — i.e., K-12 level English lessons. For this purpose, answers to the following questions were sought:

a. What are the preferred MOOCs for EFL at the school level?
b. What are the participants' views on their first MOOC experience?

Methods

Research Methodology

This research was grounded in qualitative case study methodologies, aimed at understanding the preferences and views of students on the integration of MOOCs in performance tasks of the EFL course. It used the case study method, as defined by Yıldırım and Şimşek (2021), to conduct an extensive examination of several factors related to this situation, providing a detailed understanding of the subject matter. The data collection included survey and open-ended questions.

Population and Sample

The study included 110 volunteers from the 11th grade at a state high school in Türkiye, participating during the spring semester of the 2020-2021 academic year. English was a compulsory course for all participants. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, classes were conducted online, with four-hour English lessons held weekly throughout the year. The sample included 80 female students (72.7%) and 30 male (27.3%) students, aged 16 (55.5%) and 17 (44.5%), as detailed in Table 1. Participants' English proficiency levels ranged from B1 to B2 plus.

Participants were selected using convenience sampling, given that they were readily accessible volunteers from a specific grade and school.

Table 1: Participants' Gender

Frequency		Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Female	80	72.7	72.7
	Male	30	27.3	100.0
	Total	110	100.0	

Tools and their Reliability and Validity

Data for this study were collected using pre- and post-surveys. The pre-survey gathered demographic information, including age, gender, and prior MOOC experience, and was administered online via Google Forms and EBA. The post-survey, designed by researchers and experts, included both open-ended and closed-ended questions to explore participants' MOOC preferences, learning strategies, and overall perspectives. Quantitative data from the surveys were analysed using SPSS for statistical examination of demographics and survey responses. Qualitative data from open-ended questions were analysed using NVivo, employing descriptive and content analysis techniques for nuanced insights into participants' MOOC experiences. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, each participant was assigned a unique coding number. This system, endorsed by an expert, facilitated systematic data organisation and management, maintaining data integrity throughout the analysis.

Procedure for Conducting this Research

The research methods ensured the privacy and security of student participants. Informed consent was obtained from both students and parents, with protocols to anonymise student data. The study adhered to national education standards and guidelines and received formal approval from the Ministry of Education (Research Number: E-59090411-44-22987952). Participation was voluntary, with no coercion, and participants could withdraw at any time. No incentives or payments were offered. Before starting the performance task, a pre-survey assessed students' familiarity with MOOCs, revealing that 25.5% had heard of MOOCs, while 74.5% had not. To address this, researchers conducted orientation sessions, including interviews with 11th-grade students and a YouTube video presentation (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A-kJE-q25kc).

The core of the study was a six-week task titled "My First MOOC Experience." Students selected free, English-language MOOCs based on their interests, with continuous support from researchers via online lessons, email, and messaging. Upon completing their courses, students uploaded their certificates of completion to the learning management system. An online survey was conducted post-completion to gather feedback and assess the educational benefits and overall experience. Throughout the study, the psychological and emotional well-being of participants was prioritised, adhering strictly to ethical guidelines to prevent deception or breach of confidentiality. The study's ethical design and focus on student well-being and voluntary participation underscore its commitment to providing valuable insights to the field of education while safeguarding student rights and privacy.

Findings

The findings of the current study were analysed based on the research questions.

The Preferred MOOCs

The study collected data from 110 participants (80 females and 30 males), aged 16 (55.5%) and 17 (44.5%), none of whom had ever participated in MOOCs. Prior to the study, 74.5% of the participants had not heard of MOOCs, while 25.5% were familiar with them (Table 2).

Table 2: Have You Ever Heard of MOOCs Before This Study?

Frequency		Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	82	74.5	74.5
	Yes	28	25.5	25.5
	Total	110	100	100

Table 3 shows the results of the question "What did you use to follow MOOCs?" A total of 110 valid responses were collected. The most used device was the laptop, with 38.2% of respondents using it. The second most used device was the mobile phone, with 30.9% of respondents using it. Other devices used include desktops, iPads, and tablets. A small percentage of respondents used multiple devices.

Table 3: What Did You Use to Follow MOOCs?

