

**Turisiana Ahmad Buhari, Doreen Azlina Ab Rahman,
Nurbaya Mohd Aris, Shairah Hana Sulaiman**

Academy of Language Studies
Universiti Teknologi MARA Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

Abstract: Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) has since its launch provided a diverse choice of learning courses and modules. Open-learning.com claims to have over 4000 MOOCs from around the world, making it an indispensable place to gain knowledge other than the traditional classroom or formal education. This growing number of MOOCs means that the mass has the interest to learn various subjects the virtual way at their own pace and comfort. Despite this increasing number, there are also concerns that not all subjects and skills can be delivered and taught online. Like many language subjects, Academic English is a challenging course to teach and learn. This is due to the specific skills involved in which requires constant guidance on how to deliver best. Hence, Fundamental Academic English course was created to provide knowledge and skills to teach Academic English concisely, virtually, and effectively, adhering to MOOC requirements. This course is unique as its modules are organized to firstly go over basic skills required in Academic English, then introduce the relevant tasks in Academic English, and lastly present steps and tips in ensuring effective verbal and written Academic English performance. The presentation of the course encourages a smooth transition from understanding and applying basic skills to transferring these skills into Academic English reading, writing, and speaking. It is hoped that the ten (10) specifically crafted modules help learners to grasp Academic English faster and more effectively. Fundamental Academic English has the potential to serve as an essential blended learning material at pre-university and university level and provide necessary English language skills for university students to perform academically.

Keywords: MOOC, Academic English, fundamentals, pre-university English language course, university English language course.

1. Introduction

The rising demand for blended learning is already well-known to all institutions of learning. At tertiary level especially, blended learning is a necessity in ensuring students are not left behind in the modern race of keeping up with the latest social and education trends. With gadgets becoming more user friendly, more accessible, and cheaper, learning via the Internet is no longer a huge problem.

The Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025 (Higher Education) has highlighted Globalised Online learning as one of the ten shifts in which emphasise ICT-enabled learning that would enhance learners' interactivity. This beneficial move ensures a more vibrant content and active participation from students. Both teachers and learners can stay current and innovative in teaching and learning.

There will be less need for classroom sitting time and more focus on using technology to carry out teaching and learning, mostly the virtual way. In other words, the government is dedicated to transforming the education system from textbook, and pen and paper to other approaches and modes of learning.

Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) is the solution to a current and more interactive method of learning. Due to its accessibility via the Internet and variety of courses offered, MOOC is the way forward as you can learn about anything from anywhere in the world. There are various places on the web that offer MOOCs or online learning. One of these places is Open Learning (openlearning.com). Like Coursera and iversity, it is a free online platform which offers online courses for free. The platform is user friendly and offers variety of courses that can be taken and learned at the user's own pace. Course makers act also as the instructors and groups of learners or classes can be formed. Students go through a course module by module, chapter by chapter, or topic by topic. MOOCs on Open Learning comprise of not only the lessons but also assessments and activities. Course features on openlearning.com also include keeping tracking of learners' completion of lessons and assessments.

Cognitivist school of learning views learning as an internal process whereby memory, thinking, reflection, abstraction, motivation, and metacognition are essential elements (Mohamed, 2008, p.22). The best approach to online learning according to Mohamed is by having information broken down in suitable size pieces to enable better processing. Highlighting critical information in the lesson and making learners understand the reason they should take the lesson are among the cognitivist strategies that underpin online learning. Taking this into account, Fundamental Academic English (FAE) course was designed to join other MOOCs catering to the teaching of English. The 10-module course focuses specifically on academic language skills, namely reading, writing, and speaking the academic way.



Figure 1: Fundamental Academic English Homepage on openlearning.com

2. Problem Statement

In general, learning academic English is not as popular as learning English for social purposes. There is a need to instill interest in Academic English, particularly in reading and writing so that it will not be viewed as a dry and difficult subject.

