

MOOCs to support language learning

Online resources for hearing, reading and comprehending language

Massive open online courses (MOOCs) are usually open-access online courses that do not limit class size. They often take the form of courses based on university teaching materials or are set at pre-university levels and are freely available online. Most include short videos, accompanied by subtitles or transcripts. Some MOOCs are designed to teach specific languages but all of them can be used as resources for language learners over the age of 13.

MOOCs were written for wide audiences and provide good quality examples of both spoken and written language. They cover multiple subjects that fit the interests of many learners, and they can be accessed whenever Internet access is available. They have flexible schedules. Learners can choose a single topic and review it many times, or work through a longer section.

Course content on MOOCs offers examples of formal language use. These include many written examples, as well as spoken examples accompanied by accurate transcripts. Learner discussions within the MOOC provide examples of less formal conversations and give learners opportunities to make written contributions to discussions in the language they are learning.

MOOCs provide opportunities to learn specialised language in areas that interest individual language learners. Some students will choose a MOOC that deals with a subject area they know well, so they can focus on their language skills. Others will choose a subject they want to learn more about and will study the subject and the language at the same time.

MOOCs offer opportunities to study in many languages. These are some of the larger providers.

- MOOCs in English are available at futurelearn.com, coursera.org and edx.org.
- MOOCs in French are available at fun-mooc.fr
- MOOCs in Spanish and Portuguese are available at miriadax.net
- MOOCs in Chinese are available at xuetangx.com
- Class Central provides an index of MOOCs from many providers classcentral.com

MOOCs to support language learning at a distance

Begin with opportunities to explore MOOC platforms and different MOOCs.	Guide and support students to explore the possibilities. Select a particular platform or set of MOOCs for students to investigate and report back on.
Students choose their MOOC and plan what they will learn, as well as how and when.	Ask students to share their plans with you or with the class for comment and amendment.
Students study MOOC content and the language used within MOOCs.	Students follow a course of study on the MOOC, asking you for help when necessary, and providing updates on their progress at agreed intervals.
Students report back on the experience.	This could be through a report, a poster, or a video using the language the student has studied.

How did it go?

Let us know in the comments on the website www.open.ac.uk/blogs/innovating how using MOOCs for language learning worked for you and your students. Please share any advice that others would find useful.