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Desktop	10	9.1	9.1	9.1
iPad	4	3.6	3.6	12.7
iPad, tablet	1	0.9	0.9	13.6
Laptop	42	38.2	38.2	51.8
mobile phone	34	30.9	30.9	82.7
mobile phone, desktop	1	0.9	0.9	83.6
mobile phone, laptop	15	13.6	13.6	97.3
mobile phone, laptop, tablet	2	1.8	1.8	99.1
Tablet	1	0.9	0.9	100.0
Total	110	100.0	100.0	

Table 4 presents data on the various MOOC platforms used by respondents. The most frequently used platform was Alison, reported by 40% of participants. EdX was the second most popular, reported by 26.4% of participants. Meanwhile, Udemy was used by 15.5% of participants and Futurelearn by a mere 6.3%. In addition, 11.8% used other platforms. In total, 110 respondents completed the survey.

Table 4: What Platforms Have You Studied as a MOOC?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Alison	44	40.0	40.0	40.9
	EdX	29	26.4	26.4	67.3
	Futurelearn	7	6.3	6.3	73.5
	Udemy	13	15.5	15.5	84.5
	Others	17	11.8	11.8	100
	Total	110	100.0	100.0	

When the participants were asked what subjects they had studied via MOOCs, different answers were given. Among them, 50.9% answered this question the same as others. Thus, the highest percentage was English with 20%, followed by education (10%), computer science (9.1%), mathematics (3.6%), law (3.6%), and history (2.7%), respectively, as shown in Table 5. The courses the participants enrolled in included: Discover Effective Online Business Ideas; Political Ideologies: Liberalism versus Marxism; The Rise of Superheroes and Their Impact On Pop Culture; Digital Skills: Embracing Digital Technology; Introduction to Data Science; Introduction to Psychology; Citizenship and the Rule of Law; Introduction to Conversational English; English Writing Skills; Baking and Desserts for Beginners; Basic Accounting; Beginner Digital Photography; Managing-study-stress-and-mental-health; Mental Health Studies; Basic Spanish 1; Understanding Financial Markets; Programming for Everybody (Getting Started with Python); EmSAT English Preparation — Level 2; Covid-19: Helping Young People Manage Low Mood and Depression; Fashion Design; Physics — Motion, Speed and Time; Yoga for Allergic Rhinitis; Covid-19: Psychological First Aid; IT Management — Building Information Systems; and Beating Depression: Learn the hidden secrets of beating depression.

Table 5: What Subject(s) Did You Study via MOOCs?

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Computer	10	9.1	9.1	9.1
Education	11	10.0	10.0	19.1
English	22	20.0	20.0	39.1
History	3	2.7	2.7	41.8
Law	4	3.6	3.6	45.5
Mathematics	4	3.6	3.6	49.1
Other	56	50.9	50.9	100.0
Total	110	100.0	100.0	

Table 6 shows the results for the question "How Many Hours Per Week Did You Plan to Spend Studying On MOOCs?". One hundred and ten respondents were included in the analysis.

The majority of respondents (44.5%) planned to spend 2-3 hours per week studying MOOCs, 33.6% planned to spend less than two hours per week, 15.5% of respondents planned to spend 4-5 hours per week, and only a small percentage of respondents (6.4%) planned to spend 6-7 hours per week.

These findings suggest that MOOCs are most commonly used by individuals who plan to spend a moderate amount of time studying each week, but are also used by individuals who plan to spend very little time studying.

Table 6: How Many Hours Per Week Did You Plan to Spend Studying MOOCs?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2-3 hours	49	44.5	44.5	46.4
	4-5 hours	17	15.5	15.5	61.8
	6-7 hours	7	6.4	6.4	68.2
	Less than 2 hours	37	33.6	33.6	100.0
	Total	110	100.0	100.0	

Since this study was related to the integration of MOOCs as a performance task in foreign language courses, the language of the chosen course had to be English. Considering that the participants were in the eleventh grade, their level in the curriculum was considered B1. However, due to the individual differences of the participants and their interest in learning a foreign language, their level of English as a foreign language varied. For this reason, the participants were asked whether they had language problems or not. The results indicated that 71 participants did not have any language problems, but 39 participants had language problems as depicted in Table 7.

Table 7: Language Problems

Valid		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	No	71	64.5	64.5	64.5
	Yes	39	35.5	35.5	100.0
	Total	110	100.0	100.0	

In the responses to the question “Would you like to enroll in a new MOOC again?”, most participants (61.8%) were not sure about enrolling in a new MOOC, 4.6% of the participants answered “No”, and 33.6% did want to register in a new MOOC again, as shown in Table 8.

Table 8: Would You Like to Enrol in a New MOOC Again?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Maybe	68	61.8	61.8	61.8
	No	5	4.6	4.6	66.4
	Yes	37	33.6	33.6	100.0
	Total	110	100.0	100.0	

Most participants, comprising 84.5%, indicated that they were not willing to pay for MOOC certificates, as opposed to 15.5% who responded affirmatively. This data, outlined in Table 9, illustrates a strong preference among participants against paying for MOOC certificates.