3. Objectives

The paper is written to highlight learning the necessary and basic skills of Academic English using MOOC style Fundamental Academic English course. The course was designed with the following objectives in mind:

1. To provide an organised method of learning academic English language skills
2. To provide an innovative and fun approach to learn academic English language skills

4. Novelty

A clear majority of people now interact far more using social media than in person (Devlin, 2016). As MOOCs are a direct consequence of the growth of Facebook, which made interaction-by-social-media global, it offers a transition of learning from physical space to cyberspace. MOOCs separate learning from evaluation of what has been learned. It is enormously freeing, both to the instructor and to the students. Fundamental Academic English course, thus, offers variety of learning options and an assortment of quizzes, practices and assessments for learners to choose from.

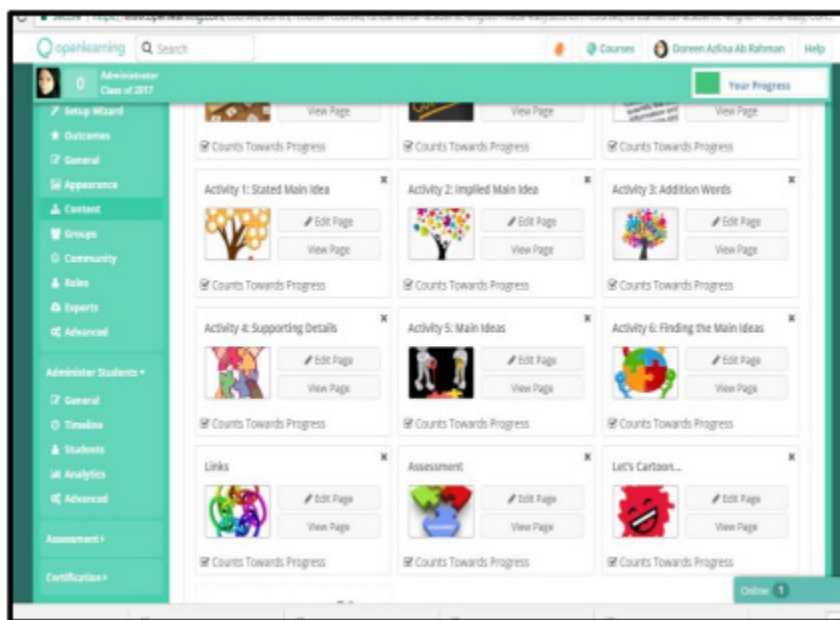


Figure 2: A Variety of Activities and Assessments

In particular, evaluation of students work and the awarding of grades is more formative and can be devoted purely to providing students with a more useful indication of their progress, not a summative measure of their performance and ability. Specific topics in Fundamental Academic English are linked to instructional video resources from the YouTube to make learning and understanding be more effective.