Table 9: Are You Willing to Pay for MOOC Certificates?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	No	93	84.5	84.5	84.5
	Yes	17	15.5	15.5	100.0
	Total	110	100.0	100.0	

Evaluations of First MOOC Experiences

To gain insight into participants' perspectives on their first MOOC experience, two open-ended questions were asked in an online post-survey. Each participant answered these questions. The responses to the first question, "What did you enjoy most about your MOOC experience?" were coded and categorised into themes. Figure 1 presents the codes, which were obtained from the participants' views.

Figure 1: Things participants enjoyed most about MOOCs

Figure 1 illustrates that nine codes emerged from the analysis of responses: MOOC content, videos, language, fun in learning, improving language skills, overcoming prejudice towards online learning, course design, free enrollment, and flexibility. The participants' feedback indicated their enjoyment of the videos, especially the animation and clear, fluent speech. The use of pictures and videos, as well as the availability of free courses, were also appreciated. The programme quality was praised, and participants commented that they were not bored while learning the subjects. The course was not tiring, and participants were able to finish it without getting bored. Some participants mentioned that they enjoyed learning about a subject they were interested in. The use of pictures and videos, along with the availability of free courses, was also well-received. Participants praised the programme quality, noting that they were engaged and not bored during the learning process. Some mentioned enjoying learning about subjects they were interested in or in a different language, while others appreciated the course providing new information on topics of their interest. Successful instructors and conversation videos were highlighted as positives. Direct quotations from participants further support these findings:

- "I liked that the videos are animated the most. The speech was very clear and fluent." (P1)
- "It was fun to watch the lessons." (P2)
- "Successful instructors have given the lessons." (P4)
- "Loved the videos in my course." (P14)
- "The course was not very tiring, and I was able to finish it without getting bored." (P56)
- "I liked that the lesson was with pictures the most." (P78)
- "I liked the conversation videos very much; we learned the sentences we need to establish when we enter into any dialogue with the other person." (P45)
- "And the videos were so interesting." (P49)
- "I liked the video descriptions." (P23)
- "Fluent beautiful and colorful examples." (P89)
- "Teaching with videos." (P78)
- "I liked the fact that it supported it with pictures and videos." (P100)
- "I found the program quality." (P108)
- "It broke my prejudice towards online education and changed my perspective." (P2)
- "The course was not very tiring, and I was able to finish it without getting bored." (P12)
- "I loved the process of teaching this information." (P23)
- "Everything was very well explained. I am not bored while learning the subjects." (P56)
- "Cleared my mind and relaxed." (P71)
- "Free access." (P84)
- "Free." (P90)
- "Having free courses for every level and every department is perfect for those who want to have so much fun learning new things." (P97)
- "Learning new things online in an easy way was fun." (P108)
- "I had a lot of fun because I was able to learn about a subject that interests me." (P8)
- "It was very nice to get new information on a subject that I am interested in." (P13)
- "It was very nice to study something I was interested in in a different language." (P88)
- "I love cooking and had fun learning the rules used in this type of cooking." (P34)

In summary, participants appreciated the use of animated videos and clear speech, found the lessons fun and engaging, and valued the quality of instruction. The use of multimedia elements and free courses contributed positively to their learning experience, highlighting the effectiveness of these methods in online education.

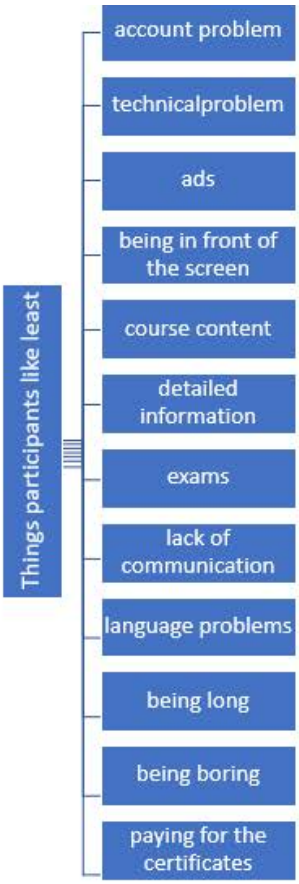

Figure 2: Things participants like least about MOOCs

Participants had various responses when asked about their least favourite aspects of taking part in MOOCs. The key issues, as shown in Figure 2, included: account problems, technical problems, ads, screen time, course content, detailed information, exams, lack of communication, language problems, duration, boredom, and the cost of certificates. Additionally, they felt that there was limited free content and some lessons were repetitive. The platform was seen as complex, with an overwhelming amount of detail in supplementary information. Participants disliked exams and noted a lack of communication among peers. Some struggled with understanding English terms and found the course duration too long. Furthermore, they were unhappy about paying for certifications, especially if they didn't need the certificate until later on. Here are a few quotations from the participants:

- "I had a problem with my account." (P23)
- "I didn't like that we had to watch commercials to move on to another section." (P27)

- "Sometimes I had internet problems and so I restudied some modules. Also, because I normally must spend a lot of time in front of the laptop, I was tired of being in front of the screen again."
- "Free contents are very few". (P32).
- "Some lessons were very similar to the previous lessons." (P39)
- "The site is too complex." (P43)
- "Much detail when they wanted to give additional information." (P55)
- "I didn't like the exam." (P63)
- "Lack of mutual communication." (P64)
- "I had difficulty understanding English words." (P88)
- "I sometimes had a problem with the language, but I overcame it by constantly translating." (P92)
- "Too long." (P93)
- "I had to spend a lot more time than I anticipated." (P9)
- "It upset me that some courses are paid for certification." (P10)
- "a certain fee to get a certificate at the end of the course." (P29)
- "I don't like paying money if I only want to get a certificate for my course in the future." (P77).

Some participants encountered various issues and frustrations with the online course platform. Some participants faced technical difficulties such as account problems, connectivity issues, and language barriers. Others were dissatisfied with features like mandatory ads, limited free content, and lengthy courses that felt repetitive. Complexity in navigation and a lack of communication among users were also noted. Additionally, frustration arose from the platform's paid certification process, especially for those seeking certificates for future use only. These findings highlight areas for improving the platform's user experience, including technical support, content diversity, ease of navigation, and flexible certification options.

Discussion and Conclusion

The current study highlights the potential of MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) in addressing various challenges in education, especially during times like the Covid-19 pandemic. It emphasises the benefits of incorporating MOOCs into English language teaching, such as providing personalised and engaging learning experiences for students. Additionally, MOOCs can supplement traditional teaching methods, offer access to resources not available in school curriculums, and cater to diverse learning needs.

The study also underscores the importance of designing MOOCs with students' needs and preferences in mind, which can lead to increased engagement and motivation. However, it acknowledges that there are still challenges, such as technical issues and the need for support in the online learning environment.

Furthermore, the study suggests that MOOCs can be valuable as performance tasks, motivating students to complete courses and enhancing their language skills. It also mentions the positive impact of MOOCs on student satisfaction, enjoyment of learning, and self-paced learning.

While MOOCs offer significant advantages in education, there is ongoing work needed to address challenges and to optimise their effectiveness. The insights from this study can guide educators and course designers in improving MOOCs to better meet the needs of learners in diverse educational settings.

This study delves into the preferences and views of participants on the integration of MOOCs in performance tasks of EFL courses, emphasising the potential of MOOCs for flexible and accessible learning (Alario-Hoyos et al., 2014). The findings reveal that integrating MOOCs as performance tasks can enhance learning and motivation, particularly during closures such as those caused by Covid-19 (Pandey et al., 2022). However, challenges such as technical issues and communication gaps need to be addressed for optimal implementation.

The Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of online teaching methods, with MOOCs playing a significant role in providing educational continuity (UNESCO, 2022). This study underscores the importance of student-centered learning and the need for tailored approaches in integrating MOOCs into traditional educational settings.

One key aspect highlighted by this study was the satisfaction expressed by participants in their MOOC experiences, despite encountering limitations (Shah, 2020). This satisfaction underscores the potential of MOOCs to supplement traditional education and provide personalised learning opportunities.

Educators and course designers should focus on enhancing MOOC effectiveness by addressing technical challenges and ensuring meaningful interactions in the online learning environment (Hu et al., 2018). Further research should explore strategies to support learners and optimise MOOC integration into educational curricula for sustained impact (Kizilcec et al., 2017).

Limitations and Possibilities for Future Research

This study acknowledges that its findings are not generalisable and that further research is needed to explore the preferences and views of school students on the integration of MOOCs in performance tasks of EFL classes. The current findings could inform teachers, practitioners, school leaders, policymakers, and MOOC providers in designing future learning interventions to complement traditional instruction. Further research could provide a comprehensive understanding of how MOOCs can be effectively integrated into K-12 EFL courses, ultimately enhancing the learning experiences and outcomes for students.

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