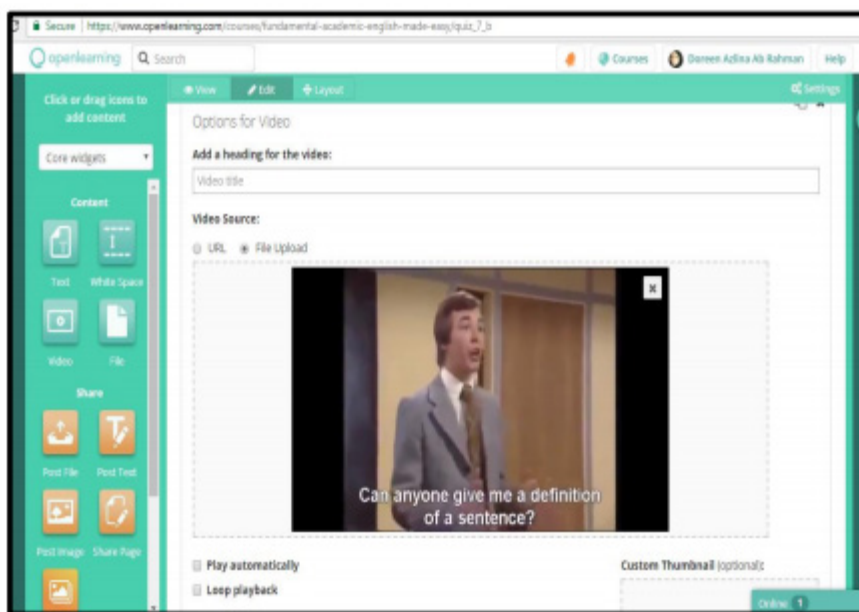


Figure 3: Links from YouTube Videos

MOOCs have the possibility to reach millions who currently have no access to any university at all. MOOCs allow students to work at their own pace, and to read what they need. They support some individualisation of learning that contributes to effectiveness. The contents for each Module in Fundamental Academic English are designed in a way that they support individualised learning. It begins with several 'unthreatening' instructions to more challenging ones. The activities and assessments include explicit and concise instructions which enable learners to make attempts on their own. In addition to that, as on any online platform, life around MOOCs is highly social when students participate massively in forums and offer assistance to each other.

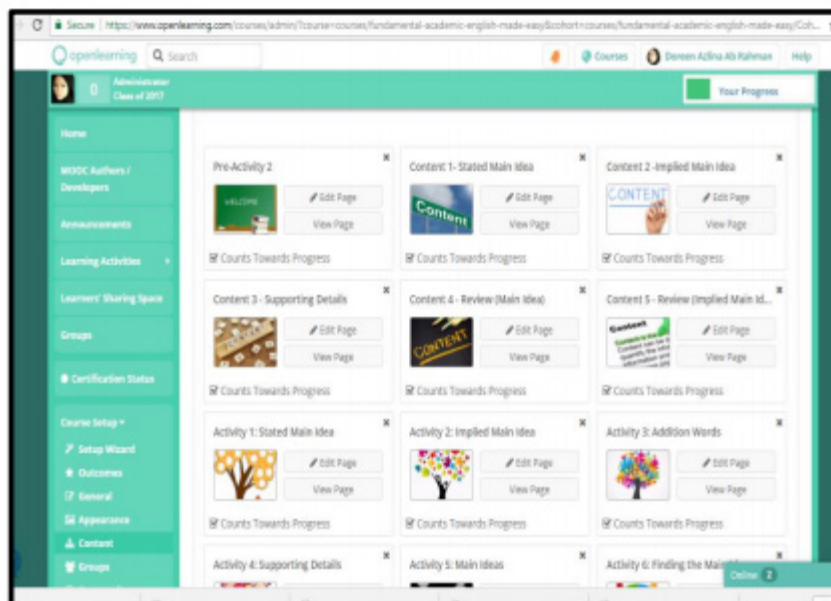


Figure 4: Contents are Designed from the Basic Instruction to more Challenging Options

Although some might argue that the new blended MOOCs' online video content is meant to be used more like a supplementary digital textbook (Skorton & Altschuler, 2013 in Montgomery et al, 2015), research in blended learning suggests both the face-to-face and online components need to be complementary and interdependent to be successful, with technology fully integrated into the instructional process. The novelty of MOOC may reside, but its strengths have opened ways for increased innovation for higher education in this digital era.

5. Usefulness

The rapid surge of technology has significantly changed traditional teaching and learning practices and educational institutions are faced with a new challenge in deciding the technology tools that are best suited to provide strong pedagogical practices to cater to a technology-savvy population (Baker, Nafukho, McCaleb, Becker & Johnson, 2015). Due to this pressing need for changes and transformation in pedagogical practices, blended learning or online learning has been introduced as an option to deliver educational products.

The availability of MOOCs, as a form of blended learning, allows learners or students to a more flexible access to education as MOOCs could cater to people with diverse life and educational background. Learners too can personalise learning according to their own needs. This is supported by Vanslambrouck, Zhu, Lombaerts, Philipsen and Tondeur (2017) in saying that online blended learning environments are mainly valued for their flexibility in time, space and pace of learning. Moreover, not only those enrolled in educational institutions can benefit from this Fundamental Academic English Course, but anyone who wishes to learn academic English can also sign up for this course as it accommodates different types of learners of various needs and limitations. Learners themselves are more aware of their pivotal areas and therefore can easily sign up for the course if they find a need to do so.

The open concept of Fundamental Academic English Course is different from the internal system that most universities utilise which restricts involvement from outsiders. This open platform is useful as it allows for knowledge contribution from the content developers, learners and people with expertise in academic English. It gives an opportunity for the learners to interact and exchange ideas with those registered in the course and brings in perspectives from a wider audience. This leads to a more comprehensive learning to take place at the same time encourages networking among the learners. Additionally, the various contents available for each module (e.g. activities, assessments and links) are useful for the learners to check for understanding as well as to extend their learning through the suggested links provided in the modules.

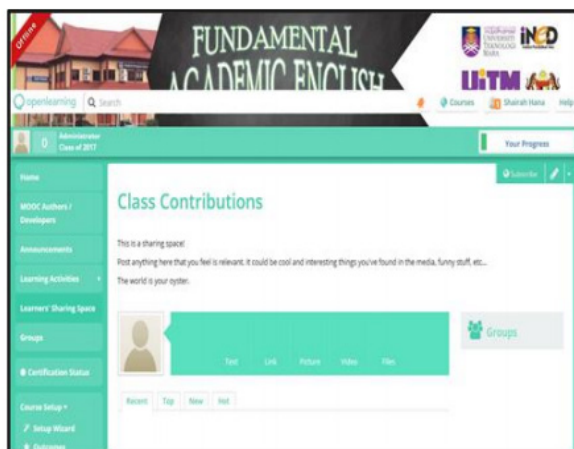


Figure 5: The Open Concept of MOOCs Provides a Platform for Easier Sharing of Knowledge

6. Commercialization Potential Or Impact Towards Socio Economy/ Humanity

The 10 modules available in Fundamental Academic English Course (MOOC), which engage students/participants in active and interactive learning, can be a source of income for UiTM. These modules can be patented and developed into a product which UiTM may claim legal rights to. Since online learning is growing rapidly, UiTM has acknowledged the fact and set a platform where students from all over the world can learn or participate in a lesson suitable to them.

For a learning innovation to be considered sustainable, it should be about a consciousness towards supporting students' activation and sustainment of engagement, not simply completion. Therefore, instructors of MOOCs will constantly be ready to provide comments and/or give feedbacks to participants upon completion of any lessons from the modules. Prompt actions from instructors will make students motivation level on high and voluntarily they will not hesitate to proceed in the lessons which have been prepared.

Winer (2013) in Lu (2017) stated that the online courses have also offered the opportunity for teachers to experiment with different teaching styles, including peer grading and the encouragement of participation on course discussion boards. Fundamental Academic English modules provide various interesting and engaging lessons for its international audience/participants. Each module has a Pre- Activity, 3 Activities (or more), Assessments, Links and Animation. These provide students with a substantial amount of references for them to make an advancement in their language learning process. The international audience that MOOCs provide has also drawn educators to further their knowledge and understanding in their field of research (Lu, 2017).

MOOCs have helped focus attention on the teaching and learning process on university campuses (Salisbury, 2014). The conceptualization of MOOC meets market demands locally and globally. In an era where English is seen to be the lingua franca, it is undeniable that mastery of the language is vital. MOOC online-learning allows students from all walks of life, ranging from various levels of proficiency to engage in an interesting and interactive teaching and learning process, anywhere and anytime convenient to them. Hence, it will not restrict / limit their quest for knowledge.

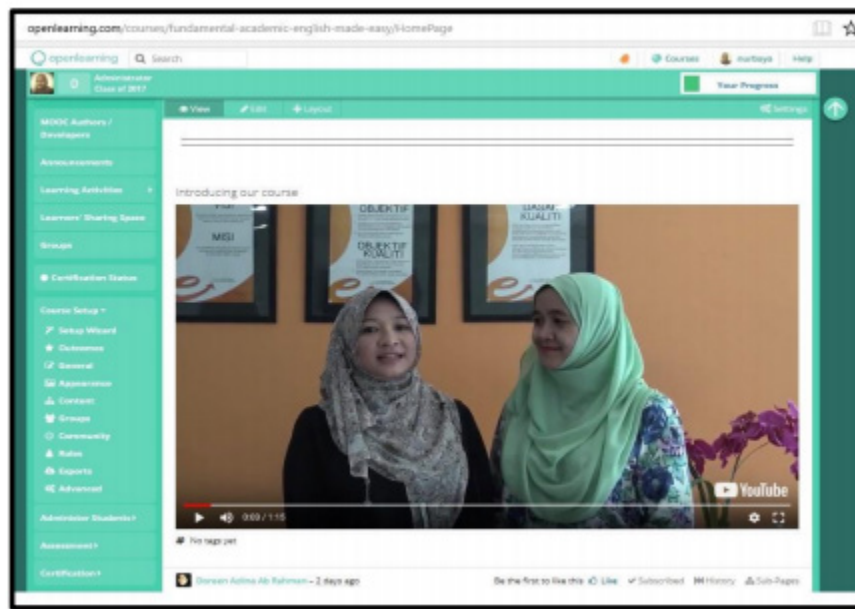


Figure 6: Fundamental Academic English Course Introductory Video on YOUTUBE

7. Conclusions

In relevance to novelty, usefulness, commercialisation potential, this paper briefly summarises academic English language learning through MOOC-style Fundamental Academic English course on openlearning.com

Overall, the design of the courses was heavily directed by the expectation that no MOOC should be seen as an ultimate resource for a particular learning topic. This denotes that the variety of contents and activities were developed in Fundamental Academic English course for people who are keen to learn academic English, to pick and choose what they want or need at any particular time. This emphasises the fact that learning is no longer restricted to a classroom setting but can actually take place practically anytime and anywhere.

The nature of MOOC will lead to a whole new dimension in language learning and feedbacks from participants allow instructors to make constant improvement to all the modules. Sharing of knowledge could be done more easily and comprehensively through this open platform. It is hoped that Fundamental Academic English course will move towards envisioning the future of learning in Malaysia, in line with the vision behind MOOCs, where knowledge is to be disseminated to a global set of learners in an open learning environment.

Having considered all the necessities of delivering a successful language course and online learning, Fundamental Academic English on openlearning.com hopes to have made academic English reading, writing, and speaking easier and less intimidating.

8. References

- Baker, C., Nafukho, F.M., McCaleb, K., Becker, M., & Johnson, M. (2015). The Tangible and Intangible Benefits of Offering Massive Open Online Courses: Faculty Perspectives. *Internet Learning*, 4 (2). Retrieved from <http://digitalcommons.apus.edu/internetlearning/vol4/iss2/6>
- Devlin, K. (2016). The Beginnings of Education Science? (Blog Post). Retrieved from <https://profkeithdevlin.org/>
- Johan Eddy Luan (2013). Massive Open Online Course (MOOC). A guide for beginners. Retrieved from <http://i-learn.uitm.edu.my/v2/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Full-MOOCs-book.pdf>
- Lu, Remi (2017). Learning Beyond the Classroom. MOOCs Inspire Blended Learning on Campus. Retrieved from <http://Mcgilltribune.Com/Moocs>
- Mohamed Ally (2008). Foundations of educational theory for online learning in T. Anderson (Ed), *The theory and practice of online learning*. Second edition (pp. 17-44) Edmonton: AU Press. Retrieved from http://biblioteca.ucv.cl/site/colecciones/manuales_u/99Z_Anderson_2008-Theory_and_Practice_of_Online_Learning.pdf
- Montgomery, A.P., Hayward, D.V., Dunn, W., Carbonaro, M., & Amrhein, C.G. (2015). Blending for student engagement: Lessons learned for MOOCs and beyond. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, 31(6), 657-670. Retrieved from <https://ajet.org.au/index.php/AJET/article/viewFile/1869/1321>
- MOOCs Activities at EPFL (2013). Retrieved from <https://moocs.epfl.ch/files/content/sites/moocs/files/files/MOOCs-Communication-KIT.pdf>. Center for Digital Education.
- OpenupEd. (2014). OpenupEd.eu. Retrieved from <http://www.openuped.eu/openuped-temp/60-about-moocs>
- Salisbury, A.D. (2014). Impacts of MOOCs on Higher Education. A report from the UT Arlington symposium. Retrieved from <https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/higher-ed-beta/impacts-moocs-higher-education>